

# Melbourne Weekly

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# Best in show

Lyon Housemuseum wins state's top residential architecture prize



LIAM CARTER  
PROPERTY WRITER

At first glance, you'd be forgiven for thinking there's been a terrible mistake. How does what appears to be an art gallery win the state's top prize for residential architecture? Kew's Lyon Housemuseum may be flush with installations and colourful canvasses, but it is also a home. And it was precisely this blurring of the lines between house and gallery that set the project by Lyons Architects above 46 other nominees at the Victorian Architecture Awards announced on June 25. Reno Rizzo, jury chairman for the coveted Harold Desbrowe-Anne Award, says: "The success of this project has been the delicate and confident weaving of a sensitive family home through towering galleries."

Hard to miss from the tram down Cotham Road, the Housemuseum opens to the public twice weekly. It is the brainchild of Lyons director Corbett Lyon, who sought to accommodate his family of four and their collection of contemporary Australian

art – including works by Patricia Piccinini and Brook Andrews – under the one roof. Corbett and his team took the idea of an intimate gallery, such as Heide or the Peggy Guggenheim in Venice, a step further by placing art in a domestic setting. Private rooms are dispersed among quasi-public gallery spaces and when open, the kitchen doubles as a cafe and the study as a research library for academics.

"It's quite an interesting experience walking through and not quite knowing where to sit, whether it's a chair or piece of art," says Lyons architect Nick Ling.

"The art is not viewed in isolation, it's unusually accessible, which is part of the beauty of the project. But at the end of the day, it's a home. There's a veggie patch in the backyard."

Ling says it wasn't just the concept that made Lyon Housemuseum a winner. "The award was deserved on all fronts. It's a very well-rounded project. I'm really interested in what the rest of Australia has to say about it architecturally, but also about its significance for the art, design and local communities."

The Housemuseum is now up for the Robin Boyd prize at the Australian Institute of Architects' National Architecture Awards in Canberra, and South Yarra-based architect Albert Mo reckons it's a shoo-in. "The project is an absolute triumph. The ability to blend

art and architecture like this is almost a dream come true. In the office, we all think it's going to win."

Mo's firm, EAT Architects, picked up a commendation for its extension of an Edwardian in Canterbury, now known as Elm and Willow House. "It's our first-ever Australian Institute of Architects award, so it's very special. To do a project like this, it's crucial to have a client who understands and appreciates your work and a builder who can pull it off," Mo says.

"What set us apart was our attention to detail and use of materials, namely glass and concrete. A lot of people are afraid of concrete, but if merged correctly with the landscape, it can have a certain type of aura."

Mo says the 2010 awards show that traditionally non-adventurous suburbs in the inner east are opening their minds. "We're seeing more and more patrons in the area who are starting to appreciate the virtues of contemporary architecture."

The other big winners at the awards were: Woods Bagots and NH Architects for the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre (public architecture), Hassell and Lend Lease for the ANZ Centre (interiors), Wood Marsh for Port Phillip Estate (commercial), ARM for One East Melbourne (multiple housing) and Peter Elliott Architecture for RMIT's Building Nine rooftop restoration (heritage). ■

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Best house – Kew's Lyon Housemuseum by Lyons Architects



Commended – Canterbury's Elm and Willow House by EAT Architects



Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre won four awards



Best interiors – ANZ Centre by Hassell and Lend Lease