



ALWEN AND BINDI

A home where everything has a label

Muriel Colville meets the Rolf Harris family

"He's very quiet and serious at home — busy reading, painting and writing scripts or composing songs. He likes to be creating something... we don't have a lot of friends or go out much."

This was said about, of all people, that bouncing, noisy, extrovert, top-line entertainer — Rolf Harris. And it was his wife, sculptor Alwen Harris, who said it.

It has just been reported that Rolf's Saturday night B.B.C. television programme draws 14,000,000 viewers. Also on sound radio from pop-record sessions to *Housewives' Choice* you hear that warm and gritty Australian accent.

Rolf works all day at the studio plus rehearsals and shows most evenings. "It's very lonely having him away so much," Alwen told me when I spent the afternoon with her at their modern, split level open-plan house in a quiet cul-de-sac. The family consists of Alwen, her unusual name comes from a river in Wales and Bindi aged 2.

"We wanted an Aborigine or Australian name for her and as soon as she was born Rolf and I knew it must be Bindi."

Rolf is an accomplished professional painter, his father was a well-known Cardiff portrait-painter and he met his wife at Art School. She specialises in animal sculpture.

One of the few examples of her work she still has in the house is a fascinating head of a sheep which stands by the kitchen window.

"I really love sheep... people don't understand that they can be very intelligent creatures. As a child we lived in Devon where I had my pet sheep and a goat and simply adored them. Both Rolf and I are mad about animals and one day we hope to have a miniature zoo."

At present there is only Cat Number 1, Cat Number 2, Rabbit and Fish.

But the Harris family have their own ideas on things, for instance anyone entering the living room might be somewhat taken back to see that each object bears a large label with its name printed in black letters. The electric radiator is marked *FIRE*; on the chest the drawers are labelled *TOP-DRAWER*, *MIDDLE-DRAWER*, *BOTTOM-DRAWER*; and the word *TABLE* tells you what the table is meant to be. The three chairs round it are clearly named *DADDY'S CHAIR*, *MUMMY'S CHAIR* and *BINDI'S CHAIR*. Then the penny drops. It is the Rolf Harris way of teaching Bindi to read. He should know, he is enormously fond of children and all his early programmes were for youngsters.

"I like working for kids, I've got the same sort of mind as them," he says. He composed his *"Coochie-Bear"* while playing with Bindi and from the age of six months she has squealed with delight when he comes on television.

Alwen told me the story of how Rolf originated his now famous wobble-beard.

"He was painting a portrait and waiting for the sitter to arrive. He hadn't a canvas and was using a board which he painted over and put by the fire to dry—when he



ROLF HARRIS

picked it up it made the most gorgeous noise. He still paints on his boards he uses in his show."

Around tea-time Bindi, playing in the garden with her friends, calls to Alwen who speeds downstairs.

"Excuse me, it's the kids for autographs."

Every day before leaving for the B.B.C. Rolf signs dozens of photographs of himself with *Coochie-Bear*, ready for the children to collect when they come out of school.

In a few weeks, Rolf is off to Canada—

with the family—to take part in *Expo '67*. His next record will soon be out and is a complete change. It will feature close harmony with a big orchestral backing.