

leather up

The only craftsman of his kind in Darwin, Mick Denigan has made stockwhips for everyone from Hugh Jackman to England's Prince Philip, and he's as passionate as ever about promoting his creations as cracking souvenirs

IT'S AN HOUR BEFORE OPENING time at Darwin's Mindil Beach Sunset Markets; Australia's most-celebrated whip maker Mick Denigan is still setting up, but he's already being run off his feet by the growing crowd crammed around his stall. Denigan's whip supplies have been selling fast and furious on market nights, and it's apparent that no one wants to go home empty-handed. "We've been selling out most nights so the word is out that people need to come early," says the father of three who's been showcasing his world-renowned whips, running lessons for novice users and staging his spectacular whip-cracking show at Mindil for the past 24 years.

"People love these whips because they're the true old-style Aussie item – and they last for at least 15 years with hardly any maintenance," he says. "I make them the traditional way, using kangaroo hide, just like the early drovers who turned



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stockwhip-making into a small but significant part of Australian bush culture.” Denigan’s whips feature handles fashioned from the back-strap leather of saltwater crocodiles, which he harvests himself as a long-time licensed croc catcher.

After Denigan took voluntary redundancy from his well-paid

government agricultural job in the 1990s, he became a wandering whip maker who made big bucks selling his handiwork across the world through an online shop. He won the Northern Territory’s 1998 Manufacturer of the Year award.

Denigan might never have cracked a whip, let alone made one, if he hadn’t volunteered to supervise a camp for cattle station kids as part of the 1988 Bicentennial Droving Australia event. “I ended up out on the Barkly Tablelands with kids with stock whips from all over Australia,” he says. “They gave me some tips ➤➤➤





WHIP HAND
Mick's stall at Mindil Beach Sunset Markets attracts curious onlookers and genuine buyers



and that's where and when I learnt to crack a whip – and I was hooked.”

Back home in Darwin, Denigan honed his skills by poring over books written by the best traditional whip craftsmen. Later on, he embarked on a two-year trek around Australia with wife Shauna and his pet dog Sheba. They travelled in a 10m-long truck with a fully equipped whip maker's workshop on board. “We stopped off at all the rodeos and country shows and festivals,” Denigan says. “We got a flat battery once on a busy Brisbane highway; the mobile mechanic jump-started the truck and went home with a whip!”

Denigan has since demonstrated his skills around the world. His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh, Chinese President Xi Jinping, US

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computer king Bill Gates and former New York mayor Rudy Giuliani all received whips personally crafted by Denigan. Prince Philip got his as patron of the Royal Agricultural Society at a 1990s world conference and was seen cracking it with great aplomb outside the Darwin conference venue.

When he's not crafting intricate

whips for grand productions – like Baz Luhrmann's epic movie *Australia* – or cracking one on stage at events like the Sydney Olympics opening ceremony, Denigan designs and produces a unique crocodile-skin souvenir range. He's even made a crocodile guitar strap for Bob Dylan! But it's with his traditional Aussie stockwhips that Mick Denigan has achieved the most success internationally. His ultimate goal? To see the whip become an Australian icon, just like the didgeridoo. ★

MICK'S WHIPS

Mindil Beach Sunset Markets (every Sunday and Thursday from April to November), mindil.com.au; mickswhips.com.au