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A LANDMARK VICTORIAN

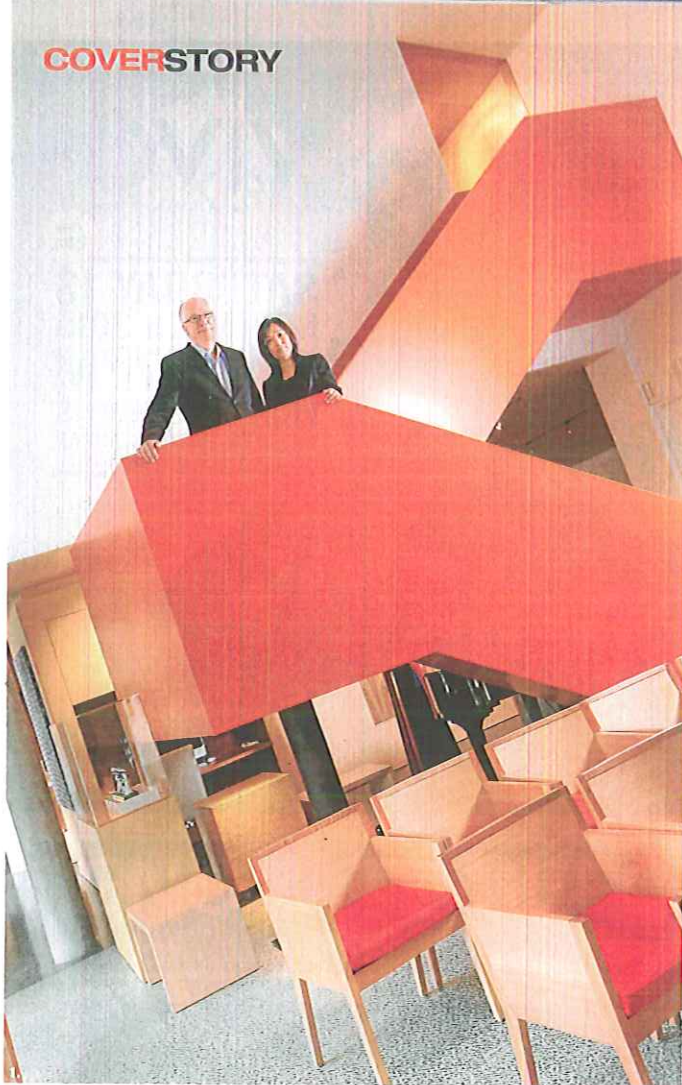
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'It's a sociological experiment, in terms of a family actually living in the museum, or vice versa, the museum living with the family'

HOME IS WHERE THE ART IS

Step inside some of Melbourne's most intimate and unique art galleries and museums. By Linley Wilkie

When representatives from Venice's Peggy Guggenheim Museum visited Kew's Lyon Housemuseum last June, they were blown away. Chairwoman of the museum's advisory board, Princess Sibillia of Luxembourg, declared the privately-housed art collection quite extraordinary and said she had never seen anything like it.

Impressive sentiments, but also well deserved. In creating a museum that doubles as the family home, the Lyon Housemuseum has the goods to back up such glowing praise.

Collectors who open their residence to share their art with the public are a rare breed and for good reason. It takes a special person to be so passionate about art that they are willing to live in what is usually a commercial space. Peggy Guggenheim did it in the 1950s, escaping to the roof terrace when the crowds became unbearable. Decades later, there are still only a handful of similar dwellings around the world, including, luckily for us, in Melbourne.

Architect Corbett Lyon started collecting

contemporary art 20 years ago and about 10 years later, he and wife Yueji contemplated sharing their collection with the public. This usually occurs via a donation to a gallery, however the Lyons were keen to keep theirs within the family.

"We came up with the idea of building a house that could also house the collection and make it available for small, pre-booked public tours," Lyon says. He had viewed comparable models overseas and wanted to replicate that kind of experience.

"The idea of walking into a museum that is residential in scale, (where) you can feel the personality of the collectors and the family and you can make the connection between their lifestyle and the collection. It has all these kinds of layers to it which you don't get in a public museum."

Being the resident architect and, with Yueji, owner of the collection, Lyon had the freedom to do whatever he liked – no boundaries, just a great opportunity. The end result is a seamless mesh of museum and private dwelling, where art is featured on most walls, sculptures sit comfortably

next to household furniture and homely details, such as storage, are cleverly hidden.

The house won the Harold Desbrowe-Anneer Award for Residential Architecture at the 2010 Victorian Architecture Awards.

Since opening in September last year, visitors have travelled from neighbouring suburbs and as far as Europe. Thousands of people have strolled through the Lyons' home, with tours, talks and concerts booked out months in advance. "People come for the experience, the building, the collection," Lyon says.

"I think there's a voyeuristic thing about looking at someone's house, like open for inspections. People come with certain expectations, but they leave saying, 'It's just nothing like I could have imagined.'"

Fellow art collectors and friends of the Lyons, the Fehily family also live in a home-cum-gallery that leaves visitors delighted. In a "mad Fehily moment" six months ago, Lisa, husband Ken and their three sons decided to move from their Toorak home into a four-storey Melbourne

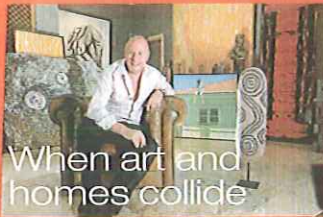
CBD apartment and turn the second level into a commercial gallery.

How times have changed. Twelve years ago, inspired by a recently-purchased \$50 poster and newly-painted feature wall, the Fehilys decided to buy one piece of art. Famous last words. More than 300 pieces now decorate their home and this year, with the gallery, Lisa began her consultancy project, Fehily Contemporary.

Until the end of the year, this section of the family home will house a series of informal exhibitions, entitled *Fehily Temporary*. "Art took us on this amazing journey that changed our lives," Fehily says. "As you collect and become more and more involved in the stories about the artists, you go on a journey with them. Then as they progress, you want to follow and it's almost like you feel a part of it. I don't feel you ever really own the work; you're just a custodian."

Lyon agrees. "It's a sociological experiment, in terms of a family actually living in the museum, or vice versa, the museum living with the family." Only the couple's bedroom and those of their

1. Corbett and Yuej Lyon at Lyon Housemuseum
2. Lisa Fehily with sculpture by Canadian artist Evan Penny
3. Bedrooms are off-limits at Lyon Housemuseum
4. Corbett playing the organ
5. Replica of the moon buggy
6. The truck babies live with the Lyons



When art and homes collide

Scott Livesey's warehouse gallery has had a striking presence on High Street, Armadale, for a decade. What many don't know however, is that Livesey has another art collection, a little further along the road in Malvern. Behind the walls of what appears to be a private home is another gallery of sorts, housing pieces not included in Livesey's current exhibition. Paintings by indigenous artists and Sidney Nolan, Todd Hunter photographs, David Bromley sculptures and antique furniture

decorate the house as it would in any home environment.

One spacious house originally occupied the block, before it was divided in the 1980s and later purchased by Livesey. He and his family now live in one of the houses and had previously leased out the other before deciding to turn it into a private gallery, which works on an appointment-only basis.

"Usually people can't visualise from the big white space how things are going to look,"

Livesey says. "And in a big space a piece can look massive, when actually it's not."

It's more likely that it has a commanding presence, however hung in the company of drapes and furniture, potential buyers can have a better appreciation for how it sits in a domestic environment. Since it opened a year ago, the house has not only accommodated art, but also artists visiting from interstate.

For more information, visit scottliveseygalleries.com

two teenage daughters are off limits to the public during the tours, which are run by Lyon or Yueji.

"Rather than having the tour guide or volunteer, you're hearing the story from the people who came up with the idea," Lyon says. "People respond positively to that."

Fehily also invites gallery guests to enjoy a cup of tea in her "residency within a residence".

"Visitors go straight to the gallery and then often I'll take them to the lounge room (pictured, top). Sometimes we go up to the roof top and have a drink. People really enjoy that."

"It's a little bit more casual and less intimidating, which is what we like."

The Fehily's sons have embraced the gallery aspect of this new abode; their 14-year-old in particular engaging with visitors and artists.

"They don't mind that people are wandering in and out, they're quite comfortable with that," Fehily says. "That really validates our decision, exposing the children to this kind of lifestyle."

Both the Fehilys and the Lyons emphasise that first and foremost, this unique vision is a home.

"It's a home that's made even more special by having a gallery in it," Fehily says. "If I'm in the gallery talking to a client and my son walks through, I'll greet him. Although I might ask them to not play Xbox. And there was some exuberant shout on Saturday and I had to say, 'Guys, keep it down'."

The Lyons daughters have grown up with the art since they were young, so they're used to such extraordinary surrounds. Now as teenagers, they can surely lay claim to the best sleepover pad in Boroondara. Lyon laughs. "It's a really cool house. They're excited about the idea of being part of something that people are reacting so positively to. And they help out with the afternoon tea."

While blurring the lines between home and museum/gallery obviously holds universal appeal, Lyon thinks it's "a very Melbourne thing to do."

"It's got all these hidden cultural themes. We like to think that we're making a small contribution to Melbourne's cultural scene."

For more information, visit lyonhousemuseum.com.au and fehilycontemporary.com.au



Collection perfection

When antiques dealer and collector William Johnson died in 1986, he bequeathed his East Melbourne home and impressive 1269-piece collection to the public. His legacy is The Johnson Collection, a museum in which his entire collection is arranged as it might have

been when he lived at the house (now classified by the National Trust), giving visitors the impression he's just ducked out for a moment.

There are no roped-off areas or plaques labelling points of interest and three times a year each room receives a new treatment. Only the drapes, chandeliers, carpets and wall colours remain.

When Johnson initially proposed the idea of a museum, it was important to local residents and the City of Melbourne that there be minimal impact to the neighbourhood. It was therefore agreed that all visitors would be bussed in and there is no signage in front of the house. The museum's planning permit also prevents the address being published.

The Johnson Collection is managed by the Johnson Trust, which hosts three tours daily together with regular lectures and workshops in an adjoining part of the house. It is estimated about 7500 people visit each year, the number growing as word spreads beyond Melbourne.

For more information, visit johnsoncollection.org