



## CAFE SOCIETY

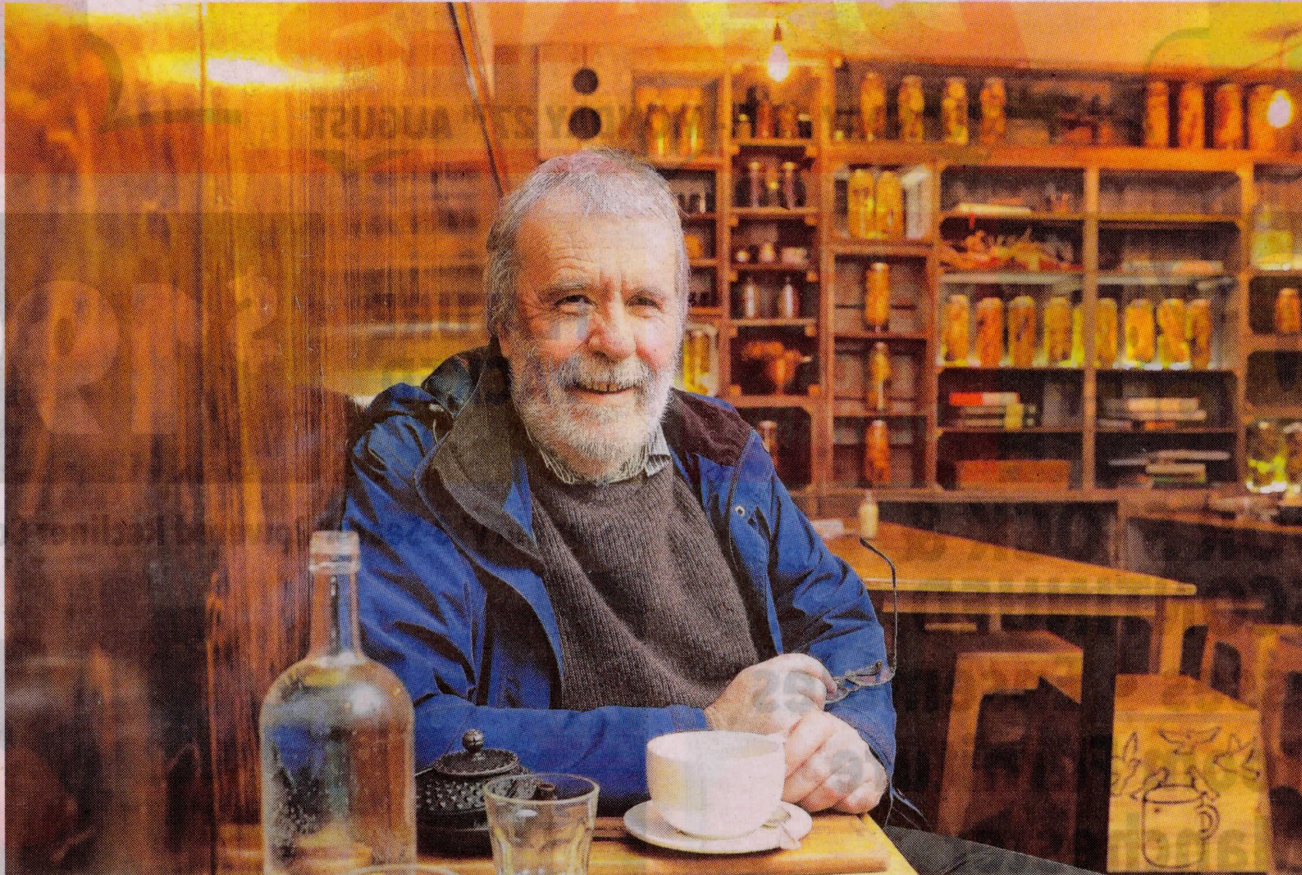
IDEAS OVER A CUPPA  
WITH AMANDA DUCKER

# It's like Disneyland in Tassie

Martin Flanagan opposes the proposal to build a Chinese-funded town near Swansea

**M**ARTIN Flanagan has just discovered that the bathroom walls at Pigeon Hole Cafe are papered in *Mercury* newspapers from 1955, the year of his birth. It's a bright spot in a troubling day for the journalist, commentator and author of 18 books, who is in Hobart to protest the proposed Cambria Green mega development on the East Coast.

There are other lovely moments too, such as when the president of the 1972 Tasmanian University Football Club spots him in the Goulburn St eatery and comes over to say hello.





Flanagan reckons he was never much of a footballer himself. "Timid, but fascinated," he says — better suited to writing about it, which he went on to do, becoming a top sports and particularly AFL scribe.

His cafe choice triggers lots of old memories. He recalls meeting Christine Milne when she was a uni student lodging at Ena Waite College farther down Goulburn St. He wouldn't have picked her as the one of that lot who'd go on to have a major national impact. Many years later, he asked the former Greens leader what made her a firebrand.

Steel, I suggest. He agrees, laughing, but says it was something else that gave Milne her mettle. "She had to fight to defend her land [at Wesley Vale] and she did."

Essentially, that's what Flanagan is here to do. He chaired a packed public

meeting at the Hobart Town Hall on Tuesday hosted by 14 East Coast community groups opposing the Chinese-funded tourism development outside Swansea.

Flanagan, who is an elder brother of fellow writer Richard, and his wife Polly both grew up in Tasmania.

They have lived in Melbourne for decades but are also East Coast ratepayers who own a shack at Dolphin Sands.

He says the proposed Chinese village that Tasmanians first heard about only months ago is completely out of character with the place they know and love.

"It would mean the biggest change to that landscape since colonisation," he says.

"Stealth at local and state levels" is what he most objects to in relation to planning and zoning of the project.

"This project should never



## PIGEON HOLE CAFE

THIS West Hobart favourite continues to thrive under second owners Belinda and Richard Weston, who feed much of their specially grown Weston Farm Produce through the paddock-to-plate cafe. The menu is both comforting and bold - a smoked Tasmanian eel and potato rosti is its current bestseller. The cafe is now licensed, serving local small vineyard drops such as Bonnie Vue pinor noir.

### SWEET TREAT

Gluten-free orange and almond cake  
\$4.50.

### ADDRESS

93 Goulburn St, West Hobart

### OPENING HOURS

Weekdays 7.30am-4pm; weekends 8am-3.30pm.

have been hidden from the people who are going to be affected by it, and the [Glamorgan Spring Bay] council is complicit in that."

Notwithstanding his calm and avuncular presence, he says he is angry, scared and

frankly gobsmacked by the handling of the project proposal.

"It's frightening to realise that the process the Government has put in place means it could happen again and again."

HE says he understands the pressing need for job creation on the East Coast.

"The right for a man or a woman to work is a fundamental right," he says. But he is adamant this project is the wrong way to go.

"It's like Disneyland," he says. "It's a church, it's a theatre, it's three Chinese art galleries, it's palliative care, it's a cinema, it's golf courses, it's Tasmania's fourth-biggest airport ... Basically the Chinese would be building a town in the middle of Tasmania.

"And yet the State Government would have us believe the matter [which will be assessed by the Tasmanian Planning Commission] is like building a supermarket at Glenorchy."

It's anything but, he says. "This matter has national and international planning implications. Saying it's all up to the Tasmanian Planning

Commission means there's no parliamentary debate at state and federal levels about it, despite the fact there are issues relating to [everything from] water and land to national security."

He questions the wisdom of building a Chinese enclave in the middle of Tasmania. "China is Australia's biggest trading partner and yet we have indicated we will go to war with them in the event of conflict in the South China Sea," he says, describing heightened tensions as Australia continues to align with the US in relation to disputed territory. "Most Australians don't care about that contradiction, but if they think the Chinese haven't noticed it, they are wrong."

As the global power and influence of the US is seen to decline in tandem with China's rise as a superpower, we need to be clear about the nature of our international relationships, he says.

"Our [State] Government is being reckless, rash, politically immature and unbelievably naïve - and that's the charitable term," he says.

Is he worried about being viewed as anti-Chinese? Yes, but it would be a wrong assumption, he says. "I have been writing on issues of race for 30 years. I attacked John Howard in the early 1990s when he tried to make Asian migration an issue ... I can foresee a time when Australia is predominantly Asian and I don't fear that so long as it's a democracy."

There are a few things on which Flanagan does agree with the Chinese government. One of these is the importance of food security. Why, he asks, have we sold more than 23 per cent of Tasmania's agricultural land to foreign investors?

"This argument should be front and centre in Tasmanian community debate."

■ Join the conversation at [themercury.com.au](http://themercury.com.au)