

Punching the light Sydney's 90s raves



people dancing at an outdoor rave

Punching the light: Sydney's 90s raves – in pictures

At the age of 17, [Simon Burstall](#) documented the burgeoning underground rave scene of 1990s Sydney. Armed with borrowed school cameras and stealing away from home in the early hours of the morning in the family car, Simon found community and a career that would change him forever.

'93: Punching the Light was published by [Damiani](#) in 2019.

'One of my best mates, Brendan Cowell can be seen in the centre of frame smiling with his arms in the air at the Field of Dreams II Rave, Graffiti Hall of Fame. He wrote the forward for my book.' Photograph: Simon Burstall

Sat 9 May 2026 10.00 AEST



'Available light – I would only take pictures in the morning intentionally without a flash so I didn't feel like I was invading people's privacy. I took this photo on May 8th 1993 in Alexandria, Sydney at a rave called Enigma. This came from one of the first rolls of film I shot with my medium format camera.'



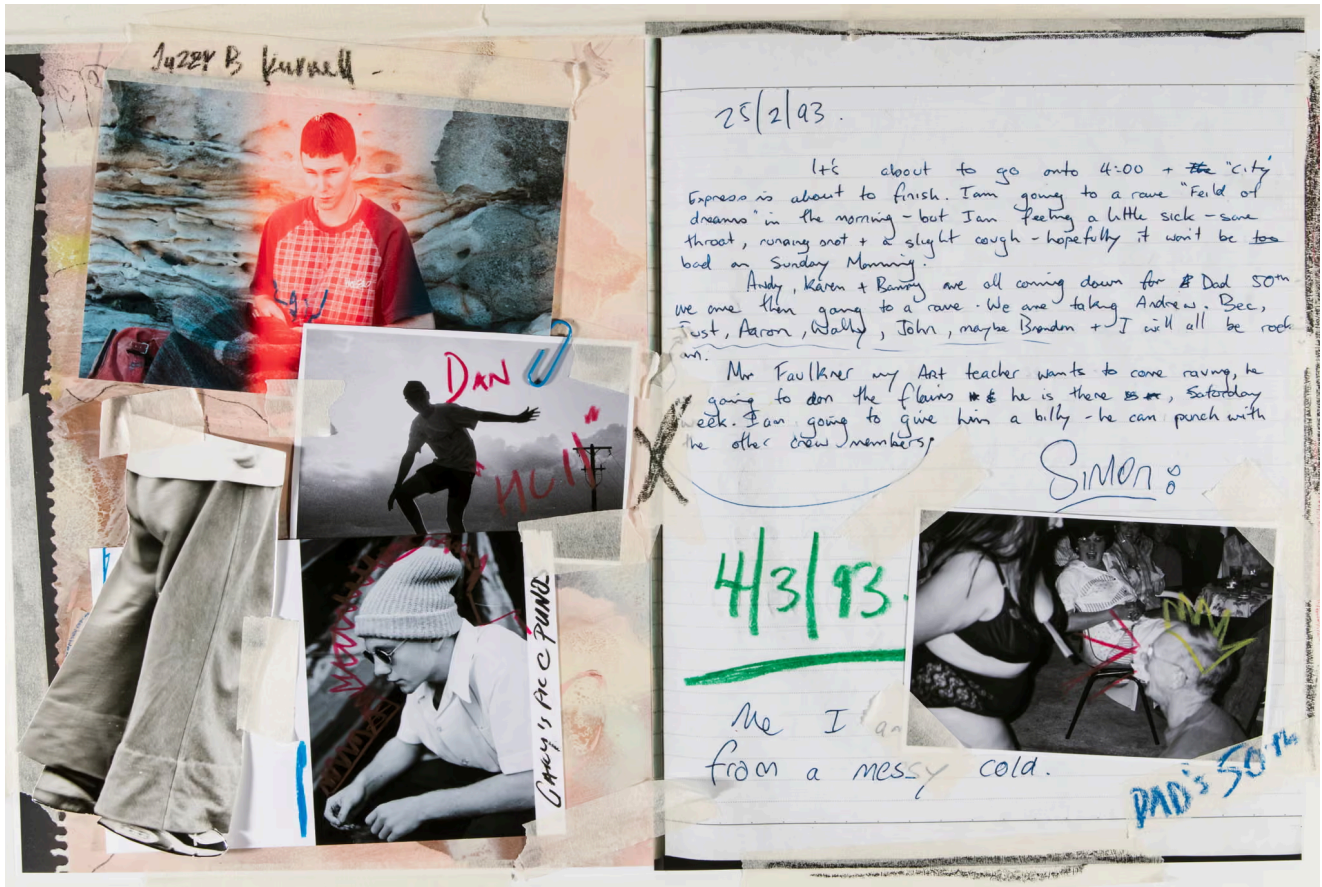
'This is a collage of photos of friends i made in my diary from that period of time.'



A group of friends at Sydney Olympic Park, New Years Day 1993.



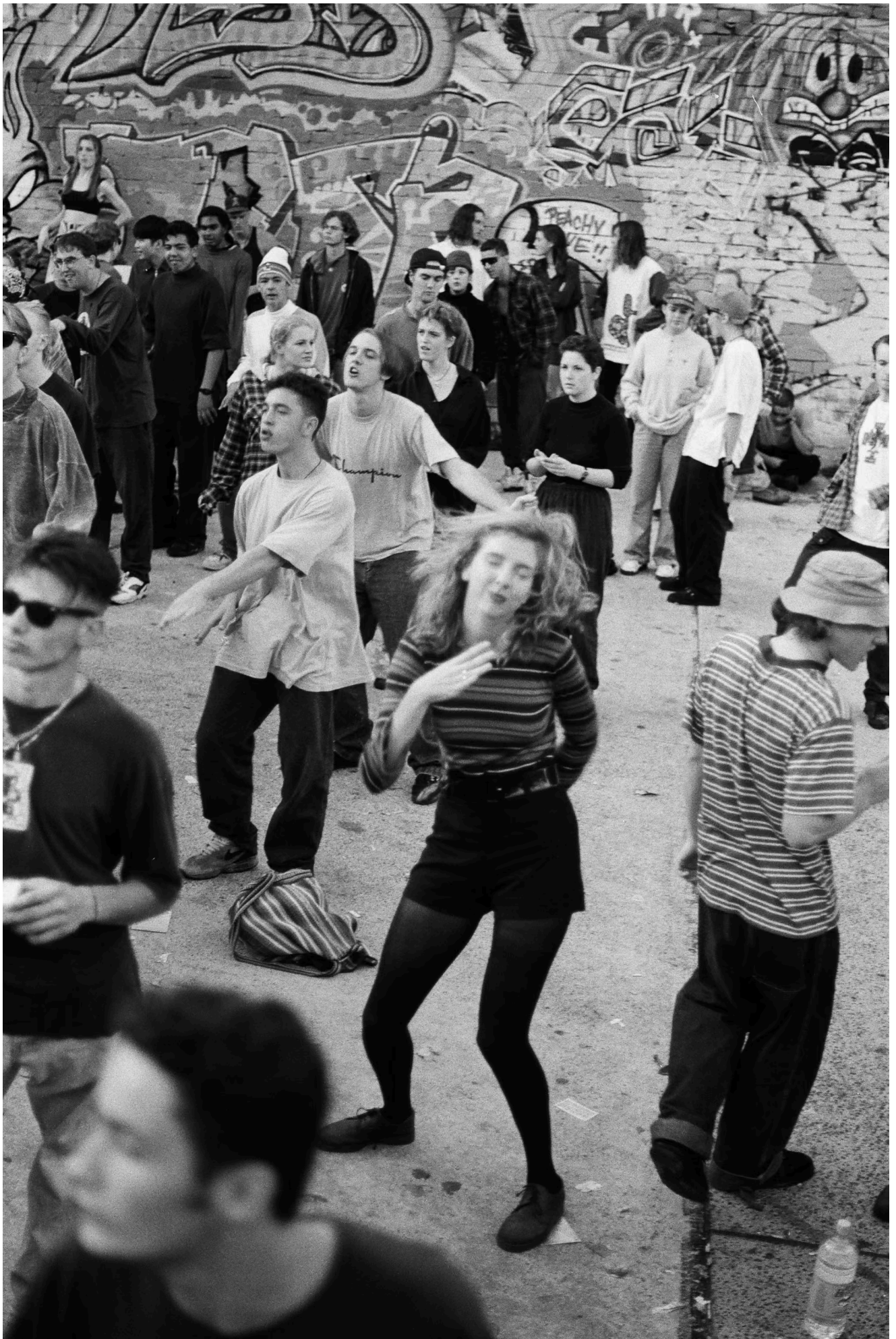
'This is the cover of '93: Punching the Light. We were at a rave called Field of Dreams II at the Graffiti Hall of Fame in Sydney, Australia. The location was also used as a meat export warehouse. I took this photo standing on a giant chest freezer, I remember so clearly feeling the vibration of the speakers behind me while I was shooting the crowd. I had no idea what I was doing with a camera at this point. Then I hand processed in my school darkroom these epic photos.'



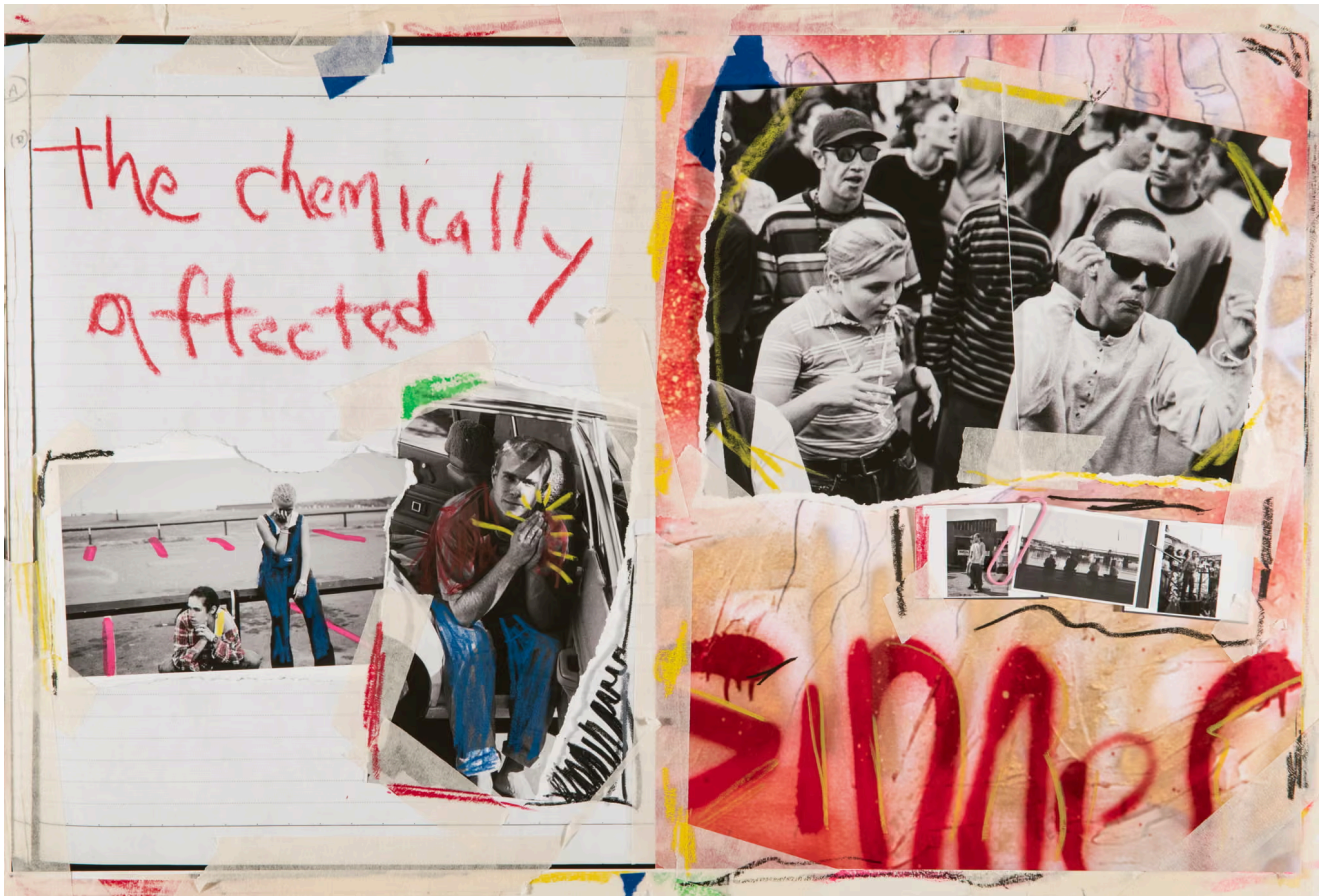
'More pages from my diary at the time, on the right: My diary entry from February 2nd 1993 with imagery from my father's 50th birthday where we hired an entertainer for him. On the left is a portrait of me taken by my art teacher. He offered to come along with me to a rave at 4am to teach me composition and subject matter, he was a teacher and also my mentor and changed my life.'



'A group of my friends and strangers who became friends that night and morning at Enigma. This was shot on a medium format camera that I had borrowed from school and one of my first frames on that camera.'



'A girl freely dancing. I loved seeing people letting go and enjoying themselves. At these parties we all felt connected, like we were all one. There was no alcohol and no one acted like a fool, it was all love and freedom and connection.'



'More Diary entries, combinations of friends' art, and my photography.'



'This was the essence of the time, the fashion, the purity of just dancing with no distractions and total freedom of expression. The fanny packs, the Adidas and Timberlands, the jeans are all so relevant now.'



'My mum's car. My brother Justin on the left with my mate Peter changing out of their sweaty socks into fresh ones. We always brought fresh pairs to change into after dancing for hours. Cigarettes and flyers litter the ground.'



'I loved capturing human nature against the abandoned wasteland of these industrial areas.'



'A diary entry talking about the raves I went to and things I experienced alongside photos I had taken.'



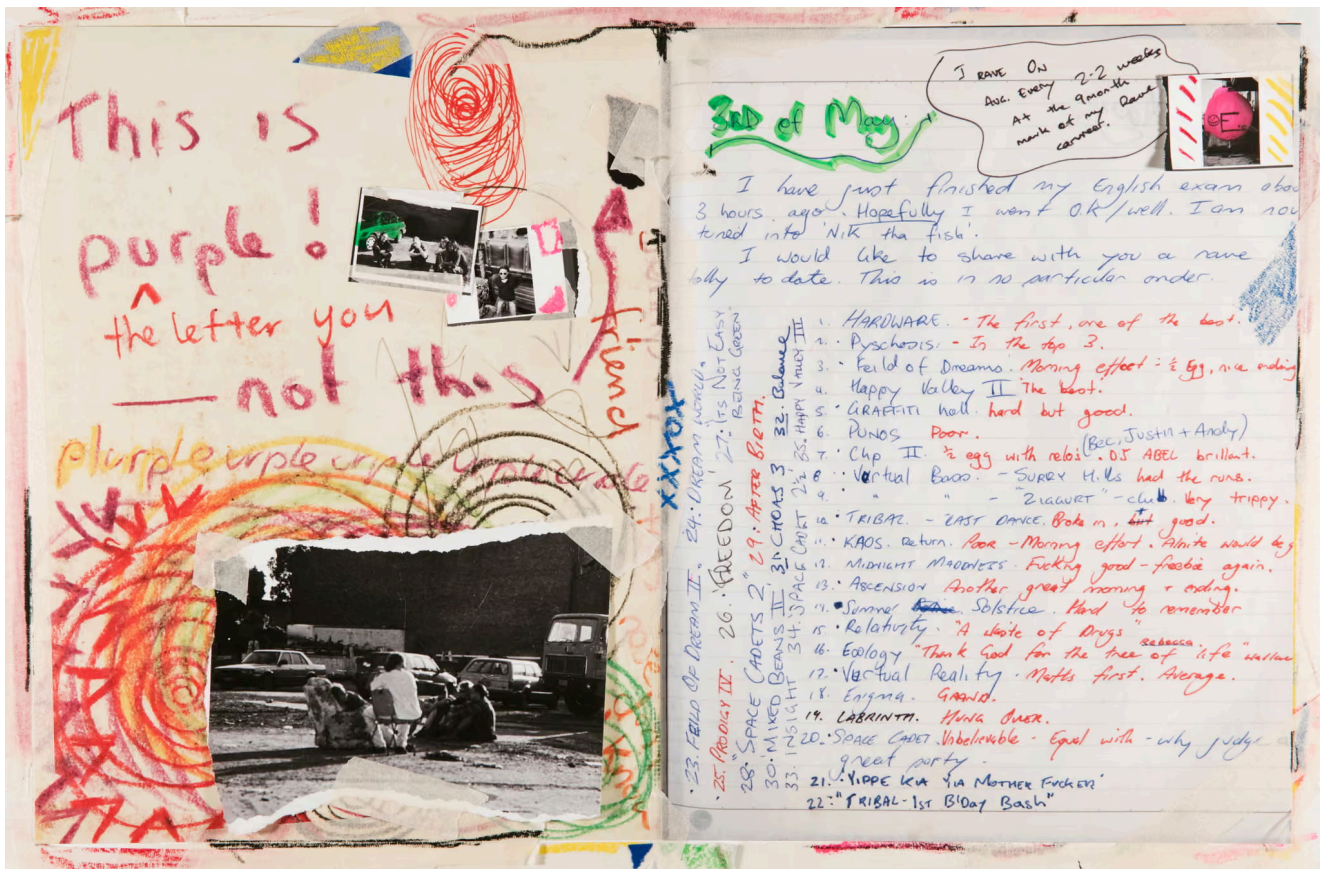
'I was photographing my mates who are in the crowd dancing without a care. You can see everyone is completely lost in the music and in their own worlds just dancing freely.'



'Sunday morning, Feb 14th 1993. Another shot taken in Alexandria, Sydney. These buildings no longer exist and were home to a lot of these raves. Two strangers changing their socks after a long night of dancing.'



'One of my best mates, JD. He said Hey Si! and he ran full-speed and jumped over the chair and I caught him mid air. He was Australia's under 16's karate champion at the time. This was at 904 Bourke St, Sydney at a rave called Punos.'



'A diary entry listing all of the raves I had been to between 1992-1993 with a brief description of them all.'



'I loved the industrial nature of the parties. We inhabited areas that no one came to at night. They were filthy but it was pure heaven. Here we are gathering at a loading dock outside a warehouse to smoke cigarettes and chat.'



'Two girls in Cronulla – my hometown beach. We would often go to the beach after the raves to come down. Sometimes we would go surfing, or just hang out in another car park and listen to music. This photo sums up what some Sundays can feel like. Lost in thought and totally shattered.'