



Advertisement

[Life And Luxury](#)[Arts And Culture](#)[Art](#)

# Welcome, art lovers and stickybeaks: house museums are anything but stuffy

Paul Best

Oct 4, 2017 — 12.15am



Third-generation Melbourne architect Corbett Lyon is giving me the royal tour of the zinc-clad family home he designed and built several years ago in leafy Kew. As we wander from room to room, he catalogues the works by Australian artists that fill the space he shares with his wife, Yueji, and daughters, Carlin and Jaqlin.

Overlooking the front garden is a Callum Morton sculpture of a wrapped public monument. In a nearby room is another sculptural piece by Patricia Piccinini, at once gorgeous and grotesque, a hyper-real animal-human hybrid carrying an old woman.

Around a 14-seat dining table upstairs is a series of Howard Arkley paintings from the late artist's *The Home Show* exhibition I recognise from the 1999 Venice Biennale. "There are still some red wine stains from the opening party," Lyon says.





Step into the Justin Art House Museum in Melbourne – part family home, part art gallery. **Jaime Diaz-Berrio**

For this is much more than the Lyon family's residence – it is a house museum, showcasing the considerable collection of Australian contemporary art Lyon has amassed over the past 30 years.

Every month on a designated Monday, Tuesday and sometimes a Sunday, the family puts out the welcome mat to the [Lyon Housemuseum](#). Three times on each of those days, they lead groups of 25 on a 75-minute tour of the exhibition, comprising about a quarter of the more than 350 works in the collection.

---

## Experience the AFR for half the price

**SAVE 50% NOW**

Already a subscriber? [Log in](#)

"The big thing is, I wanted to share my collection with the public. I didn't want a private collection," Lyon tells *Life & Leisure*.

## Purpose designed

Across town, in Prahran, retired architect Charles Justin is in the front room of his equally distinctive, contemporary home, the [Justin Art House Museum](#). He's discussing the merits of a digital video piece by Daniel Crooks with a group from the Public Galleries Association of Victoria as part of a two-hour "interactive" tour, which is followed by afternoon tea.

As at the Lyon Housemuseum, Justin and his wife, Leah, escort groups of 25 up to four days a week when exhibiting. The Justin Art House Museum was purpose designed too – by the Justins' architect daughter Elisa – to house their contemporary art. The collection largely comprises digital works by emerging local artists, including Michael Candy, Ollie Lucas and Tristan Jalleh.

"It grew so large, the question was what to do with it," Justin says. "That's why we went down this path. We wanted to use our art, which isn't conventionally accessible, to engage with the public."

"Going to the Lyon Housemuseum was the tipping point for us," admits Leah. "They changed the game."

## Experience the AFR for half the price

**SAVE 50% NOW**

Already a subscriber? [Log in](#)

Both house museums represent a departure from the norm. Traditionally, house museums have been set up in homes with historical or architectural significance.

An intimate and homely counterpoint to large institutionalised galleries and museums, they are often run by volunteers or not-for-profit groups (like a historical society) with the help of memberships, donations, sponsorships and bequests. Sometimes, governments manage them directly or assist with funding. Others are held privately and opened periodically, along the lines of the Lyon and Justin homes. Usually, there is a guided tour of the architecture, furnishings and history.



A room in the Lyon Housemuseum in Melbourne – "I wanted to share my art collection with the public," says owner Corbett Lyon. **Dianna Snape**

While they took root in the 19th century, the concept is still evolving.

"There are vast numbers of different kinds of houses" (sometimes referred to as memory museums), says art academic Professor Jaynie Anderson, author of *Unconstrained Passions: The Architect's House as a Museum in the Italian Past and the Australian Present*.

## Experience the AFR for half the price

**SAVE 50% NOW**

Already a subscriber? [Log in](#)

In Australia, the National Trust opens almost 200 of its 300-plus historic properties to the public.

---

---



Charles and Leah Justin at their house museum in Prahran. **Supplied**

House museums dedicated to Australians of note include author [May Gibbs' Nutcote](#) in Neutral Bay, Sydney, and those of artists Sir Hans Heysen in Hahndorf, South Australia, and Norman Lindsay in the Blue Mountains. In Melbourne you can visit the homes of sculptor Karl Duldig in Malvern East, and architect [Robin Boyd](#) in nearby South Yarra.

In the 1930s in Melbourne, art patrons John and Sunday Reed opened their house [Heide](#) – now a modern art museum – to artists, writers and intellectuals.

## Experience the AFR for half the price

**SAVE 50% NOW**

Already a subscriber? [Log in](#)

exceptional or fascinating. It gives clues about how they worked, thought and how their ideas emerged."



## Experience the AFR for half the price

**[SAVE 50% NOW](#)**

Already a subscriber? [Log in](#)

They tell multi-dimensional narratives, says Toner Stevenson, head of the house museums portfolio at Sydney Living Museums. [Meroogal](#) in Nowra, NSW, for instance, recounts the lives of four generations of women, while [Rouse Hill](#) house and farm includes the story of the Darug community on whose land the house is situated.

---

---

"All our properties link back to the land," Stevenson says.

Many house museums showcase their former owners' personal collections. Among the best to do this are [The Johnston Collection](#) in Fairhall, East Melbourne, and Adelaide's [David Roche Foundation House Museum](#).

The latter, comprising Roche's home, Fermoy House, and a newer museum pavilion opened by former prime minister Paul Keating just over a year ago, is jam-packed with exquisite decorative antiques and furniture.

"It was essential to keep the house just how it was when David lived in it," says Martyn Cook, director of the David Roche Foundation.

As unique as the Lyon and Justin house museums are, both were inspired by overseas examples. Justin was influenced by collectors including [Frederick Weisman](#), who bought a 1920s Los Angeles villa to display his personal collection of 20th-century art. Lyon recalls visiting the Venice house museum of [Peggy Guggenheim](#) as a student, a year after her death. The American art collector had shared her modern art with visitors for 27 years.

Lyon is taking the house museum concept further, building a \$14.5 million public gallery next door that includes a central exhibition space, cafe and sculpture court. When completed next year, it will open to the public six days a week.

## Experience the AFR for half the price

**SAVE 50% NOW**

Already a subscriber? [Log in](#)



A room in the Justin Art House Museum, open to visitors for up to four days a week. **Andrew Wuttke**

"The buildings will share what I call an architectural DNA," he says. "But [the gallery] will be more accessible and I can share more of my collection."

---

## Sensory experience

Custodians of more traditional house museums have also been instituting change – moving away from velvet rope barriers and "Do Not Touch" signs.

At Sydney Living Museums' [Elizabeth Farm](#) in Rosehill, NSW, visitors can jump into

## Experience the AFR for half the price

**SAVE 50% NOW**

Already a subscriber? [Log in](#)

back in a way that looking at images on an iPad can't."

The National Trust has introduced activities, theatrical elements and virtual-reality goggles. [Rippon Lea Estate](#), in Elsternwick, Melbourne, has a "time machine" with buttons, special effects for children and staff in costume.

"It's about re-energising and reconnecting with people," says National Trust Victoria's cultural development manager, Martin Green. "I almost see it like [the television series] *Westworld*."

Events are playing a bigger role, too. The National Trust stages some 300 activities a year, including an annual pop-up French village in the grounds of [Como House](#) in Melbourne. Recently, Rippon Lea hosted *Night Life*, a three-month fashion exhibition fusing 1920s and contemporary couture.

The David Roche Foundation holds dinners, with seating for 100, in its new gallery and is looking at having contemporary shows. "We're open to ideas," says Cook. "We might even get a graffitist in to paint a room."

---

---

## Experience the AFR for half the price

**SAVE 50% NOW**

Already a subscriber? [Log in](#)

Rose Seidler House in Sydney, designed by architect Harry Seidler in 1950, features original mid-century furniture and fittings. **Phyllis Wong**

The Historic Houses Association of Australia will stage a conference next April to help its members, most of whom are private house owners, to better conserve their properties and engage with visitors. The association's general manager, Baptiste Cornillier, says Australia lags Europe and Britain when it comes to heritage protection and offering financial assistance through tax breaks.

Such incentives, he says, would create greater opportunities for owners to establish house museums. In turn, this would boost tourism, employment and engagement.

## Experience the AFR for half the price

**SAVE 50% NOW**

Already a subscriber? [Log in](#)

Experiences at house museums have become increasingly immersive, such as the Night Life exhibition at Rippon Lea Estate. **Suzie Potter**

# Experience the AFR for half the price

**SAVE 50% NOW**

Already a subscriber? **Log in**

Rippon Lea's Night Life exhibition showcased the glitz and glamour of the 1920s and 30s. **Suzie Potter**



Save



Share

[License article](#)

---

**TOPICS**

[Art](#)

[Interior design](#)

[Life & Leisure](#)

# Experience the AFR for half the price

**SAVE 50% NOW**

Already a subscriber? [Log in](#)

3 Why Australian men are outliving their peers

---

4 How to avoid the postprandial slump

---

5 Jacob Collier, the prodigy who wowed Herbie Hancock and Quincy Jones

---

---

## LATEST STORIES

Opinion [Trade wars](#)

**A trade war that forces change could be good for China**

9 mins ago

---

Breaking [Political donations](#)

**ICAC hears Chinese worker's name used to hide \$5000 donation**

20 mins ago

---

[Street Talk](#)

**Macquarie placement covered at \$118: book message**

37 mins ago

---

[Retail](#)

**Slow FY20 start for hardware sales: Metcash**

40 mins ago

---

---

## SPONSORED

**The key benefits of digital transformation**

**Sponsored**

by Schneider Electric

---

**Improving your comfort zone at work for productivity**

Experience the AFR for half the price

[SAVE 50% NOW](#)

Already a subscriber? [Log in](#)

Experience the AFR for half the price

**SAVE 50% NOW**

Already a subscriber? **Log in**

## RECOMMENDED

**What property you can buy around Australia for \$250,000**



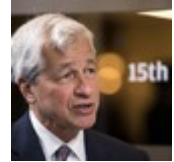
**Elon Musk says he's embarrassed about his latest failed...**




**The construction boss who won't touch apartments**



**Why America's CEOs have turned against shareholders**

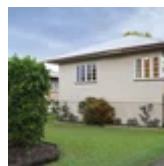


 powered by plista

## PROMOTED

Home Loans Comparison

**Homeowners: Here's Why You Should Run From The Big 4**



Mozo  
**7 of the best home loans to crush your mortgage in 2019**



Health Insurance

**Older Aussies Outraged Over Private Health Costs Are**



Life Insurance Comparison

**The life insurance trick Australians over 50 should be**



# Experience the AFR for half the price

**SAVE 50% NOW**

Already a subscriber? [Log in](#)

Healthcar  
e  
Provider?

---

power

---

 powered by plista

---

## THE AUSTRALIAN Financial Review Magazine

A colourful past: Jenny Kee and Linda Jackson

Fashion in the fast lane

Cartier with a cause

The handmade's tale opens new frontiers for craft

Eyewear entrepreneur puts Australia in the frame

## BOSS

AFR BOSS Most Innovative Companies unveiled

The 10 most innovative professional services firms

The 10 most innovative technology companies

Top 10 innovations in retail, hospitality, tourism and entertainment

The 10 most innovative property, construction and transport companies

# Experience the AFR for half the price

**SAVE 50% NOW**

Already a subscriber? [Log in](#)

Why we're falling in love again with French cooking

The day this founder dodged a rocket-propelled grenade launcher

## Special Reports

Technology driving the future of auto

Smart workplaces boost productivity

Cricket's Boxing Day test a big power draw

Critical infrastructure under threat from hackers

Big data centres on regional areas

[SUBSCRIBE](#)

[LOG IN](#)

[Subscription Terms](#)

---

[Contact & Feedback](#)

---

[Markets Data](#)

---

[Brands](#)

---

# Experience the AFR for half the price

[SAVE 50% NOW](#)

Already a subscriber? [Log in](#)

Experience the AFR for half the price

**SAVE 50% NOW**

Already a subscriber? **Log in**