

Sydney **Observer**

JULY 2014 - FREE

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FROM THE TEAM

It's well and truly winter here in Sydney. As July creeps up on us and the months continue to fly by, *Sydney Observer* HQ has been busy researching (and dreaming about) the perfect winter getaway for our second annual 'Blue Mountains' edition. With a special focus on the art-makers and musicians of the region, we've also included a list of the best – albeit lesser known – things to do when you make your journey west to the Mountains.

Aside from wistfully imagining ourselves strolling around the Blue Mountains Botanic Garden or making art in the not-for-profit artist residency, the BigCi, we've managed to buckle down and investigate some of the more serious issues occurring across the North Shore. Climbing council rates are set to hit home-owners in Ku-ring-gai and Killara; as well as affecting the long-term home of the veteran Marian Street Theatre Community group.

High density on the North Shore is still a hot topic for residents and politicians alike and our opinion contributor this month, architect Dugald Mackenzie, questions whether we really can have it all.

Last but not least, this month's profile features rising Olympic star Christian Sprenger, who proves that age really is just a number. At 28, with his sights set on the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio, he defies the idea that competitive swimmers peak young.

There's much to enjoy in this month's issue. So snuggle up, stay warm, and read on!

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FROM THE READERS



HEALTHY WINTER WARMERS A DEFINITE CROWD PLEASER

June's issue had an excellent topical article on "Cooking with Quinoa" and a couple of recipes using this delicious super food. As Australia has an obesity issue, it is great to be exposed to easy, healthy cooking options. I look forward to next month's food and wine section.

Jocelyn Kwan, Gordon

AMANDA KELLER KEEPS FAMILIES LAUGHING

The articles in the June issue of *Sydney Observer* were very well selected and very impressive. I always look forward to the next issue.

The article in the June issue that caught my attention was the comedy queen: Amanda Keller.

She brings a lot of happiness and laughter to our family after a week long of household errands and office work in the program "The Living Room". Great to learn about her continuing success. Finally "Ask the Architect" and the "super food" was very informative.

Sanjeev Prasad, Killara

The article I liked best in the June issue was the Amanda Keller profile, as I've followed her extensive career since "Beyond 2000" and listen to her show every morning. She is inspirational as she sounds so grounded, approachable, humble and family orientated. I aspire to be like her when I'm 52.

Kim Ambor, St Ives Chase



If you would like to enter any of the giveaway draws, tell us in 25 words or more, what you liked in this month's magazine. The best entries will be published* and go in the running for our monthly giveaway in the next issue of the magazine. **PO Box 420, Killara NSW 2071 or email editor@kamdha.com with your name, address, and contact number by the 25th of the month.**

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SIX COUNCILS UNITE TO INCREASE AWARENESS OF 50 KILOMETRE SPEED LIMITS ON LOCAL ROADS

PITTWATER, WARRINGAH, NORTH Sydney, Willoughby, Ku-ring-gai and Lane Cove councils are launching the "It's Local, It's 50" campaign in a bid to keep our roads safer.

Devised in response to a rapid increase in the number of crashes on local roads due to lack of knowledge regarding the 50 kilometre per hour speed limit, the campaign will see the six councils join forces to reiterate the message that there is a 50 kilometre per hour speed limit on all local roads, unless stated otherwise.

Ku-ring-gai Council Mayor Jennifer Anderson said: "It's important to remember that the road environment can be unpredictable and even the best drivers cannot anticipate what might happen."

"Crashes can be more easily avoided if people respect the 50 km/hr speed limit on local roads," she said.



HORNSBY COUNCIL WINS HEALTH AND SAFETY AWARD



STATECOVER, A NOT-FOR-PROFIT organisation, issued Hornsby Council with a work health and safety (WHS) excellence award late last month.

The StateCover Excellence Awards recognise councils for adopting strategies to help improve the health and safety standards of their workplace. Amanda Collins, leader of Hornsby Council's Safety and Wellness Team, was the brainchild behind the council's 17-month safety compliance audit, which made the council more aware of workplace hazards and risks among staff.

"This is a fabulous achievement on behalf of our dedicated Safety and Wellness team that deserves to be applauded," Hornsby Mayor, Steve Russell, said. "Winning this award reflects the fact that Hornsby Shire Council is at the forefront of WHS practices, and sets an example for other workplaces."

The Safety and Wellness team will receive a \$5000 voucher with their excellence award, to be spent on safety services and products in the workplace.

STATE BUDGET PROMISES NEW SCHOOL FOR NORTH SHORE

THE STATE GOVERNMENT has promised a new years 7 to 10 comprehensive school for Wollstonecraft, with the development aimed for completion in 2016.

The move comes as part of the state's \$189 million budget allocation for the construction of two new public schools and 14 school upgrades. The state budget's infrastructure statement, written by state treasurer Andrew Constance,

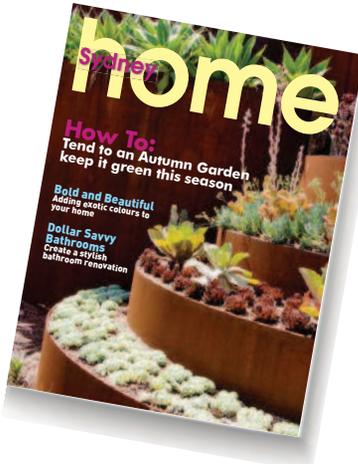
claims that there aren't enough schools to cope with the rising Australian population.

"The government school population is expected to grow from 752,000 in 2011, to over 820,000 in 2021," the paper says. "While many new students will enrol at existing schools, new schools will need to be delivered over this period to cater for population growth."



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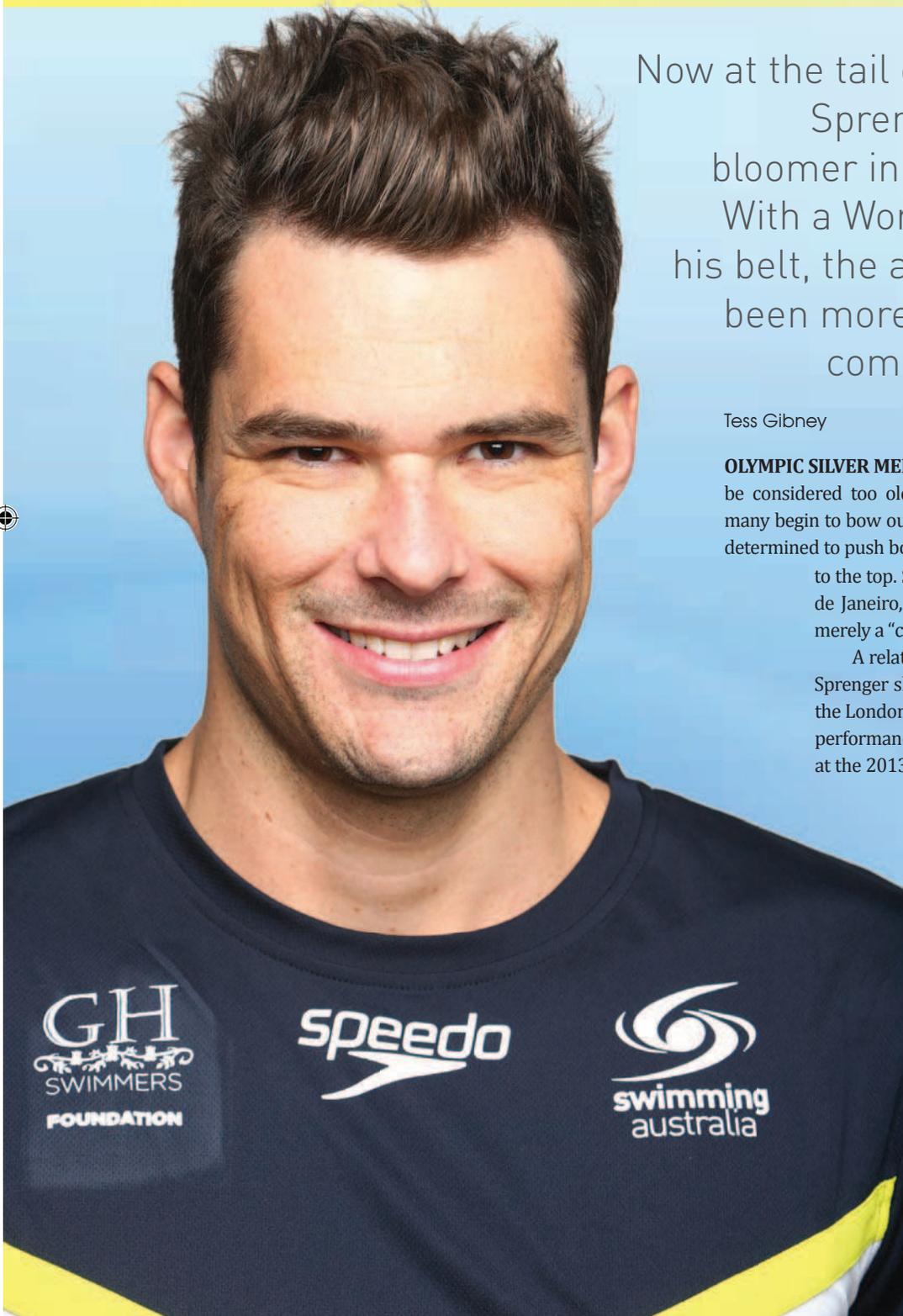
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AUSTRALIA'S SWIMMING WONDER: CHRISTIAN SPRENGER SETS SIGHTS ON RIO



Now at the tail end of his 20s, Christian Sprenger is considered a late bloomer in the world of swimming. With a World Championship under his belt, the ambitious star has never been more determined to blow his competitors out of the water

Tess Gibney

OLYMPIC SILVER MEDALLIST swimmer Christian Sprenger could almost be considered too old for the international pool. At 28, an age where many begin to bow out of the strenuous sport, an ever-driven Sprenger is determined to push both personal and professional boundaries in his race to the top. Setting his sights on the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro, the Brisbane-born local steadfastly believes age is merely a “challenge, not a barrier”.

A relative newcomer to the swimming scene, late bloomer Sprenger shot to prominence following his silver medal win at the London Olympics in 2012. Since then, a series of impressive performances – including gold in the 100 metre breaststroke at the 2013 World Championships – have seen him continue to defy the rule that the best swimmers peak at a young age. Cementing his place alongside South Africa’s Cameron van der Burgh as one of the top two breaststrokers in the world, Sprenger is a clear Australian favourite heading into the Glasgow Commonwealth Games this month.

Level-headed and articulate, Sprenger is one to espouse the benefits of balance. Though swimming seems to be in his blood (his cousin Nick Sprenger is a freestyle swimmer who represented Australia at the 2004 and 2008 Olympics), he’s never been without a backup plan. Having worked the checkout at Woolworths as he attempted to make the Australian swim team, Sprenger now juggles a gruelling training regime with part-time university study and a bustling social life.

In between all this, the busy sporting star spoke with *Sydney Observer* about life in the lead up to the Glasgow Games.

How do you prepare mentally for a big event like the Commonwealth Games?

I think preparing mentally for big events comes naturally with physical preparation. Leading into it we do a lot of things physically conditioning for the body, so the mental state occurs when the physical side is becoming ready. I can mentally train myself to anticipate conditions, providing I can physically perform. It's about making sure I'm physically fit, and if I am, I can mentally take myself to that next level.

Swimming Australia has undergone somewhat of a restructure since the London Olympics. Are you feeling confident about the Australian swim team's performance in the Glasgow Games?

I'm definitely feeling confident about the Australian swimming team's performance in the upcoming Glasgow Games. We've picked up a lot of younger athletes this time around and I think they're learning a lot about, you know, how to perform and when to perform. Although there was a bit of a re-development stage [within Swimming Australia] following London, the team from the World Championships was a lot stronger, and I think the team going to the Glasgow games is going to be very, very strong. The more performances older athletes – like myself – can put on the table, I think the more the younger athletes can respond and want to perform well.

You said that the breaststroke field is going to be very strong at the games. Who is your main competitor and why?

In my main events, the 100 metre and 200 metre breaststroke, my primary competitor will be Cameron van der Burgh from South Africa; he's the reigning Olympic Champion. In the 200 metre breaststroke it's Olympic Silver medallist Michael Jamieson from Scotland. So, between those two guys – and there's also a lot of excellent British breaststroke swimmers – getting a gold medal is going to be a very tough job. I'm predicting to win an event it will take a world record – or close to a world record – to get gold.

How do you balance everything, between part-time study and your intense training regime?

In terms of studying, it's actually not too hard to balance, and I think it's really important to have that aspect away from the pool – so swimming is not the only thing you're doing. I know a lot of athletes that do that, and I think it has the potential to consume you a bit too much. Having a balanced lifestyle with an education and a good social life, and then obviously the sporting aspect, is crucial. Having those three

elements can give me balance, which I really think is the best thing for me.

How did you begin competitive swimming?

We [my family] all swam a lot as kids, and I think we all got into it through a natural affinity for the sport. As we grew up, we stuck with it and as time progressed and we got older we decided whether to stick with it competitively or not. Myself and Nick, my cousin, really pushed it as far as we could, beyond school and into the games. That's when my brother and sister stopped competitively swimming – in high school. It was the choice we made to push ourselves as far we could go, but there was obviously a natural ability for swimming in the family.

You mentioned previously that you think it's important for athletes to have a backup plan for when they stop competing. What do you see yourself doing? Do you see yourself as being involved in some aspect of swimming?

At any point in time I could suffer from a shoulder injury or a knee injury or anything really, and that's also why I think having a decent backup plan is essential. I'm studying business and marketing at university at the moment, and I'd love to stay with the sport and stay involved as much as I can. I'd love to be involved also with the production of performance swimwear, and one of my sponsors, Speedo, has been great in helping me to crack into the design field with some of its swimwear, and it's good experience for me for when I retire from swimming. In a few years' time I could be somewhere in the design team, and that's definitely an option I'd love to explore.

What do you love the most about your career as an Olympic swimmer?

It's the racing aspect. Being able to walk out to the block and knowing that I'm prepared mentally and physically for a race. The competitive aspect is one of the best parts of it. The training is undoubtedly tough, but you know that it's essential and all athletes are doing it around the world. If I can go into a competition being the fittest and the strongest, I can put myself in a position to win and that's 100 per cent the most exciting part.

You mentioned the 2016 Rio Olympics. Are you hoping to compete?

It's just seeing how each year goes and taking them as they come. I'm 28 now and it's just about testing my body, and how I can push it still. A few years [ago] 26 and 27 [was seen] as the retirement age, and I think I've proven that changes can still be made at this age. That's why I'm curious to see what I can do in 2016. ○





RAIL TO REASON: URBAN PLANNING AND THE NORTH SHORE

Dugald Mackenzie

THE PROBLEM IS obvious; we in the North Shore want it all: trees; large lots, easy access to services and people with like-minded values. We simply don't want change – in either population demography or density – and we certainly don't want anyone telling us what to do. In other words, we are self-centered. That said, what can we do to move forward and adapt with an increasing population and their changing needs? The answer is simple and has been staring us all in the face for years.

The body works when the circulation works, the city works when the circulation works, and our area on the North Shore works just the same. When looking at zoning changes, increasing densities and the change of land use, the first thing we should do is analyse how the circulation will work. With a house, the circulation spine dictates

how the house will function. With convention centres, the circulation space becomes the lungs of the building, enabling it to breathe and the spaces to flow.

So how then do we unblock the North Shore and the rest of Sydney? Plan around and develop circulation first and then, as an adjunct, the density will follow. Let's look at a case in point: Pacific Highway traffic. The problem is acute, so what do we do? Build more roads? Widen the roads? Remove cars and take them elsewhere, or ban cars and just have bikes? What we do need to do is step back and look at what resources we do have, and then make a plan.

What do we currently have that could solve the problem? We have a railway line running through the North Shore with land on either side and height galore. In fact, that same network runs

throughout Sydney and, at places like Sydenham, is eight lanes wide. Why couldn't we take all buses, taxis and bikes off the highway and run them along the railway line, either over or beside? Why couldn't we take the Gordon Town Centre and build it over the car park and railway station/line, therefore freeing up the main intersection? Why couldn't we use the other areas over the railway line for much needed sporting fields?

Pru Goward needs to think laterally, explore all options and then get a master plan of circulation before adding density. On the North Shore we can *have it all and keep the trees*, have the density and live in harmony.

Dugald Mackenzie is an architect and director of Mackenzie Architects International Pty Ltd.

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NORTHERN SYDNEY RATE PAYERS GET SQUEEZED

Stella Gray

Property owners in the Warringah, Ku-ring-gai and Lave Cove council areas will be paying more in council rates, after a decision granted by the NSW pricing body in June.

Warringah Council's rates will eventually increase by 9.4 per cent over four years and Lane Cove will see increases by a total of 10 per cent over the next five years, equating to a \$329 jump that will be redistributed among different types of rate payers. Ku-ring-gai's rate rise will be a one-off of 5 per cent from July 1.

Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) chairman, Dr Peter Boxall, said Warringah's application for a rate increase was approved at a lower rate than originally requested by the council.

"Warringah Council's application was the only application where a clear need for the increases was not in the near future," said Boxall.

Warringah Mayor Michael Regan issued a response to IPART's decision, indicating that

the rate rise was not high enough to meet the Warringah community's needs.

"The not so good news is that we won't have the funds to upgrade our public spaces to the standard our community has requested. Major projects, such as the redevelopment of the Aquatic Centre simply won't proceed," Mayor Regan said.

Ku-ring-gai Council's increase equates to an additional \$32.5 million over the next 10 years.

In a public statement, Ku-ring-gai Council noted that its approved increase "enables the council to generate an additional \$2.7 million for roadworks, in addition to its existing budget which is around \$7 million each year".

IPART approved thirty-three applications for council rate increases out of the thirty-four it received.

The most recent statistics published by the NSW government show that each aforementioned council spends more on administration and governance than



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ON THE AGENDA

services such as waste disposal and public safety measures.

Governance and administration costs account for 34 per cent of total expenditure for Warringah Council, and residential rates are an average of \$1,034.54, above the median of \$790.15.

Lane Cove Council's administrative costs account for 20 per cent of its total spending and its rates are an average of \$1,087.34.

Ku-ring-gai Council's administrative costs claim 24 per cent of its expenditure, but its administrative costs and residential rates are lower than average.

Glenn Byres, from the Property Council of Australia, says the current process of IPART approving increases in council rates is preferable to the reliance on ministerial discretion in the past.

"Having said that, we do still hold real concerns about provisions which allow councils to load up rate increases on commercial property - which after all, is about providing jobs and investment choice for millions of Australians with superannuation," Mr Byres said.

"We have seen business or commercial property rates increased radically compared to

other rates."

Business rates in Warringah will increase by \$678 in 2017-18 after the latest price approvals from IPART.

"In making this decision, we are conscious that concerns have been raised both with the council and with IPART about the affordability of the increase and the level of council spending," said Warringah Council's Boxall.

The latest report by the Independent Local Government Review panel found NSW councils' revenue systems are disjointed and applied unevenly, contrary to the basic principles of taxation.

"This approach is unlikely to reflect sound fiscal policies or to lay a solid foundation for long-term sustainability," the report stated.

Byres says he believes the fact that so many councils are under heavy financial strain underlines the need for a total transformation of local government, particularly in Sydney.

"The last independent financial 'health' check of councils showed one in two are unsustainable and that's one of the many reasons we'd urge the Government to accelerate a program to create larger, stronger and more modern councils." ○



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PLANNING MINISTER UNDER FIRE FOR HIGHER HOUSING DENSITY ON THE NORTH SHORE

Pru Goward's announcement of more high rise developments for the North Shore area has been labelled a betrayal of the Liberal government by local MPs and community figures

Kieran Gair and Steph Nash

On June 1, state planning minister Pru Goward announced that the North Shore should "be prepared for more density", despite earlier promises by the state government to reduce planned development for the Ku-ring-gai area.

Liberal member for Davidson, Jonathon O'Dea, and former Premier, Barry O'Farrell, pledged a limit of 10,000 new dwellings for Ku-ring-gai between 2004 and 2031, following staunch community unrest over high density housing levels. The latest figures from Ku-ring-gai Council show that over 6000 new dwellings were approved for construction between 2004 to 2013, with the council already reaching over 60 per cent of the 27-year target.

O'Dea seized on Goward's comments, branding them "highly inappropriate".

"For many years, planning has been a sensitive issue on the North Shore, particularly in the Ku-ring-gai Council area," O'Dea said. "Local MPs have encouraged the local community to accept its fair share of new development while criticising the bullying tactics and insensitivity of past Labor Planning Ministers."

Despite his shot at past Labor governments, O'Dea said Goward's statement that "garden suburbs" like the North Shore should "be

prepared for more density" is unfair.

"The reported statement of Minister Goward that 'you can't start exempting the North Shore' and suggestion that the area is

"To start advocating more density around the North Shore railway stations, when an agreed increase of 10,000 dwellings is already planned, is just pure overdevelopment and planning vandalism"

Kathy Cowley

not accepting its fair share of new dwellings is extremely hard to justify".

Kathy Cowley, president of community group Friends of Ku-ring-gai Environment (FOKE), says that the local community is

outraged by Goward's comments. She describes the announcement as a betrayal of the Liberal government, arguing that more high-rise developments will lead to the overdevelopment of the Ku-ring-gai environment.

"To start advocating more density around the North Shore railway stations, when an agreed increase of 10,000 dwellings is already planned, is just pure overdevelopment and planning vandalism," Cowley said. "With two threatened ecological communities and heritage conservation areas within the targeted rail zones, one wonders where this Minister thinks she is going to cram more high-rise [buildings]!"

According to a FOKE survey conducted around various local Ku-ring-gai centres, 71 per cent of respondents complained that high-rise developments negatively impacted their area. Cowley argues that urban planning decision should be made with respect to the wellbeing of local citizens and ecosystems, suggesting FOKE will fight for housing density suitable for all members of the community.

"This is a betrayal of the promises of the Liberal government," she said. "We are committed to returning planning decisions to local communities." ○



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RATE COSTS THREATEN FUTURE OF COMMUNITY THEATRE

Excessive commercial rates have placed the much-loved home of the Marian Street Theatre for Young People in jeopardy, causing concern for the future of this unique community group

Charmaine Hui



MARIAN STREET THEATRE for Young People (MSTYP) is under threat as the Ku-ring-gai Council determines whether Australia's oldest children's theatre can return to its Killara home. The theatre has operated as the resident theatre company at Marian Street Theatre for 40 years, with the council-owned space serving as a performance venue and important administration, rehearsal and storage space.

The council closed the theatre for renovations in December 2013, deeming the site unsafe, and is now planning to make the theatre available for commercial hire at rates that MSTYP will not be able to afford.

An online petition on Change.org demanding that Ku-ring-gai Council offer MSTYP its original home at affordable rates, has amassed over 1300 signatures so far, including the signature of actor Hugh Jackman.

"I am a powerfully strong supporter of the arts and I believe that our performing arts industry needs to be nurtured at every level. I sincerely hope the Marian Street Theatre for Young People finds a way to continue [its] important work," Jackman wrote.

MSTYP artistic director, Margie McCrae, said the theatre will not only be too expensive to hire, but the renovations will also strip the venue of valuable rehearsal, administration and storage space.

"We can't use the theatre for classes or teachers and we can't have an office. It is inconsistent with council's assertion that they support us," she said.

Ku-ring-gai Council has assured MSTYP that it will have continued use of the newly renovated Marian Street Theatre when it reopens. However, the theatre group has already lost thousands in funds having to hire extra rehearsal spaces and performance venues which restrict the number of production showings. According to McCrae, the group could lose up to \$90,000 by year's

end if it is unable to return to its home at Marian Street Theatre.

MSTYP has played a unique role in the North Shore's cultural life, being widely valued by the community for generations. The theatre group is an independent, not-for-profit organisation which offers drama classes for people of all ages and gives young people the opportunity to participate directly in theatre production as actors, stage managers, directors and technical operators under the guidance of experienced theatre professionals.

A signatory of the petition, Cecilia Ritchie, remembers MSTYP fondly.

"My mum took us to see Marian Street shows many times when we were kids," she said. "They were some of the most memorable moments of my childhood, and fostered in me a lifelong love of live theatre. I encourage council to invest in the creativity of its residents by making space for children's theatre."

Writer and teacher for MSTYP, Catherine Martin, said the theatre group is important to the teenagers who perform and the children who watch the shows.

"There is no other theatre group in Sydney that is doing what MSTYP does for the community ... but the reality is, this unique theatrical group cannot survive without financial support and a space to perform."

The council has suggested that Marian Street Theatre be offered to MSTYP for performances only during the school holidays. For the time being, MSTYP has partnered with Knox Grammar to present a production of *Snow White* during the winter school holidays from June 28 to July 12.

A Ku-ring-gai Council spokesperson said it is waiting on recommendations from an independent reviewer which will inform the council's decision about the MSTYP's future. ○

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STUDENTS TURN TO PRIVATE TUTORING FOR HSC SUCCESS

Statistics show a growing number of students are turning to domestic tutors in order to ensure maximum HSC success

Tiffany Tirtabudi

YEAR 12 STUDENTS across New South Wales will soon commence the final stretch of their high school journeys, beginning with their HSC trial exams in the middle of July. As this is a time often fraught with high expectations, anxiety and stress for students and parents alike, it is not surprising that many are opting to seek out extra help in a bid to secure the best marks and top positions within school ranking systems.

Last year's statistics indicate that Australia's domestic tutoring industry is valued at \$1.2 billion – growing at an average rate of 11 per cent each year – with many children receiving some form of academic coaching even before the age of five.

However, this trend may be taking a downward turn as the Australian Tutoring Association (ATA) has revealed that the 2014 NAPLAN tests; undertaken by students in years 3, 5, 7 and 9, saw a surge in parents taking their children to tutoring only after the release of their child's results, rather than prior to the onset of the benchmark national tests.

CEO of the ATA Mohan Dhall advises HSC students not to delay in asking for assistance, emphasising the need to engage in tutoring services as early as necessary if individuals are hoping to improve their academic performance.

"Most decisions should really be made by the end, or even the start of year 11," Dhall says.

"By the time trials roll around, it's arguably too late."

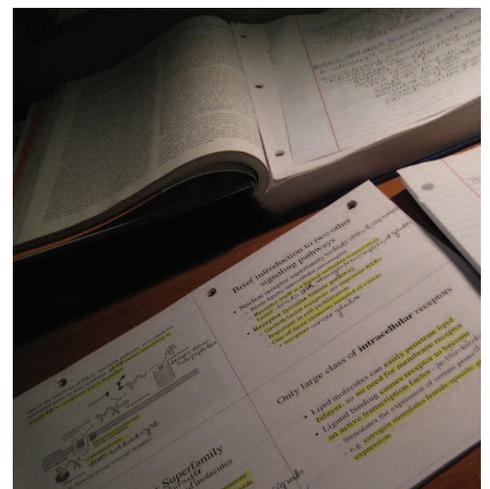
He believes that for students who feel they require coaching in the period after the trial exams, it may simply be a matter of a lack in self-confidence as opposed to a lack of skill.

"In most cases, these kids just need some positive affirmation because they have a fear of failure and have started comparing themselves with others," Dhall says.

Parents who are confronted with this dilemma are often presented with an increasing temptation to enrol their children into HSC revision workshops or 'boot camps' that are held by coaching schools or universities and are priced anywhere between \$25 to \$150 per session.

"Most of the time, 30 to 40 per cent of the teachers have been given a text and a group of kids and they don't know the kids or the text."

Walter Sprinke





EDUCATION

According to Dhall, even school teachers who have previously urged their students against undertaking extra coaching are becoming less reticent in their approach to the issue, as they receive in-service training by virtue of their students attending such programs.

Walter Sprinke, founder and head tutor at Smart Moves Coaching in Roseville, maintains that one-to-one tutoring is more advantageous than a classroom-style approach.

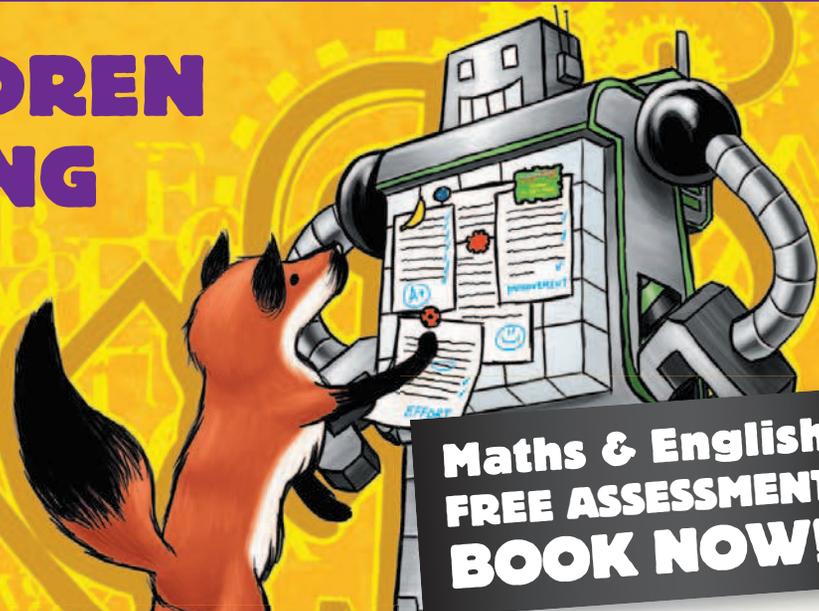
"Most of the time, 30 to 40 per cent of teachers [at revision workshops] have been given a text and a group of kids and they don't know the kids or the text," Sprinke says.

Whilst he believes that the atmosphere and environment of revision workshops can inspire students to do well, he insists that it is more important for students to receive individual attention and personalised help.

Similarly, Dhall says that the best private tutors are not necessarily teachers or students who have achieved the highest ATAR scores. Instead, an effective tutor will ask students how they can best help themselves and understand which particular set of skills a student needs.

"When students engage in the right kind of tutoring, they can have a sense of security that all is not lost and they can build self confidence around the things they know." ○

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TEEN FICTION WINNING BATTLE OF THE BOOKS

It's hip to be square in 2014, with sales in teen fiction novels enjoying their highest spike in 4 years

Steph Nash

2014 signals the return of the teenage bookworm! According to Australian book store franchise, Dymocks, sales in young-adult fiction are up 25 per cent from the last financial year – that's 45 per cent higher than the vampire-boom of 2010. This sudden rise in teen readership shows a prominent shift away from the Gothic-fantasy sub-genre, with the surge of popularity for author John Green (*Fault in our Stars*, *Looking for Alaska*) indicating a strong teen infatuation with contemporary realism.

Dymocks' children's category manager, Ruth Ellis, says that our teens are embracing well-written, true-to-life stories, showing elements of

increased reader sophistication.

"There is a lot of buzz at the moment about contemporary teen fiction," Ellis says. "No vampires. It's about real teenagers in real life."

John Green's novels are by far the most popular teen fiction books this season, with Dymocks reporting to have sold close to 10,000 copies of *Fault in Our Stars* in June. This novel tells the story of two teenage cancer victims who fall in love after meeting at a support group. Inspired by Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, Green's book is rife with literary allusions – the two lovers bond together over a mutual interest in analysing literature.



Dr Robyn McCallum, English lecturer at Macquarie University, says that many teenagers appeal to complex literary concepts, hoping to challenge their perspective and engage higher order skills.

"A generalised construction of teenagers is that they embrace causes, hence they might be interested in these kinds of books," says McCallum. "They are beginning to think on higher conceptual levels, and hence are interested in contemplating hypothetical situations."

As the children's category manager for Dymocks, Ellis is in charge of selecting teen fiction books for Australian shelves. She says above all,

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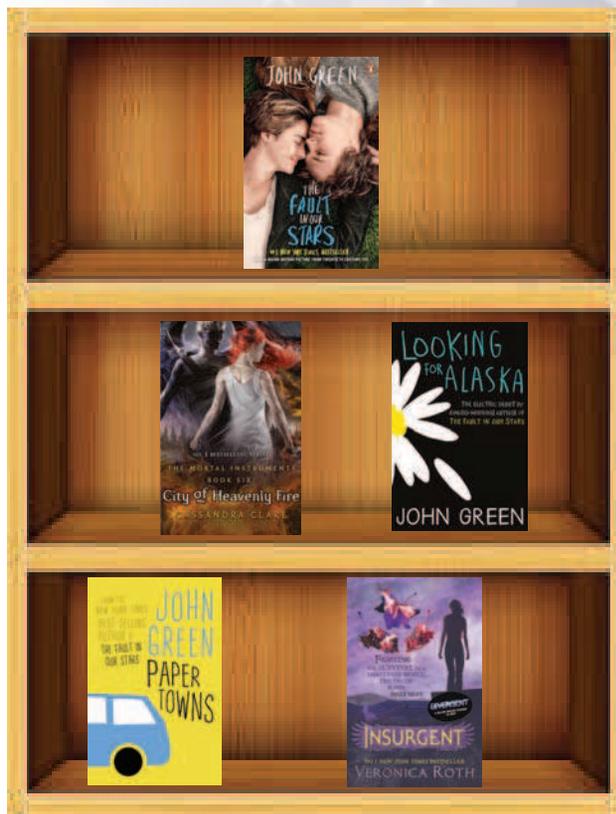
TOP 5 TEEN-FICTION NOVELS JULY 2014

teenagers appreciate a skilled writer, suggesting that the most popular titles this season involve complex ideas and gifted writing.

“The skill of the writer is the main thing that informs my choice,” she says. “Authors that are skilled in what they do, like John Green, are selling because teens appreciate an incredibly good story-teller. Teens like to read something they can relate to, that is a bit escapist. This is probably why Green’s *Fault in our Stars* is doing so well.”

Green’s fellow best-sellers for June include sci-fi series writers Cassandra Clare (*Mortal Instruments series*) and Veronica Roth (*Divergent series*). The sustained popularity of these novels indicate that although contemporary realism may be taking off this season, fantasy and dystopic fiction will always be a category favourite for Australian teens. Dr McCallum says that political themes engage young readers by making them feel part of the community, with environmental issues popular amongst successful novels.

“If young people are going to pick up a book, as opposed to an iPod, books need to somehow have more appeal,” she says. “Young readers need to be encouraged to be politically engaged, if they aren’t already.”



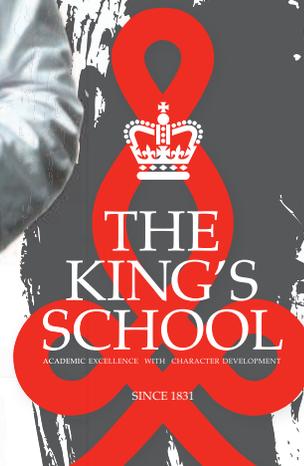
1. *Fault in our Stars* – John Green
2. *City of Heavenly Fire* (Book 6, *Mortal Instruments series*) – Cassandra Clare
3. *Looking for Alaska* – John Green
4. *Paper Towns* – John Green
5. *Insurgent* (Book 2, *Divergent series*) – Veronica Roth

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NEW APPRENTICES: PREMIER CALLS ON TRADIES FOR INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS

The NSW Premier has called for the employment of 1000 new apprentices – but is this enough to save our TAFE students from further budget cuts?

Steph Nash

EARLY LAST MONTH, NSW Premier Mike Baird announced the future employment of at least 1000 trades people and apprentices for the fulfillment of the government's 2014 infrastructure initiatives.

"The NSW government is transforming NSW through the delivery of a massive infrastructure program right across the state," Baird said. "Working on our infrastructure projects will give young apprentices an opportunity to learn key new skills, and will leave the state with a lasting legacy of a highly skilled workforce who received on-the-job training."

Revamped in the 2014 budget, the national Infrastructure Plan will cost NSW \$14.9 billion dollars. Major works include the North Connex tunnel linking the M1 at Wahroonga with the M2 at Pennant Hills Rd, the Western Sydney Infrastructure Plan, the Roads to Recovery Program and the Pacific Highway upgrade. The construction periods for most programs are predicted to extend beyond 2017, which is a promising career-start for new tradies.

This opportunity follows the government's recent education cuts, which has resulted in TAFE fees soaring. Labor minister for TAFE,

Sharon Bird, says that Australian vocational students aren't receiving a fair go by the federal government. The 2014 federal budget incurred \$2 billion worth of cuts to skills and training courses, leaving Minister Bird fuming.

"Since the election of conservative governments in New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland, and now federally, we are seeing conditions for TAFE [being] decimated," she said. "The federal Liberal government is insisting that young people need to 'earn or learn', yet they are ripping away all the programs to support our young people into apprenticeships, into employment and into education."

Most notably removed from the 2014 budget was the Australian Apprenticeships Access Program, which was designed to provide students with training and employment opportunities. Bird admits that although TAFE students are suffering huge blows on the account of the Liberal government, Premier Baird's announcement of apprenticeship opportunities could not be more welcomed.

"This is a positive step by the NSW Liberal government," Bird said. "[It] reinforces the need for the NSW government to commit to

funding TAFE properly, and ensures that TAFE is a well-funded, strong public provider so that apprentices can complete their apprenticeships and embark on their career path with a strong skills base."

Although significant cuts have been made to vocational education across the country, Premier Baird maintains that the state government will support our apprentices through an intricate set of new arrangements. He says that the process will involve the cooperation of public and private stakeholders, reflecting the federal government's key initiative of increased privatisation for Australian industry.

"Under the NSW government's procurement process for major infrastructure projects, we will set minimum requirements for apprenticeships on a project-by-project basis and ensure bidders spell out how they will leave a lasting skills dividend for local communities," he said. "The NSW Government will work with infrastructure contractors, registered training organisations and other stakeholders to facilitate the employment and training of apprentices." ○



PRINCIPAL'S VOICE

Stephaine McConnell

“We are currently preparing students for jobs that do not yet exist, using technologies that haven't been invented, in order to solve problems that we don't even know are problems yet.” - Karl Fisch

LET'S JUST THINK about that for a moment.... To be honest, as a principal, the implications of this quote keep me awake at night.

It is not only important that we change what teaching and learning looks like, it is absolutely imperative that we completely blow the 19th century model out of the water!

There are many challenges involved in achieving this goal. Not least, is changing the thinking of parents, students and dare I say it... teachers. Well yes, changing teachers' thinking is logical, but it is only part of the solution. The first teacher in a child's life is their parent and the experience of learning that the parent has had influences the learning expectations that they have for their child.

The second teacher is a child's school teacher but, importantly, the third teacher is the learning environment. More often than not, the physical environments in our schools creates learning experiences that promote teacher-centred learning. The spaces were designed for a world that was preparing students to become, what educational researcher Guy Claxton calls, '19th century clerks' as opposed to '21st century explorers'. We allow ourselves to be convinced that the one teacher, one class, one subject model works... because it always has...and because that's what we did at school, so, if it was good enough for us... it must be good enough for our kids!

Well, it's not. Instead, let's take on the challenge of creating learning environments – both physical and intellectual – that will prepare our children for the world that they will be inheriting.

One of the most powerful imperatives of Claxton's research is the idea that we need to

be developing 'attitudes' in our students rather than 'skills'. Skills are learned abilities that we engage randomly at a point of need, but attitudes are a mindset that shape our thinking and responses in every situation.

Consider the following life and workplace requirements of each century:

19th Century Clerk	21st Century Explorer
Being right	Being adventurous
Copying down	Creating ideas
Listening to teachers	Discussing with peers
Accepting what you're told	Questioning things
Working alone	Working with others
Sitting still	Being active
Remembering facts	Imagining possible solutions
Showing deference	Showing initiative
Following instructions	Taking responsibility
Being evaluated	Self-evaluating

(Claxton 2012)

In light of this, let me challenge some 'traditional' pillars of 19th century teaching and learning.

HOMEWORK

What is the point? There may be one. But it is worth asking whether your child's homework is about remembering facts and rote learning, or is it about developing their passion and seeking depth and quality in their learning?

EXAMS

This is one measure of success. Some students do well in exams, others don't. There are multiple ways of measuring a student's ability and there are multiple ways that students can demonstrate their learning. We need to consider the difference between measuring ability and measuring achievement.

ROTE LEARNING

There may be an argument for this style of systematic learning in subjects that require an incremental development...such as mathematics or numeracy, but technology allows students to find an answer at the point of need. As a result, in the mind of a student, there is no need to memorise huge slabs of information.

TEACHER-CENTRED LEARNING

The 'sage on the stage' needs to become the 'guide on the side'. This is not to say that the expertise of the teacher is no longer needed, in fact, the opposite is true, but collaborative, student-directed learning is the best way to prepare our students for the world of their future.

We need to work together to create a model of education which enables our students to communicate and collaborate, to think critically and creatively. We need to support the learning of our children as we prepare them for an exciting but challenging future.

Stephanie McConnell is the principal of Turramurra High School. She is passionate about creating future focused and innovative learning experiences for students of today.



Winter in the Blue Mountains

Uncovering the artisan gems of the region

Getting off the beaten
track in the wild blue

Artists' paradise:
Profiling the Blue Mountains'
most talented artists



Back in the Blue Mountains

Tess Gibney

THE DRAMATIC NATURAL aesthetic of the sprawling Blue Mountains region has long attracted a talented collective of creatives: from writers and artists to film makers and musicians. It is undoubtedly a secluded cultural hub; surrounded by sprawling sandstone beauty and sheltered from the frenetic pace of the bustling Sydney CBD. This issue, *Sydney Observer* is excited to announce the return of the annual Blue Mountains feature; with a special focus on talented emerging artists of the region. Including profiles of local painters, sculptors and musicians, we've also compiled a comprehensive guide to getting off the beaten (tourist) track in the Blue Mountains. We've included everything from leisurely drives to adventure sports, so read on to explore with us the hidden gems of this unique Australian environment.



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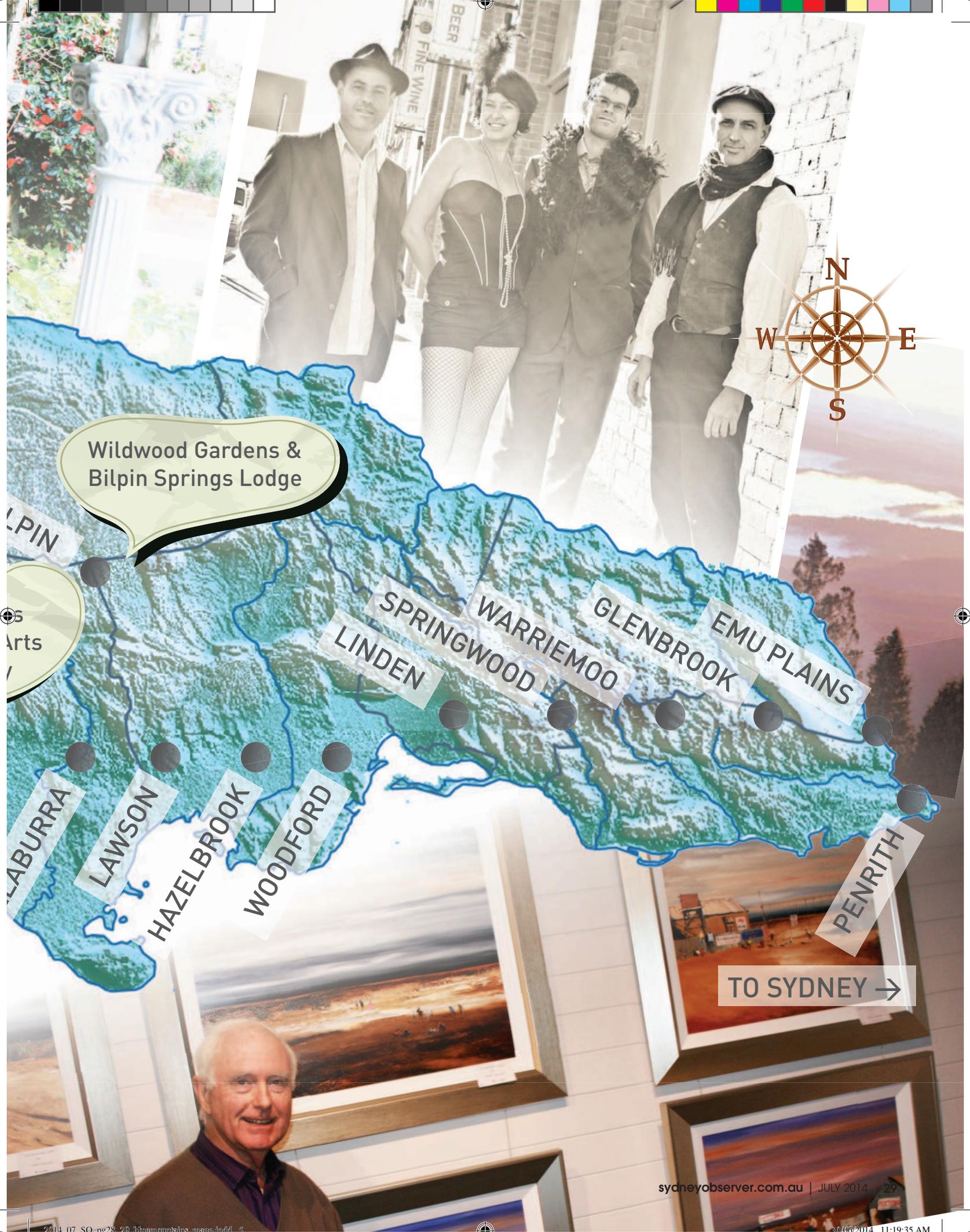
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WINTER IN THE BLUE MOUNTAINS

Quidditas Creative Arts Gallery

LOCATED IN THE SUBURB of Leura; one of the Blue Mountains' most spectacular small towns, the recently opened Quidditas Creative Arts Gallery is a source of eclectic art from some of the most culturally diverse regions in the world.

Showcasing a divergent range of textiles, jewelry, art and craft, the ethos of this vibrant haven is perhaps best revealed in the name of the gallery: 'quidditas' being the Latin word for 'quiddity', meaning the essence of an object – or literally, what makes an object what it is. Certainly, the objects of this space invite the consumer to consider them beyond their physicality – as items from far and wide; their aesthetic pleasure is matched only by the richness of the cultural histories they relay.

Open Thursday through to Monday from 10am to 5pm, the gallery is now showcasing two concurrent exhibitions. For fans of the 'Arts and Crafts Movement', Quidditas' 'Arts and Crafts Movement – Then and Now' exhibition is a delightful insight into the beauty of a design movement that flourished between 1860 and 1910. Characterised by a return to traditional styles of craftsmanship – including

the application of romantic and folk styles of decoration – the 'Arts and Crafts Movement' delivered a powerful anti-industrial message. The Quidditas exhibition does not disappoint, featuring a collection of wonderful Arts and Crafts pieces – including a restored artifact from the Abbey in Annandale.

Hanging alongside the 'Arts and Crafts Movement – Then and Now' exhibition is the captivating work of well-known Australian artist Colin Parker. Revered for his engaging renditions of Australiana, Parker's most recent collection is titled 'Nostalgic Australia'; and is compiled of images that represent the quintessence of the artist's favourite outback towns. Visualise classic scenes of children playing cricket in the dust and the central Australian desert and you won't be far from the heart of Parker's art – it is a homely representation of all that it means to exist in country Australia.

If you're heading to Leura, the Quidditas Creative Arts Gallery is not one to be missed. Visit it at 88 Railway Parade, Leura, NSW, 2870.

CURRENT SELLING EXHIBITIONS

The Arts and Crafts Movement 1860-1910

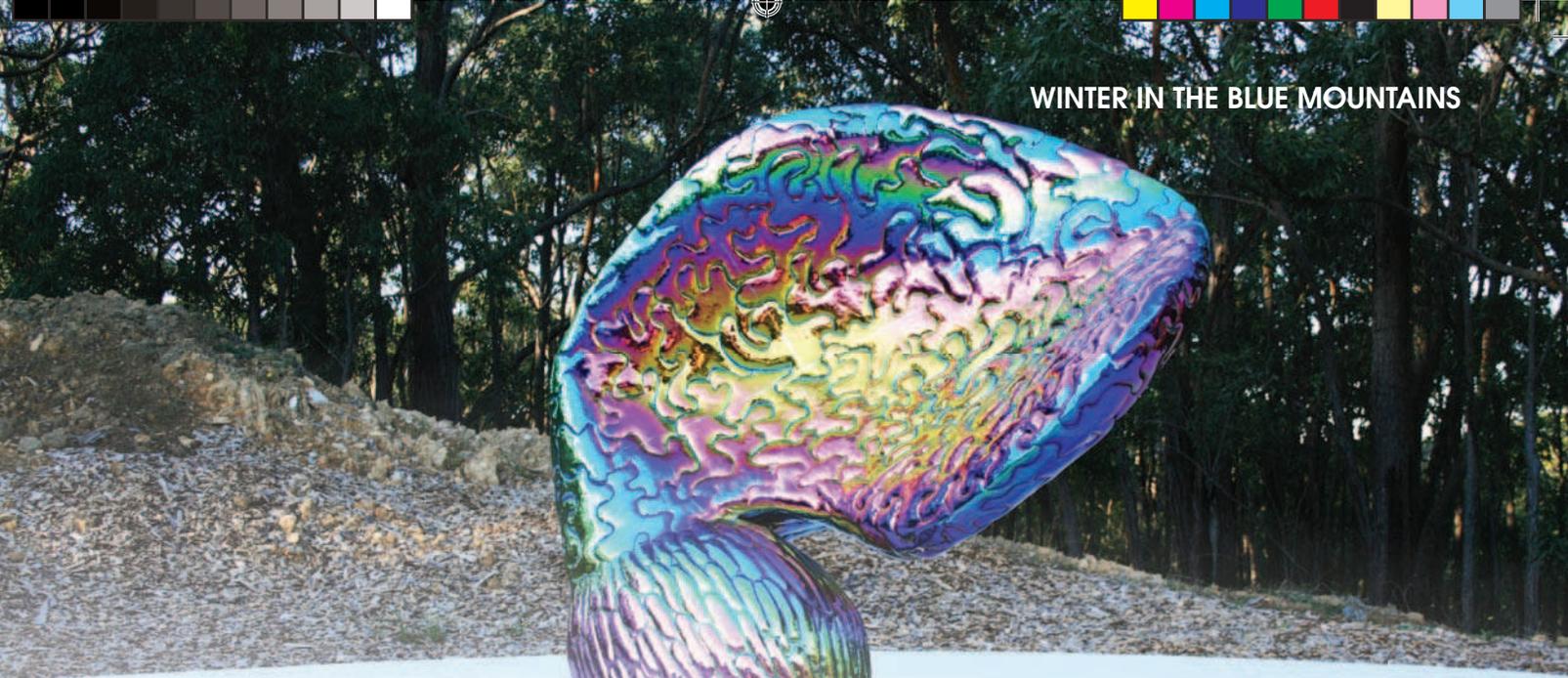
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Colin Parker Art Nostalgic Australia

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Bilpin's own artist paradise

Creativity abounds at the BigCi thanks to an inspired artist and her bushland surrounds

Tiffany Turtabudi

DEEP IN THE HEART of the Bilpin bush land stands a shed unlike any other. Six metres tall, fitted with 41 solar panels and constructed primarily out of recycled materials, its purpose is to foster and exhibit the creativity of the residents of the BigCi, an independent, not-for-profit artist residency program established by internationally recognised sculptor, Rae Bolotin.

"The Art Shed was unveiled two weeks ago and the opening was tremendous," Bolotin says. "We had a huge gathering of about 90 people and it was a very vibrant occasion. So now we have this extraordinary facility and hopefully artists will be inspired to do something that maybe they can't do anywhere else."

Passionate about nurturing the individual development of both Australian and international artists, Bolotin, along with her husband Yuri, founded the BigCi in 2011 after the couple relocated from Sydney's Lane Cove to the Blue Mountains over seven years ago.

"I used to have my studio in Sydney, but at the time it was really just a glamorous garage," she says, "and when my sculptures started to become bigger and bigger, I needed a new space and that's what prompted me to move to Bilpin where we are now based."

Since then, Bolotin has transformed her

personal studio into an eight-acre wide oasis that not only includes a two-story high exhibition area, but also unique work and living spaces that are set against breathtaking views of the Wollemi National Park. Bolotin says that each facility has been built with the intention of providing artists from around the world with the opportunity to focus on their professional development, improve their skills and expand their body of work.

"The most important part is that artists can use their time in BigCi to push their career forward - it's for serious artists who focus on their creative practice and who wouldn't otherwise have the opportunity, time, place or facilities to do work which takes them to another level," she says. "Here we see artists progressing in whatever projects they are working on, so we are very focused on facilitating their projects and supporting their initiative."

Having been a professional sculptor for several years, Bolotin says that she had participated in many artist residency programs in the past and was therefore very aware of the kind of environment that would naturally stimulate artistic practice and innovation. She says that the concept of the BigCi was birthed out of her

own experiences and that the "extraordinary" landscape of the mountains made Bilpin an ideal location for the artist residency program that she envisioned.

"It was the environment that was the main attraction at first," Bolotin says. "Of course, later on, we discovered the cultural life in the Blue Mountains, which is a huge bonus, but originally, the idea came from a desire to be in an inspirational place."

Sydney based artist and ex-resident of the BigCi, Keith Chidzey, says that his experience whilst on the grounds was "simply brilliant" and reinvigorated his enthusiasm to create.

"The opportunity to just remove oneself from the day-to-day responsibilities, and immerse and concentrate fully on one's creative work should never be underestimated."

This is a concept that Bolotin has always understood. She says that above all, the BigCi is a place that is committed to encouraging true artistic pursuit.

"For me personally, it's exciting that we're helping such a wide range of artists and that we are just seeing the extraordinary magical transformation for every artist that comes here - it's heartwarming and inspiring." ○

WINTER IN THE BLUE MOUNTAINS



Ian Swift - Art in the Mountains

Tiffany Turtabudi

IAN SWIFT'S HANDS were made for sculpting. Even at the tender age of seven, the Blue Mountains-based artist had a curiosity for recycled materials and discarded items that he could transform into something more interesting.

"As a young kid I used to collect stuff off the clean ups and build bicycles," Swift says. "So I've been doing construction with found objects for most of my life."

Despite his early fascination with artistic production, Swift did not seriously pursue his interest in sculpting until his mid-thirties.

"Eventually it got to a point where every time I met someone who said so-and-so is an artist, I'd

have this funny feeling in my belly telling me that that's what I should be."

When he finally began attending classes at a local art school in the early 90s, Swift felt like he had come home. He says that moving from a flat in Bondi to a cosy cottage in Katoomba in 1997 was a similar experience, as he quickly discovered a community of artists who were not only welcoming, but also extremely supportive of one another.

"The first thing I noticed when moving up here was that everyone was either a writer or a painter, and so it was wonderful finding all these like minds."

Since then, Swift's passion for reconstructing

ordinary objects into insightful sculptures has lead him to produce 17 solo exhibitions; with his latest work, *Modern Tribal*, being showcased in Katoomba's Lost Bear Gallery from July 12 to 29.

The exhibition features a series of masks assembled from scrap materials that explore the prevalence of body art, binge drinking and risk taking behavior in young people.

"I find it ironic that adolescents mark themselves for difference and individualism, and yet they all come out looking the same," he says. "But it doesn't matter, the bottom line is that I thought I could make some interesting 3D objects that are fun and artistic and reflect on today's youth culture."

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Belle Jar: Music in the Mountains

Tiffany Turtabudi

DRESSED IN VIBRANT burlesque outfits, circus gear and Parisian stripes, Belle Jar is definitely not your average folk, blues or swing band.

A unique and energetic blend of gypsy, pop and punk style music is a breath of fresh air within the Blue Mountains music scene, which has embraced all genres – from Afro funk to Jewish traditional music to hip hop.

“We’re not easily pigeonholed,” Amy Edwards, female vocalist and the band’s accordion player, says. “Lots of people tell us that they haven’t heard anything like us before and we love that!”

Edwards says that it was a similarity in musical style – and desire to have fun when performing – that initially drew the group’s members together back in 2011.

“I remember hearing Julien (Castegnaro) play and thinking to myself, that’s exactly the kind of music I want to be a part of,” she says.

Since then, the band has gained attention

and praise for its originality and distinct sound by entertaining, and dancing with, audiences at various local events, such as Katoomba’s Winter Magic Festival.

Of the Mountains’ musical community, front man of Belle Jar, Julien Castegnaro, says that in recent years many bands are “cementing and spreading their wings”, while still keeping a firm foothold in the Blue mountains.

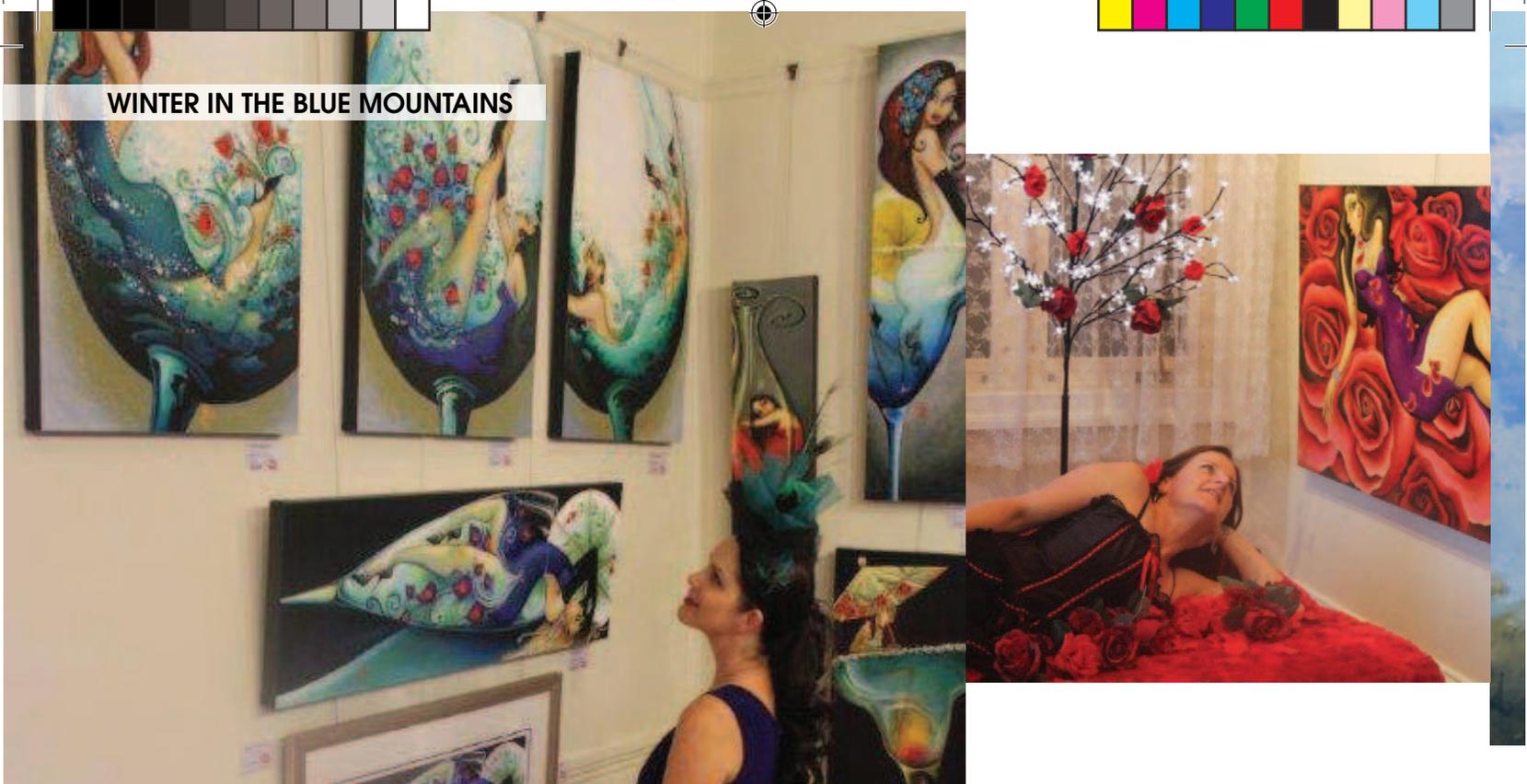
“The Blue Mountains scene is quite vibrant these days ... bands get together to organise gigs and venues are putting more time into taking care of the bands too,” Castegnaro says.

After taking centre stage at the Peak Festival in Perisher, Castegnaro says that Belle Jar will be returning to the studio to record its second full-length album in Hartley, which they hope to launch later on in the year.

More information is on the band’s website at www.bellejar.com.au.



WINTER IN THE BLUE MOUNTAINS



Living Art at the Loviz Art Gallery

Get amongst it all at Tanya Loviz's art gallery in Faulconbrige, offering a hands-on experience for all adventurous art lovers

Tiffany Turtabudi

IN ONE CORNER of the Loviz Arts Gallery hangs an ornate chandelier shaped swing, dripping in crystals and suspended just a metre above the ground. In another corner stands a tall wine glass, similarly decorated in glitter and gold. Both props are just large enough to seat an adult woman, which is precisely the idea.

Artist and owner of the gallery, Tanya Loviz, calls it "living the art".

"We believe that art is something to view, but also something to experience," Loviz says. "I want the people who purchase my art to attach amazing experiences to the painting that hangs on their wall."

Gallery-goers are provided the opportunity to "look like artwork", by dressing up in an outfit and positioning themselves on various life sized props, according to a particular painting. By providing the interaction between artwork and admirer, Loviz says viewers are able to fully appreciate and be "filled up" with the playfulness and cheek she hopes to convey through her painting.

"I'd say it's a bit special, it's definitely not like your typical gallery with boring white walls."

An artist with a difference, Loviz has been creating bold and mischievous paintings for more than 25 years, primarily depicting "real cheeky girls, in unreal life situations". A few notable examples include 'Her Wild Roses Grow', whereby a voluptuous brunette is sprawled across a bed of crimson roses, and 'Let Her Will Fly', which pictures a seductive blonde dressed in a cascade of turquoise peacock feathers.

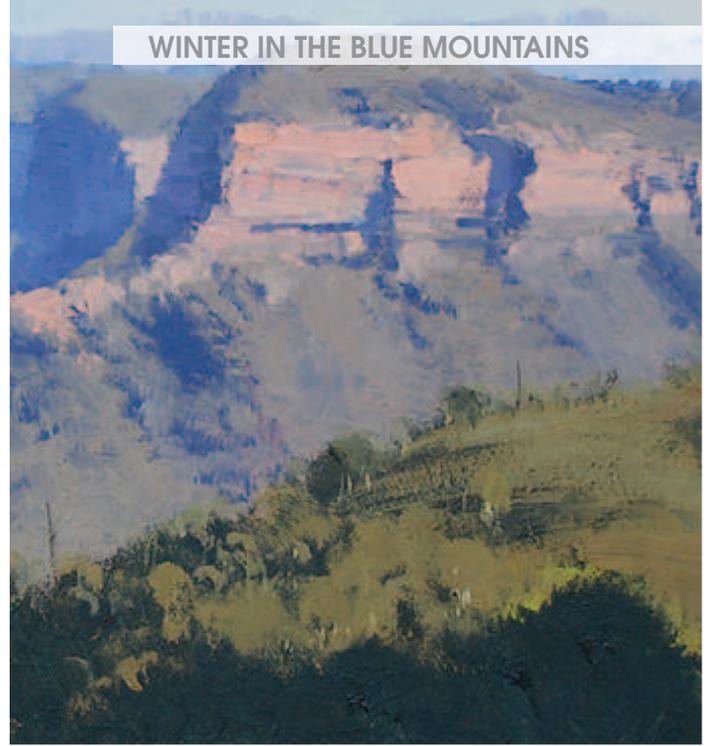
Although each painting is imaginative and unique in its own right, each of Loviz's pieces are united by their glamour and vivacity, as well as her signature, which is, befittingly, her kiss.

Since 2013, Loviz has also been busy at work as the official artist of the Blue Mountains Crossings Bicentenary, creating 50 distinct artworks to reflect the celebrations. She says as well as being the literal inspiration for her paintings, the Blue Mountains environment constantly nurtures her creativity.

"I absolutely adore the Mountains! I'd say what they give to a lot of artists is that feeling of really being supported; I call it 'mother energy'," she says. "I just always feel hugged and supported living in the mountains."

"The Blue Mountains gives a lot of artists is that feeling of really being supported; I call it 'mother energy'."

Tanya Loviz



Artist Profile: John Wilson

The hills are alive for internationally acclaimed artist, John Wilson, who claims his muse always has, and always will be, the beautiful Blue Mountains

Tiffany Turtabudi

ILLUSTRATING THE SERENITY and grandeur of a 200 million-year-old mountain or a towering blue gum is not an easy task. Multi-award winning artist, John Wilson, however, has been able to capture the majesty of Australia's Blue Mountains through his oil painting for the past 35 years.

Having grown up in the New South Wales Blue Mountains region, John says he was instilled with an appreciation for the rugged countryside from a very young age – despite choosing to first pursue a career in music before devoting himself to visual art.

“My first career was as a professional musician, but when I was doing music full time, I started painting every morning,” Wilson says. “I guess it was another form of artistic expression that came naturally to me.”

By his mid-twenties, John transformed his fascination for artists and painting into a full time job, presenting his first exhibition in 1979. Since

then, he has held 41 solo shows and participated in countless shared exhibitions, which have garnered him international recognition in the

“There’s really nothing like sitting amongst the cliffs and being a part of the landscape.”

John Wilson

UK, Japan, the United States and Canada. John has even accumulated admirers in Asia, producing a

sold out exhibition in China in 2007 and in South Korea in 2011.

Irrespective of his amassed success over the years, John’s muse has remained the same; he describes the elusive uniqueness of the Australian landscape as his ongoing source of inspiration.

“The mountains are just so beautiful and ever changing,” John reflects. “There’s really nothing like sitting amongst the cliffs and being a part of the landscape.”

Indeed, John’s art evokes not only a sense of deep admiration for the mountains, but also a true understanding of the “character, atmosphere and mood of each area” that he paints.

Eager to share his talent and knowledge to budding Australian artists, John has now also assumed the role of a tutor, hosting master class workshops across the country while completing his own exhibition, titled *The Journey Continues*.

Getting Off The Beaten Track in the Beautiful Blue Mountains

Tess Gibney

THE INCOMPARABLE BEAUTY of the Blue Mountains is no secret to tourists and Sydneysiders alike. The NSW World Heritage listed area has long been revered for its breathtaking panorama of blue; and has since become a thriving enclave for creative types wishing to escape the more claustrophobic atmosphere of the inner-city. It's no surprise that come the winter months, many Sydney locals pack up and head west to soak in the sights and indulge in quality home-grown food and wine.

Though Leura, known for its "olde wordy"

charm, and Katoomba, home of the world-famous Three Sisters, are stock standard visitor favourites, there's more to this natural wonderland than meets the eye. Such a diverse and distinct environment lends itself harmoniously to a range of exciting ventures; from visiting art studios to experimenting with outdoor adventure sports. *Sydney Observer* has banded together to provide you with some tips to get you off the tourist trail, and on your way to uncovering some of the more artisan gems of the region.



Make your way along the Bells Line of Road

RUNNING FROM NORTH Richmond in the north western outskirts of Sydney to Bell in the Blue Mountains, Bells Line of Road is notorious for its steep and winding ascent. Providing stunning visuals, the road is home to Bilpin's famous fruit orchards. Though typically a summer activity, the orchards are open to visit – and pick from – in periods throughout the year for a small fee. Regardless of the season, the drive through Sydney's apple country is still worthwhile as nestled on either side of the road are orchards stretching as far as the eye can see. If you prefer your apples alcoholic, head to Bilpin's own Apple Bar, a bar-style restaurant situated in leafy surrounds that serves local apple ciders – the "Bilpin" and "Hillbilly".

If you're heading to the Blue Mountains on the weekend, don't miss the Bilpin Markets. Held at the Community Hall on Bells Line of Road, the markets run from 10am to noon every Saturday, and display some of the finest produce the Bilpin region has to offer.

Bells Line of Road isn't all about apples. In fact, just 40 kilometres along the road from Richmond lie the captivating Blue Mountains Botanic Garden at Mount Tomah. Australia's premier cool-climate botanic garden, the garden at Mount Tomah covers 28 hectares on the

summit of a basalt-capped peak, 1000 metres above sea level. Open every day from 9:30am to 5:30pm, entry to the Botanic Garden is free of charge. Boasting colourful garden displays from all over the world, winter is the best time to get lost in the misty beauty of this mountain paradise – there's even a Winter Wonderland self-guided adventure trail to keep any youngsters occupied. For the garden lovers amongst us, Wildwood Garden – situated in the heart of Bilpin – is further grounds to explore the wonder of the Bilpin region along Bells Line of Road. Owned by plant enthusiasts Wayne and Sue Tapping, Wildwood Garden is spread over 25 acres and features a collection of diverse flora – from cool climate perennials and shrubs to vibrant magnolias and hydrangeas. Though it is closed through the middle of winter from June 9, Wildwood reopens at the end of August for late winter and early spring – just in time for the magnificent blooming of camellias and spring blossoms!

Blue Mountains Botanic Garden at Mount Tomah: Bells Line of Road, Mt Tomah NSW 2758, ph: (02) 4567 3000
Wildwood Garden: 29 Powell Road, Bilpin NSW 2758, ph: (02) 4567 2194



Adventure time in the wild Blue Mountains

KEEN FOR SOMETHING more adrenalin inducing than a slow meander down country roads? The unique environment of the Blue Mountains is a natural facilitator of adventure sports such as horse riding and extreme segwaying. If you're interested in something more fast-paced to act as an aside to the serenity of eating, drinking, sight-seeing and gallery-going, look no further.

Megalong Valley is a sprawling expanse of green, snuggled at the bottom of the rocky precipices the Blue Mountains are so famous for. Accessible via car from the Great Western Highway, the drive down to the valley alone is unforgettably transfixing. 'Megalong' literally means 'valley below the cliffs' in the Aboriginal dialect and the descending road winds through a lush rainforest glen sporting a canopy of tree ferns, caves and towering gum trees. Primarily the precinct of local farmers, the valley has recently become popular with tourists looking for an authentic bush experience. Horse riding is a favourite way to explore the expansive valley; with trails taking you

along rocky ridges and gullies. Transported to a time where men and women used horses as their main mode of transport, this is an ideal way to take in the breathtaking sights of the majestic Megalong Valley. Horse riding packages can be booked through the Megalong Valley Heritage Centre and the Megalong Valley Farm.

Horse riding not extreme enough for you? Segwaying through the Blue Mountains' dense forest and bushland should do the trick. The latest transport craze, segwaying is certainly an alternative way to sight-see, and one that will most definitely get you off the beaten track. An ideal activity for families, Segway packages can be booked through Segway Blue Mountains; with tours including safety training and group trail riding.

Megalong Valley horse-riding: Megalong Valley Rd, Megalong NSW 2785, ph: (02) 4787 8818
Segway Blue Mountains: 1 Sublime Point Road, Leura NSW 2780, ph: 0418 229 539



What's On - Blue Mountains

Yulefest - Christmas in July

Throughout July

Various times

Experience this annual Blue Mountains tradition by booking one of the many Yulefest packages offered by Blue Mountains venues. Cosy up by a fire and enjoy some mulled wine with a traditional Christmas dinner. The kids may even get a visit from Santa!

Winter Wonderland

Daily throughout July and August

9.30am-5pm

\$5 per kit - includes craft materials

Explore the Blue Mountains Botanic Garden, Mount Tomah on the self-guided Winter Wonderland trail. Follow the map to discover the incredible plants and animals in the gardens. For children aged 5 - 12 years.

Contact: 4567 3000



Daffodil Festival - Cancer Council

16 to 24 August

9.30am-5.30pm (Free)

Support the Cancer Council during the Daffodil Festival at the Blue Mountains Botanic Garden, Mount Tomah, where you can enjoy a sea of golden daffodils in bloom. Cancer Council merchandise will be available for sale.

Contact: 4567 3000



Springwood Art Show

29 to 31 August

From 9.30am (except opening night)

\$2.50 concession, \$5 adult, \$10 family

Visit the region's premier art show at Springwood High School with over 400 works of art, crafts and jewellery for sale. Opening night (August 29) tickets are \$15 and include wine, supper and the announcement of art prizes, starting at 7pm.

Contact: 4751 2111

Leura Gardens Festival

4 to 12 October

9.30am-4.30pm

\$5 single garden ticket, \$25 all gardens, free for children under 16

This year marks the 50th Anniversary of the annual Leura Gardens Festival, where 11 stunning gardens will be opened to the public. The festival includes events like Music in the Gardens, plant sales and horticultural talks.

Contact: 0431 095 279

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HOW TO: KEEP YOUR POWER COSTS DOWN THIS WINTER

Stella Gray

JUST ABOUT EVERYONE in NSW is feeling the pinch of rising power costs, and for good reason. Since 2012, Australia has twice been singled out as the most expensive country to pay for electricity and gas in the world since 2007. However, as no one can avoid paying bills, making some wise investments is a sound idea. *Sydney Observer* has devised a few sure-fire ways to keep your home warm and power bills down this winter.

Remember the solutions that are most economical in the long-term do tend to cost more initially.

INSULATE YOUR HOME

Non-insulated ceilings, walls and floors can account for over 70 per cent of total heat loss from your home. Keep in mind that central heating bills are likely to be astronomical if you haven't insulated your home properly first.

- Installing doors between zones in your home helps seal off heated areas.
- Keep the thermostat between 18 and 21 degrees - every one-degree increase in temperature could increase your energy bill by up to 10 per cent.
- Keep out draughts with draught excluder - air leaks can account for 15 to 25 per cent of heat loss.

Natural gas heaters, slow combustion wood heaters and high efficiency star-rated air conditioners are the most economical to use. Look for gas heaters with ratings of five to six stars and reverse-cycle air conditioners with three to six stars.

Accessories such as programmable timers (devices which automatically turn heaters on and off at pre-selected times) are also useful, especially with heating appliances and outdoor lights.

Take advantage of the free natural solar heat on clear winter days by opening up curtains on any north facing windows to the sunshine. On dark winter days, keep curtains closed. Thick curtains work well as insulators in winter.

Seal out draughts: look for obvious gaps around doors and windows where light is visible and listen for rattles and whistling.

HOT WATER

For solar systems, do jobs requiring hot water early in the day when possible, to allow the water remaining in the tank to be reheated by the sun.

- If your electric storage system is running on a peak tariff, switch it off whenever you can. These

systems can be far more expensive to run than off-peak electric or natural gas systems. (You can find your tariff type on your electricity bill or by contacting your electricity provider)

- If you're away from home for an extended period, turn your hot water system off, or make use of the 'vacation' setting if your system has one.

SHOP AROUND

Even if you have the best energy saving measures in place, it is always worth doing a price comparison of energy providers. If you are thinking of switching, be sure to ask the following questions:

- Do I get discounts for paying on time?
- Are there flexible payment options?
- Am I locked into my contract?
- Are there extra costs or exit fees?
- Is there a plan that suits the way I use energy?
- Are any price changes planned?
- Check with your current provider if you will incur a cancellation fee before switching.
- Be mindful of extended warranties. Often you're already covered by a manufacturer's warranty and may also be covered by the Federal Trade Practices Act. ○



GLADES BAY GARDENS OPEN DAY FOR YOUNG AT HEART

ON SATURDAY JUNE 21, residents and locals, young and old, enjoyed the perfect weather and came out in droves to inspect the new \$3M renovation of Glades Bay Gardens in Gladesville. Roy Maggio, Mayor of Ryde, said: "I'm incredibly impressed by the standard of the renovation and the investment in aged care for the community of Gladesville. This is much needed and I am delighted to support Twilight Aged Care in their vision for excellence in ageing in place". Twilight Aged Care CEO John Stuart expects the project at Glades Bay Gardens to be complete by September this year with the final phase of renovations and landscaping.



Residents of Glades Bay Gardens enjoying the Open Day



John Stuart CEO of Twilight Aged Care, Roy Maggio, Mayor of Ryde, Mr John Laurie Chairman of Twilight Aged Care and Mrs Mary Laurie

For further information call: 02 9414 4400



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MANAGING TAX CHANGES AT TAX TIME

Peter Vickers

EACH TAX TIME brings changes and this year is no different. It's important to be aware of the changes, what they mean to you, how they will affect your net income for the year and to look at ways to ensure you can minimise the tax you need to pay. This year's changes will affect most of us in some way.

Private Health Insurance rebate changes: from 1 April all rebate percentages will be adjusted annually, taking into account the average increase in premiums and the consumer price index. You need to provide your private health insurance statement to your accountant.

Net medical expense tax offset is being phased out: to be eligible individuals need to have received the offset in their 2012-13 income tax assessment in order to be able to claim for this year. 2013/2014 is the final year the offset can be claimed. As is often the way, there are exceptions to the rule – it doesn't apply to disability aids, attendant care and aged care which can be

claimed until June 2019.

The concessional contribution cap for superannuation increases: will change to \$30,000 from 1 July 2014 and \$35,000 if you are over 49 as of 30 June 2014. The non concessional cap goes to \$180,000 and the bring forward cap is \$540,000.

New CGT discounts: if you have a Capital Gains Tax event after 8 May 2012, and have had any periods of foreign or temporary residence since that date, your eligibility and discount rate may be affected.

This year the ATO is not targeting certain occupations but will be focusing its attention on work related expenses across all occupations. Under the spotlight will be overnight travel, transportation of large tools and equipment and the work use of electronic devices such as laptops, computers and mobile phones.

And of course the Debt Repair Levy is an additional 2 per cent tax on incomes above \$180,000 for the next four years, placing

Australia's top income tax rate at 49 per cent (including medicare levy which is now 2 per cent rather than the previous 1.5 per cent); amongst the highest in the world. This is an attempt by the government to reduce the budget deficit by \$3.2 billion.

Another sting for high income earners is Division 293 Tax, which applies to individuals when relevant income plus their concessional super contributions exceeds \$300,000. The tax is an extra 15 per cent on their concessional superannuation contribution and can be paid either by the individual or the super fund. Thus, the contribution is taxed at 30 per cent as opposed to 49 per cent, which is still a worthwhile tax saving.

For more information about these and other changes, contact your accountant.

Peter Vickers is a Chartered Accountant and Director of the Peter Vickers Business Group

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CANCER DIAGNOSIS JUST A BREATH AWAY

From alcohol analysis to medical diagnosis, the breathlyser may help save lives in more ways than one

Steph Nash

SPECIFIC COMPOUNDS FOUND in exhaled breath may help diagnose lung cancer in its early stages, according to a study released earlier this year. Professor Nir Peled from Tel Aviv University, Israel, and his team of researchers have developed a device that is both able to detect cancer cells in human breath, and discriminate between an early stage and late stage of the disease.

The device, which is currently being modified to support USB ports, is called the NaNose, and works by sniffing out cancerous clusters in samples of exhaled breath. Previous tests using the NaNose have been highly successful, promising a drop in false-positive diagnoses for patients if released in Australia.

"The NaNose was able to detect lung cancer with a very high accuracy, even when the lung nodule was tiny and hard to sample," Peled said. "It was even able to discriminate between sub-histologies of cancer, which was unexpected."

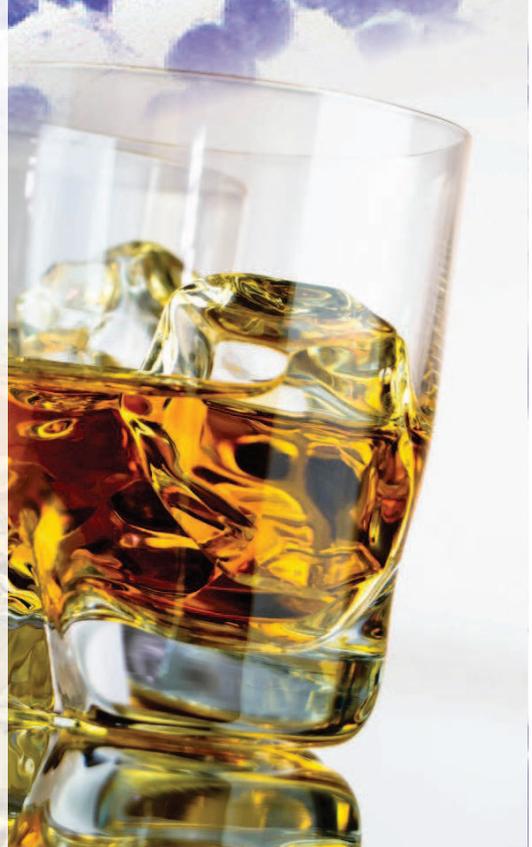
This method of non-invasive cancer detection was developed earlier in the year, with Dr Michael Bousamra from the University of Louisville, Orlando, reporting a 95 per cent success rate of identifying cancer.

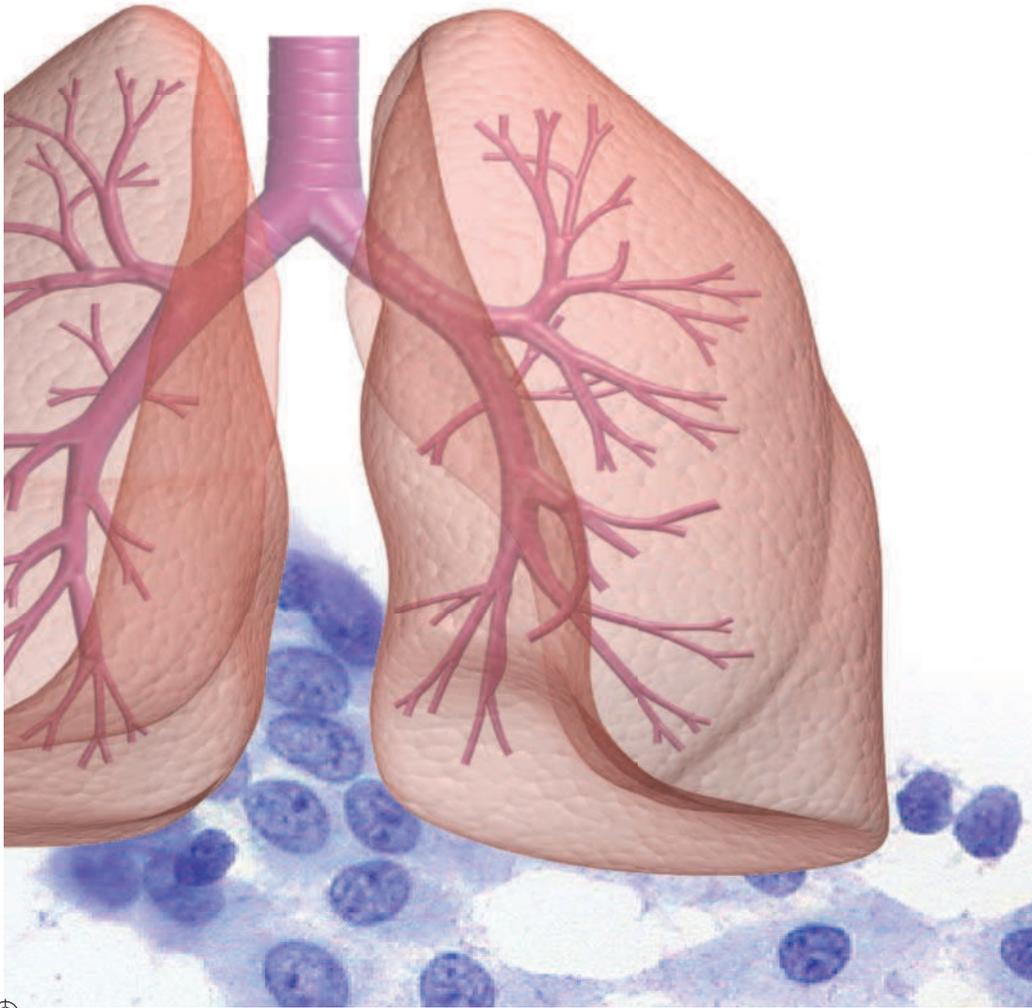
"The novelty of this approach includes the simplicity of sample collection and ease for the patient," Bousamra said. "Instead of sending patients in for invasive biopsy procedures when a suspicious lung mass is identified, our study suggests that exhaled breath could identify which patients may be directed for an immediate ... biopsy and resection."

Before now, biopsy procedures have been used to determine the malignancy of cancer clusters, which can be extremely painful for the patient and require days of healing time. The NaNose could mean less time and money for patients, with current advancements being made to possibly allow for self-diagnosis.

"This approach of non-invasive measures to detect cancer is very attractive and may contribute significantly to efforts to fight lung cancer, to detect lung cancer early enough, and reduce the mortality from this terrible disease," Peled said. "We still have a long way to go, however we are moving forward and hope to have such tools available in the clinic in the coming years."

Professor Kwun Fong from Lung Foundation Australia, says although this technology is not yet available in Australia, research is





currently underway to develop a similar cost-effective device.

“Our group and others are researching other platforms that may be able to detect the exhaled volatile organic compound (VOC) profile or “smell print” that characterises lung cancer,” Fong said. “These machines are most often either very powerful mass spectrometers, or use solid-state sensors – including electronic noses – that can detect chemicals in the breath.”

Professor Fong says that the most common method of detection in Australia is the CT scan, which although accurate, does not compare to the advantages of sensor technology.

“CTs are costly, need advanced scanners and deliver a relatively high amount of radiation,” he said. “High radiation doses are a risk factor for the development of cancer later in life, especially for younger people.”

The introduction of the NaNose in Australia could be revolutionary, allowing for instant cancer detection at general practices.

Lung Foundation Australia CEO, Heather Allan, urges that lung cancer doesn't discriminate, with more than 11,000 Australians diagnosed with the disease every year. ○



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LANDMARK STUDY REVEALS THE TREATMENT OF SILENT KILLER WILL CUT RISK OF STROKE AND DEATH

Tess Gibney

A **LANDMARK STUDY** published in the latest issue of *Thrombosis and Haemostasis* has revealed that the opportunistic detection of asymptomatic atrial fibrillation (AF) - and its subsequent treatment with anticoagulants - can greatly reduce the risk of stroke and premature heart disease.

Among the most common of abnormal heart rhythms, AF poses the risk of blood clots forming inside the heart. When clots break off they usually travel to the brain, causing severe strokes.

The study is the first of its kind to explicitly reveal the serious risk of stroke, heart attack and death associated with incidentally detected AF.

Accounting for 30 per cent of all strokes, AF is simultaneously common, serious and silent. It was found that in 20 to 45 per cent of all AF-related strokes, the heart arrhythmia had not been previously detected due its often asymptomatic nature.

According to the study, the treatment of asymptomatic AF with an oral anticoagulant drug (warfarin) almost completely reversed the increased risk of stroke, and partially reversed the increased risk of death.

The study's co-author, University of Sydney Cardiology Professor Ben Freedman, said the study was a breakthrough for the minimisation of stroke and resulting disability.

"This study indicates that widespread screening for asymptomatic atrial fibrillation could cost effectively reduce strokes and their associated disability, and help save lives."

In another study conducted by Freedman and colleagues, it was also found that AF could be detected easily with a simple, inexpensive ECG using a novel hand-held device attached to an iPhone. The iPhone-based ECG device can diagnose AF within 30 seconds.

"Given such easy ways to detect AF, and our demonstration of the poor outcomes that

can be substantially modified by treatment, our results would make a reasonable case to screen for this abnormal heart rhythm in the population, as well as in the clinic," Professor Freedman says.

Fast Facts on Atrial fibrillation, screening and treatment:

- Atrial fibrillation (AF) is responsible for one third of all strokes.
- 20 to 45 per cent of AF-related strokes aren't detected prior to stroke because AF is often asymptomatic (no apparent symptoms)
- AF-related strokes are more severe and cause greater disability than non-AF strokes.
- Widespread screening for asymptomatic AF among people aged 65 years and over would be a potent way to prevent strokes and the burden of stroke-related harm because AF-related strokes are largely preventable by treatment with oral anticoagulant drugs.

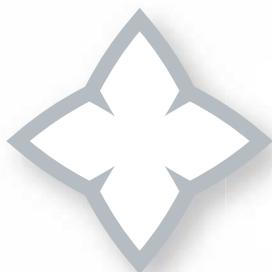
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DENTAL CARE AND CHEMOTHERAPY

Dr Ian Sweeney

THE NEED TO receive chemotherapy or radiotherapy usually comes as a shock to most people. It is therefore normal to focus on the treatment, possibly neglecting oral care. However, both treatments may affect your mouth in many different ways. Many patients report adverse effects ranging from an apparent loss of taste, dry mouth, mouth ulcers or mouth infections.

Oral ulceration is a side effect of many of the medications used, due to a thinning of the lining of the mouth. This may make eating, chewing and swallowing difficult and painful.

A weakened immune system during treatment may increase the risk of infections. The mouth is particularly at risk of oral infection, due to the large amount of bacteria present.

Radiotherapy will affect all cells, particularly those that replicate quickly. Skin cells, the cells that line the mouth, salivary glands and potentially blood vessels that supply bones may be affected.

Salivary glands affected by radiotherapy may show a reduction in the amount of saliva they produce. Saliva is important in maintaining a healthy mouth, reducing everything from dental decay to oral infections. The lack of saliva may therefore have detrimental effects on the teeth and gums.

The composition of saliva may also change. It may become thick and ropery. Thick ropery saliva makes swallowing difficult, which may in turn cause pain when swallowing.

If the mouth is directly affected by the radiation, the oral tissues may become swollen

and painful making denture wearing almost impossible. Ulceration may also occur making eating difficult and painful.

In severe cases, radiotherapy may affect the ability of bone to heal due to a reduced blood supply. Complications following tooth loss or extraction may be quite severe.

For these reasons, it is important that routine dental examination be performed prior to commencing radiotherapy of the head and neck region. You should consult with your dentist about strict cleaning guidelines and techniques, such as soft toothbrushes and antibacterial mouth rinses. It is vital to identify any teeth that may potentially cause problems, as it may be prudent to remove any badly broken down and decayed teeth prior to the start of treatment.



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FAST AND HEALTHY WINTER RECIPES

Comfort food goes hand in hand with the cold; but you shouldn't sacrifice health for flavour. *Sydney Observer* has compiled two warming and nutritious recipes to help you stay on track this winter

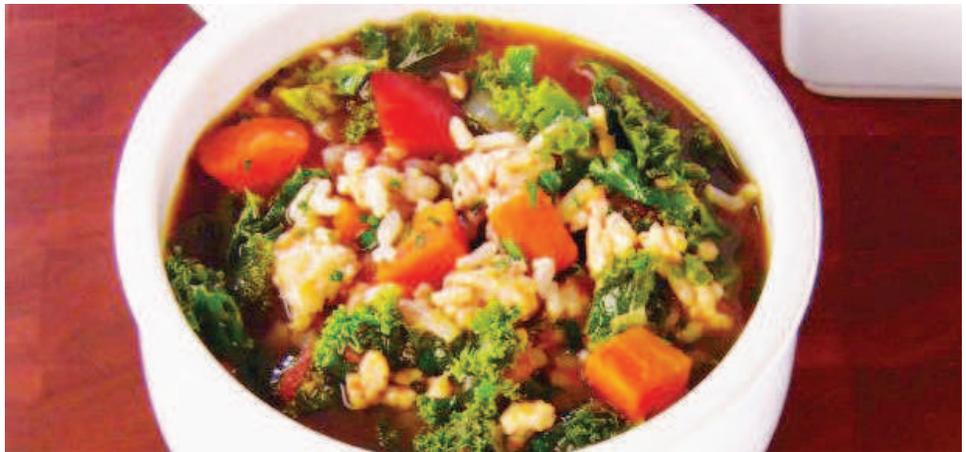
Charmaine Hui

WINTER HAS FINALLY arrived in Sydney, but as we pile on the layers we're also more likely to pile on the pounds.

During the colder months, our bodies naturally crave more food; and carbohydrate-rich food in particular. Our cravings for these comforting, high carb foods are driven by the temporary boost in hormones like serotonin and dopamine they provide – producing feelings of happiness and improving our mood.

Unfortunately, the foods we crave – generally pasta, bread and cake – tend to also contain high levels of sugar and fat. Such foods promote weight gain as they are digested quickly; causing spikes in blood sugar and insulin levels, and fuelling additional cravings for rich, dense foods.

As a result, it's important that we remain aware of the foods we eat and the amount of food we consume during winter.



TURKEY, KALE AND BROWN RICE SOUP

Soup is a good option as a starter as it's a great way to pack in the vegetables and will help to control your appetite when you get to the main course. Of course, it can also be served as a meal on its own. This recipe is the perfect healthy and hearty winter soup – it uses the 'superfood' kale as well as brown rice. Brown rice is a healthy wholegrain alternative to white rice or pasta, which will keep you fuller for longer and keep your blood sugar levels balanced.

(Makes 4 to 6 servings)

INGREDIENTS

- 2 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- 5-6 large shallots, chopped
- 3 medium carrots, chopped
- 1 large capsicum, chopped
- 250g turkey mince, broken into small chunks
- 1 tbsp Herbes de Provence
- 4 cups chicken stock, plus more as needed
- 1 x 400g can diced tomatoes, drained
- 1 cup cooked brown rice
- 1 bunch kale, roughly chopped (about 4 packed cups)

- 1 tsp salt
- ½ tsp black pepper
- ¼ cup chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
- ¼ cup freshly grated Parmesan (optional)

METHOD

1. Heat the oil in a large pot over medium-high heat. Add the shallots, carrots and capsicum and saute, stirring frequently for 8 to 10 minutes, until the vegetables begin to brown and soften slightly.
2. Add the turkey mince and stir for 5 to 7 minutes until the meat turns white and begins to colour very slightly around the edges. Add herbes de Provence and stir for 1 minute.
3. Add the 4 cups chicken stock, tomatoes and rice. Bring to a boil.
4. Stir in the kale and season with ¾ teaspoon salt and the freshly ground black pepper.
5. Reduce the heat to medium-low. Cover and simmer for about 15 minutes until the vegetables are tender. Season with the remaining ¼ teaspoon salt.
6. Ladle the soup into bowls. Sprinkle with parsley and parmesan, and serve.





APPLE CRUMBLE

Eating cold, fresh fruit can be the last thing you want to do in winter, so the perfect way to keep up your fruit intake is by making warm, stewed fruit desserts like this healthy apple crumble. With only three tablespoons of oil and rolled oats instead of flour for the crumble, it's a sweet treat you won't feel guilty about. (Makes 8 servings)

INGREDIENTS

Filling

- 6 medium sized apples (approx 1kg) cut into wedges with the skin left on
- 1 cup 100% apple juice
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- ¼ tsp ground cinnamon
- zest from ½ orange

Crumble topping

- 1 ½ cups rolled oats
- ½ cup desiccated or flaked coconut
- ½ tsp ground cinnamon
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- 3 tbsp organic maple syrup

- 3 tbsp macadamia nut oil or cold pressed coconut oil
- ½ cup walnuts or macadamia nuts (optional)

METHOD

1. Preheat oven to 160 C
2. Combine the apples with the apple juice, vanilla, cinnamon and orange zest in a large heavy based pot.
3. Cook over a medium-low heat for 20-30 minutes, stirring occasionally until the apples have completely softened and collapsed. Cover the pot for the first 10 minutes of cooking, then remove the lid for the last 10 minutes, if necessary, to help some of the excess moisture evaporate.
4. To make the crumble, combine rolled oats, coconut, cinnamon, vanilla, maple syrup, oil and walnuts into a food processor.
5. Process for a few seconds or until mixture is combined and crumbly.
6. Pile the apple mixture into a baking dish and scatter the crumble over the top.
7. Bake for 30 minutes or until the crumble is golden.



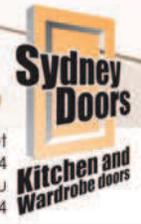
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WHAT'S ON: JULY

Design, Colour, Pattern

July 7 – July 11

11:00am to 4:00pm

The start of NAIDOC week brings indigenous artist Reko Rennie to the Art Gallery of NSW, who will help your kids create brightly coloured stencil designs to celebrate the annual event. This event is free, and is a great way to get your kids involved in celebrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture.

Where: Art Gallery of NSW, Art Gallery Rd, The Domain

Contact: artgallery.nsw.gov.au



Burlesque!

July 10

6:30pm to 11:30pm (G.A: \$23.80)

If you've never been to a burlesque show, now is the time to give it a try with Edgar's Girl by the Poe Burlesque Theatre group showing at the popular Newtown establishment, The Vanguard. The performance is inspired by the works of Romantic poet Edgar Allan Poe, promising a glitzy twist to his eccentric tales.

Where: The Vanguard, 42 King St, Newtown

Contact: thevanguard.com.au

shows/2014/07/10/edgars-girl/12246



Flash Mob

July 13

7:30am to 9:30am

Aptly called Big Dance Australia, the Sydney Theatre Company are bringing to life a professional flash mob at the Sydney Opera House. The Big Dance is a biennial event that started in London in 2006, which calls on dancers from around the world to meet up and celebrate the wonders of dance. This event is free, and allows onlookers to participate.

Where: Sydney Opera House, Benelong Point, Circular Quay

Contact: sydneydancecompany.com/events/bigdance/



Japanese Film Festival Encore

July 9 and July 13

See film timetable for dates and times

International film buffs will love the Japanese Film Festival Encore which will be held at Event Cinemas, George St this July. Eight Academy Award winning titles will be showing throughout the event, showcasing the best of Japanese cinema.

Where: Event Cinemas George Street, 505-525 George St, Sydney

Contact: japanesefilmfestival.net



Archibald, Wynne and Sulman Prize

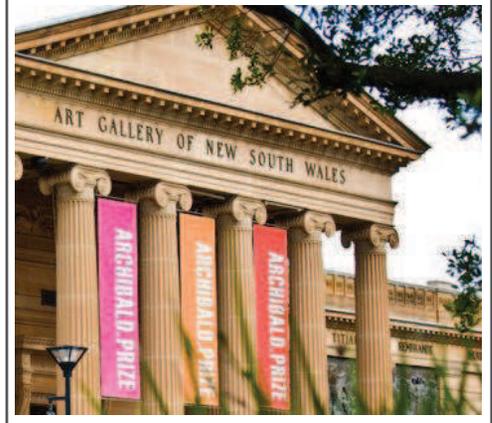
July 19 – September 28

10:00am to 5:00pm

It's that time of year again! The famous Archibald, Wynne and Sulman prizes are going to be announced for 2014, which will feature several exhibitions of the best artworks from around the country. Don't miss it, it's a must-see annual event. Adult admission: \$12

Where: Art Gallery of NSW, Art Gallery Rd, The Domain

Contact: artgallery.nsw.gov.au/exhibitions/archibald-wynne-sulman-prizes-2014/



Unveiling of the Big Matilda

July 9

9:00am to 5:00pm

You've heard of the Big Banana, the Big Pineapple and the much missed Giant Prawn (RIP) – now Sydney will have its own big cow! The larger than life Big Matilda will be erected in front of Customs House to give thanks to Australian dairy farmers. A pop-up milk bar will be opened at the site, along with a farmers show for the kids.

Where: Customs House, 31 Alfred St, Circular Quay

Contact: facebook.com/devondale



HANDY 3186 GRID 15D (ORANGES)

PUZZLE SOLUTIONS

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SUDOKU

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9	7	2	3	8	5	4	1	6
6	8	4	7	5	9	2	3	1
7	2	9	1	6	3	5	4	8
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1	5	3	8	7	2	6	9	4
2	6	8	9	3	4	1	7	5

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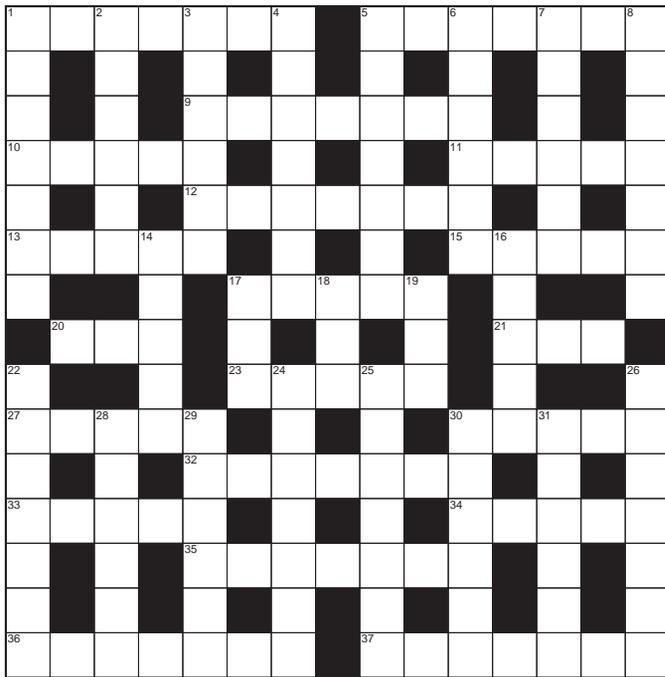
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Crosswords

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Across

- 1. ... & Lemons
- 5. Great applause
- 9. Asks for
- 10. Protect
- 11. Speak to crowd
- 12. Already
- 13. Requires
- 15. Wild animal
- 17. Ran in neutral
- 20. Self-regard
- 21. Historical age
- 23. Canonised person
- 27. Secreted
- 30. Heavily promoted
- 32. Precisely
- 33. Aladdin's lamp servant
- 34. Valiant
- 35. Street trader
- 36. Ankle shackle
- 37. Railway shunting tracks

Down

- 1. Beginnings
- 2. Burning out of control
- 3. Tour leaders
- 4. Cut of
- 5. Survive longer than
- 6. Soak up
- 7. Large lizard
- 8. Cheap trinket
- 14. Hum tunelessly
- 16. Manicure board material
- 17. ... & butts
- 18. Flower necklace
- 19. Punctual, on the ...
- 22. Mutt
- 24. Desert
- 25. Stinging weeds
- 26. Verb modifiers
- 28. Defining (region)
- 29. More profound
- 30. Cross between two species
- 31. Peacock's mate

SUDOKU

Fill the grid so that every column, every row and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1 to 9.

Rating: ★☆☆☆

					3			
8		6	2					9
9			3	8		4	1	
			7		9	2	3	1
7	2						4	8
3	1	5	4		8			
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		8						

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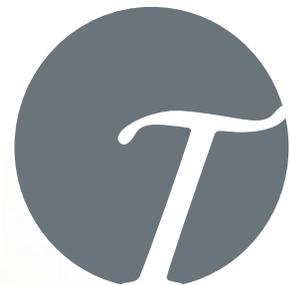
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