

AUTHOR / KIRSTY BROOKS

# Criminal intent

An Adelaide writer is at the forefront of female detective fiction.

STORY / SAMELA HARRIS



Kirsty Brooks at the Hyatt.

Picture: GRANT NOWELL

A SIMPLE act of theft has set a budding crime writer on the road to national fame. Kirsty Brooks had made early efforts at novels as a child and had always shown a flair for writing – but it took a bookmark-thieving toddler to make her sit down at the computer and get serious about being a novelist.

A few years later Brooks is one of Adelaide's noted writers who has turned early successes into a three-book deal from publisher Hodder.

Her recent novel, the gumshoe crime thriller with the intriguing title *The Vodka Dialogue* is being celebrated by *The Advertiser's* BIG Book Club.

Female crime fiction is becoming hot property in publishing, with lead characters far removed from the whisky-swilling, down-at-heel private eyes of old.

Brooks's effort may never have come into being, however, had it not been for the author's thirst for entertaining reading material – and her toddler niece.

"I couldn't find any books that I wanted to read," she explains.

"I wanted something absorbing and fun, with good, kind, genuine characters who made me laugh."

In the quest, Brooks had amassed a pile of about 20 partially-read books beside her bed – until her toddler niece came along and pulled out all the bookmarks.

"I figured I had better just chuck them and write something myself, seeing as I had no idea where I was up to in any of them," she laughs.

"I guess I can blame it all on her."

The former Wilderness student was already writing for a living. She had completed a Journalism degree at the University of South Australia, along with a Bachelor of Visual Arts. She had even done a WEA grammar course. And she had been published in magazines large and small – and also on the Internet where, for many years, she was a well-known identity as a writer and e-zine reviewer.

As a personality, Kirsty Brooks, 31, is as full of curiosity and vivacity as she is pretty. Her books, of which *The Vodka Dialogue* is her fourth, swarm with lively, over-indulging urban Generation X-ers, emotions running the full gamut in a fast and fun (and funny) society.

Brooks has set much of her work in Adelaide, the city she loves. *The Vodka Dialogue* is set "near the south end of the city mile".

"I used to live right in the city of Adelaide and I love all those side streets leading up to the parklands, around South Terrace, so much of the book is set there," she reveals.

The characters in the book are less identifiable than the geography.

Cass, the junk food-eating, weight-fighting, amateurish private eye with bad fashion sense and a taste in expensive lingerie, she reveals, is like characters in her other books – "another alter-ego".

"I'd say most writers would agree that's how you write, exploring yourself, your potential – asking yourself what you'd do in certain situations," she says.

Yet the writer herself thrives best in solitude. "I really admire people who can

work in busy offices all day," she reflects.

"Writing suits me because I like being home on my own, listening to music. The Internet and e-mail are good forms of communication for me."

Brooks likes to write 1000 words a day, often spending a full eight-hour day at the computer, sometimes working through the night to edit or meet deadlines.

She also finds time to be deputy chair of the SA Writers' Centre, to run her own Driftwood Manuscripts Assessments Agency, to participate in web-based arts events, attend writers festivals and, of all things, to create *Sex in the City* and *Big Brother* board games.

She writes with an easy, generationally idiomatic style, throwing in contemporary references to cultural trends and products. It's the modern form some have defined as "chic-lit".

Brooks says she likes her characters to develop "through dialogue and action rather than much introspection".

"I love being carried away by a story," she declares.

She sees her target readers as people like herself "who love movies and good, adventurous stories". She's a keen *Buffy* fan. "I love stories that shock you, romances that make you wistful, characters you are hopping around on the couch about because they're in danger, or about to make a romantic move." She also confesses to an admiration for kitsch, "anything from the 50s and 60s, some 70s". The Brooks decor sneaks through into *The Vodka Dialogue* – and will probably find its way into the next books, since

*Vodka Dialogue* came as a three-book deal from publisher Hodder.

"I just finished *The Happiness Punch* the other day and I'll be writing *The Millionaire Float* next year," says Brooks.

"Cass gets into more trouble. I like that.

Emotional conflict ricochets from decisions in life and I think Cass makes some very good ones and some terrible ones," she says. "I'm familiar with that!"



## Hooked on adventure

WITH scant job satisfaction working in a DVD store, not to mention slim chances of paying off her massive Visa bill, Cassidy Blair braves moonlighting as a private detective for some easy money. She's 29, fond of a drink, chocolates, expensive lingerie, and she is game for anything – almost. A colleague hooks her up with a client and she sets out to investigate infidelity in the suburbs. It's not quite as easy money as she may have assumed. In fact, it's downright dangerous – not helped by life at home, which is suddenly complicated when she is landed with her drug-addicted ex-boyfriend. At least his brother is a gorgeous hunk – and a policeman.



*THE Vodka Dialogue*, written by Adelaide author Kirsty Brooks, is the fifth book to be featured by The BIG Book Club.

Supported by *The Advertiser*, in partnership with Arts SA, The Australia Council for the Arts, Channel 7 as well as FIVEAA, The BIG Book Club's objective is to promote a love of reading, discussion and literature.

Kirsty will be the guest speaker at *The Advertiser* BIG Book Club literary event to be held this Tuesday, September 23, at the Jade Monkey, 29a Twin St, city, between 6pm and 8pm.

Contact Dymocks on 8223 5380 for more details.

For further information, visit [www.libraries.sa.gov.au](http://www.libraries.sa.gov.au)

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