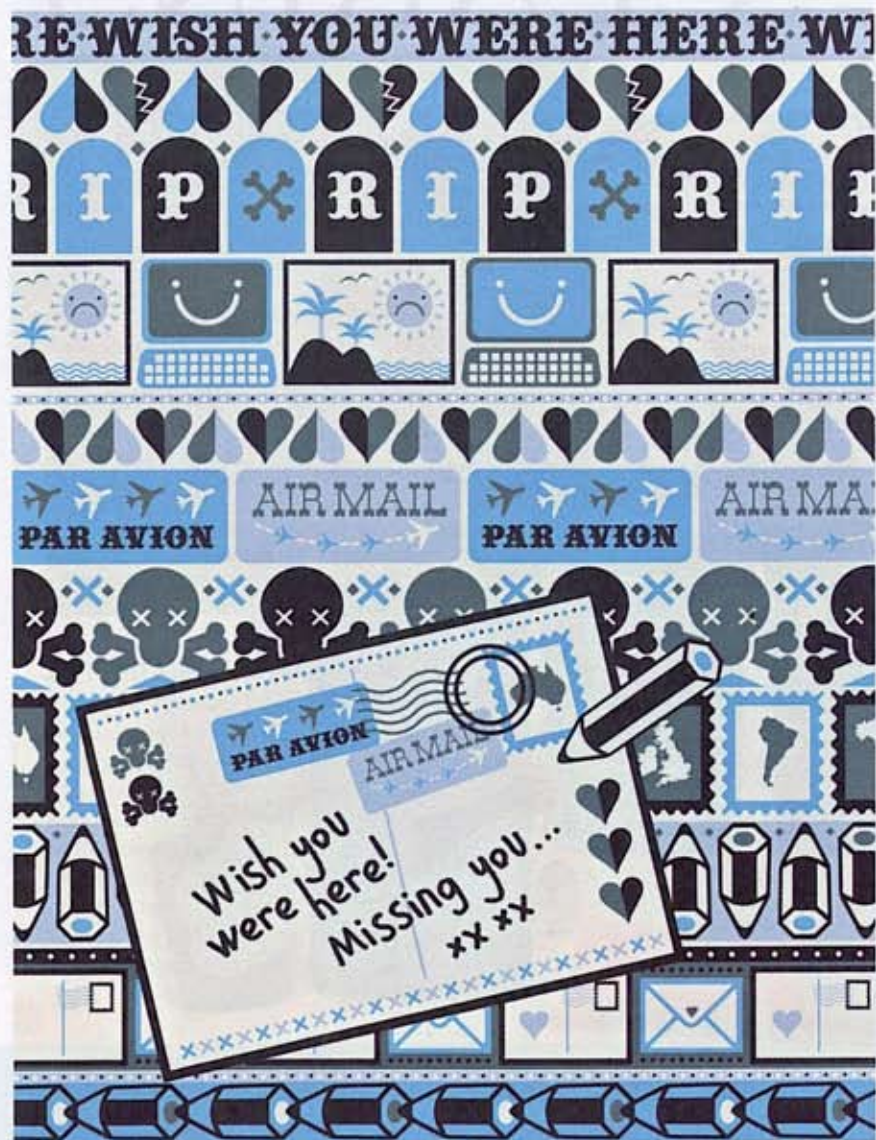


SUNDAY BEST

Edited by Ceri David



Have you noticed...

postcards are dying out?

Communication technology has killed a lot of things: the payphone, the phone book, the ability to hide from your ex. Yet, of all the relics of our pre-web existence, perhaps none evokes as much nostalgia as the humble postcard.

Since the early noughties, digital photography, picture messaging and email have been slowly strangling the postcard, foreshadowing a future without one of the world's most recognisable pop-culture icons.

"I shouldn't say this but, yes, sales have declined," says Gail Perkins, a postcard manufacturer from the NSW North Coast. "It's not only because of email and picture messaging. People used to buy a postcard because they didn't know how their picture would turn out - it was insurance against a bad shot. Now people know exactly what photos look like on the spot."

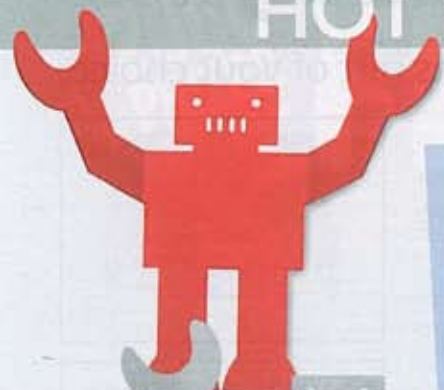
But in defiance of our penchant for instant gratification, the postcard clings stubbornly to life, with millions still sold each year. Aerial shots, says Perkins, are a favourite. "Most people don't have the equipment to take them," she explains. And the weather remains a mitigating factor; if it's raining or the Big Banana has been blown away in a cyclone, you might not snap the DIY shot you'd hoped for.

"It's a declining market," admits Lynda Evans from Steve Parish Publishing, a Queensland-based postcard manufacturer. "But if it wasn't worthwhile, we'd ditch it. People buy them for their own memories now, rather than posting them."

According to Evans, her company's biggest sellers are the multiple-shot variety. "Especially the junky looking ones with super-imposed images," she says.

Gordon Liddle, NSW branch manager of Visit Merchandise, the oldest-surviving postcard manufacturer in Australia, believes the novelty postcard is being kept alive purely for the UK and Japanese markets, and large-format postcards have almost died out completely because "they take longer to write". Which raises the inevitable question: is the postcard a victim of technology or is its decline simply down to human laziness? **BRENDAN SHANAHAN**

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MAY 23