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Back to the retro

What were the Eighties really like? Were they one just one big party and an awful lot of big hair? Or was there a lot more going on? A new exhibition in Sydney takes visitors back to the music, fashion, politics and people to find out



Old favourite: Pac-Man is chomping its way into the hearts of gamers who prefer such retro titles to today's offerings.

By **MADELEINE COOREY**

THE decade which produced Rubik's Cube and the Sony Walkman may seem old-hat, but a new Australian exhibition dedicated to the 1980s is riding a wave of nostalgia for pre-digital days, according

to its curator.

Peter Cox, who has put together "The 80s are back" at Sydney's Powerhouse Museum, said the generation that grew up watching *Dallas*, playing Pac-Man and listening to INXS and Wham! holds a fondness for those day-glo days.

"It was a simpler time," said Cox at the show's recent opening.

"It was pre-9/11. While there was a kind of shadow of Cold War and impending nuclear apocalypse, at least you knew where the enemy was.

"It was before the digital era really."

Hundreds of keen time-travellers have flocked to the exhibition since it opened last month, peering into screens playing pioneering video clips while Pat Benatar's *Love is a*

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Battlefield or Salt 'n' Pepa's *Push It* is pumped into the room.

On display are the diversions of the time – arcade classics such as Galaga, Donkey Kong and Frogger – as the exhibition tracks gaming from Pac-Man to Space Invaders to Atari and Nintendo *Game & Watch*.

Costumes worn by Boy George, Kylie Minogue and Split Enz are on display, while a window into 1980s fashion features acid wash jeans, fluorescent aerobics leotards and shoulder-padded powersuits.

Cox said he wanted to create an exhibition of the popular culture – the television shows, music, movies, clothes and toys – of the time when Ronald Reagan was the American president, AIDS was first recognised and the Berlin Wall fell.

"It was a time when Australian culture really flourished. There was a period there around the time of the America's Cup (won by Australia) in 1983 when a lot seemed to be happening for Australia on the over-

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PETER COX

seas front," he said.

The biggest grossing Australian movie of all-time, *Crocodile Dundee*, was a worldwide smash, INXS and Men at Work enjoyed big hits and an unassuming soap opera called *Neighbours* took off in Britain, added Cox.

But Cox said it would be wrong to categorise the 1980s by the economic boom times portrayed in the movie *Wall Street* or the lavish opulence of American television shows such as *Dynasty* and *Dallas*.

"The Eighties get stereotyped a bit as one big party and of course life wasn't like that for most people.

There were tough times for people in the 1980s as well – there was severe recession from 1981 to 1982," said Cox.

Meanwhile youth unemployment was high, stock markets around the world crashed in 1987 and by 1989 in Australia interest rates had topped 17%, creating hardship for home-owners struggling to meet mortgage payments.

"In the Nineties, the Eighties were way out of fashion. People in the Nineties sneered at the Eighties a bit, they seemed embarrassed by its excesses," Cox said.

"But it's clear that in the last few years a new generation of young people have been looking to the 1980s for fashion styles and musical styles. It's apparent in the way that people are dressing on the street." – AFP

■ The exhibition runs until late 2010. For more information, log onto <http://www.powerhousemuseum.com/the-80sareback/>.

Wham! is one of the beloved Eighties icons featured at the exhibition.

