



# Rolling back the years: August 1995-2005

The story of the New Zealand appliance channel, as seen through the pages of *Wares* magazine. **Merv Robertson** reports.



**20 YEARS AGO – AUGUST 1995**  
Westinghouse purchased the CBS-TV network 20 years ago and, on the 12th, a “work stoppage” brought America’s Major League Baseball season to an end, including the World Series at a player salary cost estimated at US\$230m. At home, girl band TLC dominated our music charts with a hit single, *Waterfalls*.

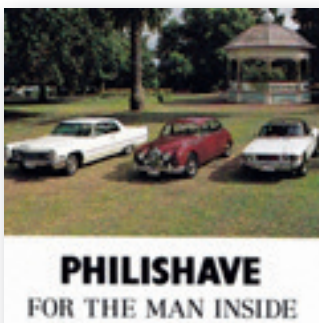
**Classic rides, then and now?** – Two decades back, Philips launched the Philishave “Classic Man of the Year” promotion on the build-up to Father’s Day, with some truly extraordinary prizes for three lucky Philishave purchasers: a 1966 Cadillac Calais Coupe; a 1975 Triumph Stag Convertible; and a 1965 Daimler 2.5 litre V8. Any one of these would be considered highly collectable



Hoover marketing manager, Bevan Baker announced the introduction of the new Hoover washing machine models in the five kilogram range which complement the existing range.

back then, let alone today. The magazine’s Editorial offered big raps for the Electronic Appliance Industry Guild conference, suggesting that such events were essential to the future success of the industry as they brought the retail, supplier and service sectors together at one forum. Like, that could happen again, right?

**Vulcan Hoovers up interest** – 20 years ago, Southcorp Appliances’ Vulcan division released an



20 years ago, buying a Phillips shaver could get you a classic car. Also in August 1995, Bevan Baker and Vulcan launched Hoover brand washers



impressive line-up of new washers, dryers and dishwashers from recent acquisition Hoover, with dishwashers being a new departure for the brand.

Almost a hundred dealers attended the launch at Clifford House, overlooking Auckland’s Waitemata Harbour where Hoover Marketing Manager **Bevan Baker** made the presentations. What happened next? Well, Vulcan became Southcorp which became Email which became Electrolux and Bevan is now National Sales Manager for Eurotech Design.



In 1995, Panasonic was launching wide-screen TVs and NEC was still making hay with VHDS video recorders.

**Way back when with wide screen TV** – It was all go on the wide screen TV front in 1995 with Panasonic introducing its new Gaoowide 28 and 32” models, complete with roll-away cabinets. The 32” version included Teletext and retailed at \$5,499 (around \$8,300 in today’s terms) with the 28” model at \$2,999 (\$4,500).

As I re-read that old article, it was impossible not to compare in my mind the excitement around the wide screen phenomenon to our Philips launch of K9 22 and 26” models when colour first arrived in 1973, and indeed the first ever black & white sets hitting retail way back in 1960. I don’t think new TV technology has the same impact today.

VHS video was still around back in 1995 and you needed to clean your VCR’s tape heads once in a while. Which is why Next Electronics in Christchurch sought to raise eyebrows with its back-of-bus advertisements. They asked the following drivers: “Have you been watching DIRTY VIDEOS?” The qualifier was: “Then get your video heads cleaned at Next Electronic Servicing.”

**Tiny article, massive impact?** – The August 1995 issue of *Wares*



Whirlpool's entry into the NZ market was a strangely muted affair, in Wares at least.

contained a strangely understated article on what was pretty big news back then. "Whirlpool hits New Zealand shores" should have been big and bold I would have thought, ahead of at least a full page story.

We read that "Whirlpool Corporation, the largest manufacturer and marketer of major home appliances in the world, is making a play in the New Zealand marketplace." The New Zealand operation was part of the Whirlpool Asia Appliance Group, headquartered in Singapore.

Whirlpool Managing Director, **Michael O'Neill**, said, "The decision to launch in New Zealand is part of a global strategy to remain the world's largest dedicated manufacturer of whitewares as the 90s give way to the 21st century."

**Who sold what back then?** – On a quite different scale but in the same issue 20 years ago, Parex was doing a fine job with DeLonghi dehumidifiers and in the fast growing coffee-making sector. In both cases, the company assured punters: "We were thinking of you when we thought of it".

Also in the land of local agents, LM Rankine Trading can be

found promoting the top loading Goldstar Genie Washing Machine. Typically feature-rich, Goldstar would eventually become LG (originally "Lucky Goldstar").

**Did they dare to challenge?** – The Sheraton Mirage on Queensland's Gold Coast was the venue for the 15th conference of the Electronic Appliance Guild, an annual event where retailers, suppliers and service people met as an industry group. "Dare to Challenge" was the conference theme and in his opening address, Guild Executive Director the late **Dennis Amiss** who challenged attendees to question "the very core of your business philosophy".

**Bob Harvey** (now Sir Robert but even then Mayor of Waitakere City) spoke of the "rise of the global tribe" and the advance of "tribal brands", saying the internet was the best example of "tribal marketing" seen in recent years. Bob and Dennis presented the awards – to Smiths City Markets for Excellence in Retailing and Axial Appliances for Service.

The gala dinner took a military theme and Hill & Stewart MD **Mo Khan** was one who got busted for stepping out of line. Longstanding Guild Director and former President **Jim Bulloch**, announced his retirement from the Board (check out Jim's career on page 72 of this issue!).

Mo Khan is now retired, although he is engaged in assisting an IT company to restructure, he's a board member of New Zealand Red Cross, an advisory board member of Total Spray and a special advisor to the Friends of the Pacific Foundation.



20 years ago, the power companies were becoming less prominent as appliance retailers. Wellington's Energy Direct Appliances was one of the few still trading and Alan Singh was the GM.

**When the power cos still wielded power** – Back in the day, power companies were prominent on our national appliance retail landscape. They had one very big advantage over their competitors in that customers could buy their appliances on credit, paying the instalments off on their energy accounts.

But, by August 1995, Energy Direct Appliances was one of the few still trading. With a Fisher & Paykel whiteware franchise, along with Panasonic and Technics brown goods, it was a strong player in the Wellington Region. **Alan Singh** was Energy Direct's GM and he told *Wares* that the superstore concept at the Lower Hutt HQ had been embraced by the locals because they were given a wider choice of appliances, both gas and electricity. Over 10,000 people had attended the recent Energy Direct Expo.

Alan now owns The Temp Centre, a Wellington-based recruiter, "Dedicated to providing temporary and contract staffing resource solutions for over 40 years."



"Dare to challenge" was the theme of the 1995 Appliance Guild conference. Guild Exec Dennis Amiss led the way, Jim Bulloch retired from the Board and Hill & Stewart MD, Mo Khan (also seen here today), was marched to the brig for code infractions.



### 15 YEARS AGO – AUGUST 2000

Moving forwards a decade, **Tiger Woods** won the US PGA Championship to become the first golfer since **Ben Hogan** in 1953 to win three majors in a calendar year. The Russian submarine **Kursk** sank in the Barents Sea with the loss of all aboard. Overnight on 29 August 2000, **Christine Lundy** and her daughter **Amber** were murdered in Palmerston

North. Two guilty verdicts later, this story is not over and done with yet.

And Fisher & Paykel announced a record group profit after tax of \$54.4m. The result was said to be a direct reflection of the effectiveness of the new strategy of focusing on F&P's three businesses – whiteware, healthcare & finance.



Fisher & Paykel's record group profit was said to be a direct reflection of the new strategy of focusing on three businesses, whiteware, healthcare & finance.

**Dual lasers and DVD** – Philips again took the August front cover, announcing that the All Blacks had a new player – a new Limited Edition All Blacks DVD player with 3D Surround Sound, Advanced Parental Approval System and Dual Laser Drive! Purchasers also received an All Blacks DVD with interactive footage from the 1999 season.

15 years ago, DVD players were still a hot topic and in the August issue Monaco Corporation was showing off its new leading edge Toshiba SD-1200. Indeed its 540-line horizontal resolution was said to be the highest specification in the industry and the product had “advanced digital surround sound”.

**Pana's personal screens** – Philips wasn't the only brand making hay with the ABs that year. At the Eden Park rugby test with Scotland, a handful of lucky corporate guests got to enjoy some new Panasonic technology which combined the attributes of television coverage with live atmosphere. They could watch the game, check out the big screen and take in live TV coverage on the 7” LCD monitors, all at the same time – multi-tasking!

**Frazer Kerr** was Panasonic's Consumer Products Manager: “The big bonus is that it's the best of both worlds. You are right there



Panasonic guests at the rugby could watch the game and take live TV

coverage on 7” monitors, thanks to Consumer Products Manager Frazer Kerr. These days he's into commercial and industrial lighting.

with the live game atmosphere, but you get replays and close-ups that no one else at the stadium can get,” he said at the time.

Frazer is now Sales Director and a shareholder at Business Lighting Solutions in Auckland, a company that designs, manufactures, installs and services commercial (including warehouse, office and retail) and industrial LED lighting in the mid to top end of the market. Mutual opportunities perhaps?

**Still early for internet disruption** – The August 2000 Editorial looked at the profitability (or rather the non-profitability) of internet selling. It said that even Amazon, which poured millions into its online efforts, could not make a buck. Some 15 years later, its bottom line is still marginal by the way...

Locally, the online newcomer was *Applianceshop.co.nz*. Started by ex-Sanyo and Noel Leeming boss **Greg Lancaster**, it was offering prices it said were around 10% cheaper than elsewhere.

Sales were routed through Mason Appliances in New Plymouth and were described at the time as “miniscule”. Proprietor **Brian Mason**, now a Property Brokers real estate agent in Napier, agrees and said recently: “Greg was just ahead of his time.”



15 years ago, one of the first online retail ventures, Applianceshop.co.nz, started by Greg Lancaster, didn't make an impact and was simply “ahead of its time” says Brian Mason (above) today.

**Snapshots of activity** – With the first Father's Day of the new millennium looming, one might have expected several supplier ads around the event but this time only Breville dined out, unlike the flurry leading up to Mother's Day each year. The Breville team had eight items deemed to be ideal for any “inner man”.

15 years back, Ian R Little was the New Zealand



Breville was alone in trying to make much of Father's Day in the new millennium.

15 years ago, Ian R Little was the NZ distributor for Italy's Bompani stoves. These days, it concentrates on photographic equipment.



distributor for Italy's Bompani stoves and was showing off the new gas mega-model in August's issue of *Wares*. This stainless steel effort had a giant 135 litre oven, 5 hob burners, automatic ignition and a gas grill. RRP was \$2,195 or around \$3,100 today. The Bompani brand does not seem to be represented here now.

I recently spoke with **Ian Little**, who said the firm's appliance activity was closed down six years ago, citing simply too many brands in the market. His company now concentrates on photographic equipment, notably Pentax and Ricoh, which are marketed through specialist retailers.



The launch of Sony's Vaio was all about online, which would be shocking to dealers these days...

**What does Vaio stand for?** – In 2000 Sony entered the computer fray with Vaio ("Video Audio Integrated Operation"). Other Sony innovations at this time included the Memory Stick Walkman, a "pivotal component in linking Vaio computers with Sony's extensive range of digital products".

Interesting that Vaio's route to market at that time was to be sold direct. Now, in 2015, we see Sony closing down some of its online stores around the world. But not in NZ, says Sony's Peter Buckton today: "We are continuing to give consumers the opportunity to buy from [sony.co.nz](http://sony.co.nz) and have no plans to change this."

**Vogel's: more than bread...** – Another seeming fixture in the New Zealand market was Mayo Group, which in August 2000 was advertising its range of high quality Vogel's AV wall mounting systems out of the Netherlands. The company still represents Vogel exclusively.

Today, **Jim Mayo** tells me the company remains very active at retail level, although the biggest revenue stream is now the



corporate and commercial market, which includes transport terminals, digital signage and

Then as now: the long relationship between Mayo Group and Vogel's remains to this day.

video walls. Jim is also very enthusiastic about the success of his comprehensive range of Sangean radios which incorporates high-end Bluetooth models and Bluetooth speakers.

**From little acorns grow...** – Despite its low profile entry into our market (see above), by the year 2000 now in its 5th year as a New Zealand entity, Whirlpool was making inroads, especially with the independents.

In Palmerston North, for example, Manawatu TV & Sound Service took the decision to headline its appliance division by stocking the brand exclusively, to the extent that the entire range of Whirlpool whiteware was stocked. 15 years ago, **Eric Hewson** was GM at the iconic retailer founded by industry legend Jim Bulloch back in 1967.

**Excellent retailers** – Appliance Connexion's year 2000 conference was on Queensland's Gold Coast and attended by 147 delegates. The late **Wayne Burton** was ACL's General Manager and in his opening address he stressed the company was entering a new era in its development, advances were being made in new technology and that retail was changing.

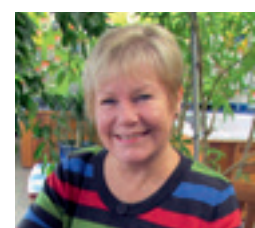


Appliance Connexion's year 2000 conference was on the Gold Coast. **Wayne Burton** was ACL's GM and the photos here are a who's who of the appliance channel at the time.



Then, ACL members accounted for just over 25% of New Zealand's appliance retail market. Keynote speakers were **Barry Urquhart** who discussed changes, challenges & opportunities and **Dr Alan Treadgold** who presented a workshop on overseas trends and how they might impact on Australasia. Guinness Appliances and LV Martin & Son won member awards while supplier success went to F&P, Panasonic and Sunbeam.

Farmers Hamilton won the August 2000 Sunbeam Award for Excellence in Retailing and **Sue Greig**, Sunbeam's Sales Rep, was on hand to present the certificate to Store Manager **Brian Faulds** and his team for their high standards and quality of service. Sue now works with her husband **Rick** in the family business, The Poolcare Company, primarily looking after online sales.



Farmers Hamilton won the August 2000 Sunbeam Award for Excellence in Retailing. Sue Greig was on hand to present the certificate to Store Manager Brian Faulds and team.



We tracked down August 2000's movers & shakers but you'll have to read the story to find out where they are now!

**Millennial movers & shakers** – 15 years ago, **Michelle Campbell** (now Michelle Perry) joined Nilfisk as a Christchurch-based Regional Account Manager while **Mel Albers** had gone to Philips and **Mike Daly** had taken the role of National Sales & Marketing Manager at Direct Imports. **Steve Penman** was the new National Retail Sales Manager at Philips whilst Panasonic appointed **Duncan Didsbury**, **Earl Mander** and **Alex Elliott** as Account Managers.

Michelle is now a stay-at-home, but extremely active mum in Brisbane and we find Mike as the Manager of family business Rockgas Hawkes Bay in Hastings. Steve is National Retail Channel Manager at D-Link, Duncan had 10 years as an ASB Rural Manager but is now farming in the Wairarapa, Earl had a two-year OE before coming home and joining F&P where he is now a Channel Manager for Fisher & Paykel and Haier responsible for Harvey Norman while Alex is still with Panasonic, in Australia.



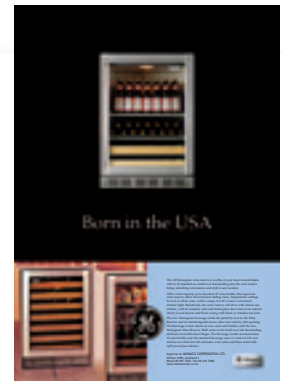
**10 YEARS AGO – AUGUST 2005**

Renowned for his sharp wit and oratory, former Prime Minister, **David Lange**, passed away 10 years ago this month aged just 63, after several years of poor health.

Another master of spin, Aussie **Shane Warne** became the first cricketer to claim 600 Test wickets and *The Dukes of Hazard* movie hit the screens in August that year.

**Wide, loud and proud** – In the magazine, Electrolux Home Products took the front cover to introduce new 640mm-wide Westinghouse refrigerators coming on stream the following month. The Editorial also had a fair bit to say about the strength of China when it came to appliance manufacturing, both in finished goods and componentry.

On the back cover, Monaco Corp reminded us that GE was “Born in the USA” and showed us the GE Monogram Wine Reserve with a capacity of 57 wine bottles. This product had sliding racks and temperature settings for both whites and reds. Also featured was the Monogram Beverage Centre which could accommodate 150 standard measure cans.

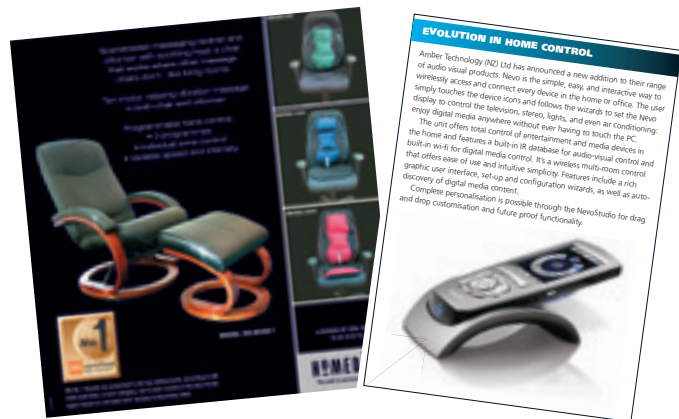


In 2000, Monaco Corp had the Toshiba brand; now in 2005, it reminded us that GE was “Born in the USA”.

**Anything for an easier life** – Norm Scott and Homedics, a division of Opal NZ had an eye-catching ad for massage chairs and cushions, featuring the Scandinavian recliner model (with ottoman) which seemed like the ultimate in pampering. Norm still has Opal, importing and distributing “home & wellness products for the whole family”.

A very different product, but still one designed to make life easier, was the Nevo remote control from Amber Technology. You simply followed the wizards to set the Nevo display to control the TV, stereo, lights and even air conditioning.

Today, Amber Technology National Sales Manager, **Nigel Lee**, tells me that the company continues to launch innovative technology-based products into the New Zealand market, these days with remote control leader, One For All, whose latest product is the Smart Zapper, which turns your smartphone into a remote control using an app.



A decade ago, **Norm Scott** was doing well with Homedics and Amber Technology had Nevo to control the TV, stereo, lights and even air conditioning. Today, both Nevo and All For One (Amber's flagship remote control brand) belong to the same parent company.

An interesting aside at this point is that both the Nevo and All For One brands belong today to Universal Electronics Inc (UEI), a company with an almost dominant hold globally on remote and infrared control technologies. Funny that.

**Flooring the market** – This time 10 years ago, *Wares* ran a dedicated feature on floor care. Six brands were featured: Shark



10 years ago, the fresh faced team of Mark Robinson and Brett Avery present another design-led Dyson Design Award, while Nilfisk got all Darth Vader on us with its Extreme model.



## INDUSTRY HALL OF FAME

APPLIANCE & ELECTRONICS INDUSTRY OF NEW ZEALAND

# WHO WILL BE THE 2015 INDUCTEE(S)?

The Appliance & Electronics Industry New Zealand Hall of Fame was established to run alongside *Wares* magazine's annual Awards. *Wares* magazine and a formal committee comprised of respected people in the industry are the engine behind the Hall of Fame, cementing it as a reputable celebration of the most influential people in the industry.

***All will be revealed on 12 November  
at the 2015 Wares Awards***

[www.hof.org.nz](http://www.hof.org.nz)



touted its Cordless Rechargeable Super Sweeper; Electrolux pushed the Oxy<sup>3</sup> system with the British Allergy Foundation Seal of Approval; and Dyson spoke of its new Origin range, at the same time revealing a 26% market share by value.

Over at Nilfisk we (that's your author and team!) were celebrating the release of our Extreme series and repeating that this was another case of "vacuum better breathe better".

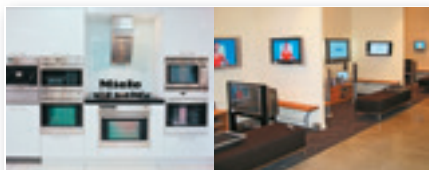
LG had a range of HEPA filtered machines with both cloth & paper bags while the Roomba robotic vac from Salton could sweep most floor surfaces at the touch of a button. Despite much promise, even today robovacs remain off to one side of the market.



Eastern HiFi burned very brightly indeed for some years, before founder Steve Allbury fell sick.

**Ups & downs of a hi-fi retailer** – On the what was happening in retail 10 years ago. **Steve Allbury** founded Eastern HiFi in 1975, operating out of the back of a van. In August 30 years on, it was announced in *Wares* that turnover had risen by \$1m over the previous year and GP had increased by \$400k. Also, the company had taken over Wellington retailer Absolute Audio.

Just two years later, Steve suffered a heart attack and was forced to retire from our industry. He now works with his wife, **Clare Danks**, at the family business Mt Meru, which is an importer specialising in giftware.



**Tharcold Gen 2**  
The Tharcold appliance story is a journey showing what an unwavering commitment to quality ethics can achieve.

Turning from a Kitchen Things into Tharcold Beta Electrical in May 2005 with the introduction of Beta's Generation 2 concept, Tharcold's has since reverted to its servicing roots and operates to this day as part of JFI.

**There & back with Tharcold's** – Founded in Porirua in 1959 as an appliance service company, in 1993 Tharcold's took a new direction; as a member of The Appliance Network Society (Appnet), it added a retail arm called Tharcold Quality Appliances.

In August 2000 the shop was transformed into a Kitchen Things outlet when Appnet assisted in the purchase of Kitchen Appliance Specialists in Wellington, before it was rebranded Tharcold Generation 2 Beta Electrical in May 2005 with the introduction of Beta's Generation 2 concept.

Tharcold G2 traded until the business was sold to Jones Family Investments group (JFI) in 2006. Since then the retail side has been in the re-energised Kitchen Things stable but, throughout all the changes, Tharcold Appliance Services has continued to cater for the region's whiteware servicing needs, also as part of JFI and operating out of Ngauranga Gorge.



Meikles in Whakatane was going well as a new superstore in 2005. Cherie Kerrison (seen above at the Wares Awards) was Appliance Buyer back then and was "always looking to raise the bar". Smiths City purchased Meikles two years later.



**Marking time with Meikles** – Founded by **John Meikle** in 1954 in the small Bay of Plenty settlement of Edgcumbe, this Whakatane-based family business grew in prolific style and opened a store on The Strand in 1972, moving across the road two years later.

20 years on, **Mark Meikle** (son of John) was the owner and he bought the adjoining New World supermarket, converting the department store into a superstore. **Cherie Kerrison** was Appliance Buyer back then and her division was part of Retraction.

In August 2005 she spoke to *Wares*. "Exceeding our customer expectations is the number one priority," she said. "It has to be that way, for every customer, every time. We are always looking to raise the bar and since reopening we've had a huge amount of positive feedback." Cherie added, "We're better because we care about people and try to get it right first time, every time."

Smiths City purchased Meikles two years later in 2007. Mark and his wife **Carmen** now spend our winter on Australia's Sunshine Coast, returning to Whakatane in time for the warmer weather and last November Mark ticked off another bucket list experience when he completed a lap of the famous Nürburgring motor racing circuit in Germany. Today, Cherie is General Manager at Appliance Shed.

**August's movers & shakers** – 10 years ago, BDT had appointed **Kate Gibson** to the role of Retail Group Manager with emphasis on Mitsubishi Electric refrigerators, dehumidifiers and air conditioning while **Trish Stenzel** took on responsibility for the overall Mitsubishi Electric portfolio as Marketing Manager.

Kate became Divisional Manager for Mitsubishi Electric and has until recently been on maternity leave, whilst Trish, after five years in Australia returned to BDT as Marketing Manager last year.

Over at Electrolux Home Products, **Michael Peters** was the new Operations Manager, **Wayne Taylor** became Marketing Manager for the 100% YES brand at ACL and Haier announced **Jade Cuthbert** as Northern Area Manager.

Michael still holds sway as Ops Manager at Electrolux and Jade is now Jade Clarkson, in the family business of Clarkson Electrical. I haven't been able to locate Wayne.

In the next issue, we see what **Bryce Purdy** was doing 20 years ago, we check out a schools training session with the All Blacks (**Simon Little** was there too) and read about the Auckland City Council's heavy handed attitude towards an iconic retail frontage.

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