

# VOGUE

ART & DESIGN

## Open house policy

*WITH THE LAUNCH OF THE JUSTIN ART HOUSE MUSEUM, A PRIVATE COLLECTION OF CONTEMPORARY WORKS ARE NOW AVAILABLE FOR PUBLIC VIEWING.*

### NOTHINGNESS

*By Annemarie Kiely Photographed by Sharyn Cairns*

Stair light sculpture by  
Ilan El. PREVIOUS PAGE:  
All Blacks series by  
Pj Hickman.



HEY SAY THE BEST TIME to start thinking about your retirement is before the boss does, but if you are the boss presiding over a major architecture practice, it's presumed

you'll just drop at your drawing board.

"Not me," says Charles Justin, founding co-director of architecture and interiors practice Synman Justin Bialek (SJB). "We introduced a mandatory retirement age at SJB as part of a succession plan. Psychologically, I was prepared for the next stage of life."

While he claims departure from the profession conclusive, what architect retires their passion? Think Philip Johnson, the Pritzker prize winner who, winding up practice at the age of 98, claimed his longevity was contingent on the chance to act out aggressions. Justin doesn't miss the battles of building, but does miss the cerebral dip into making. And, truth be told, he's still making. "Though not as you'd think," he says of a recent move to the commissioning chair. "I've finally become the client." It's an axiom flip that he rationalises with the desire for a new experience, a daughter who is an architect, a 250-plus-piece art collection and a radical idea to decant it all into a house-museum. He describes himself and his wife, Leah, as inveterate travellers and lovers of contemporary art, whose post-retirement journey has just "dipped" into the JAHM, the sweet-sounding acronym for the new Justin Art House Museum.

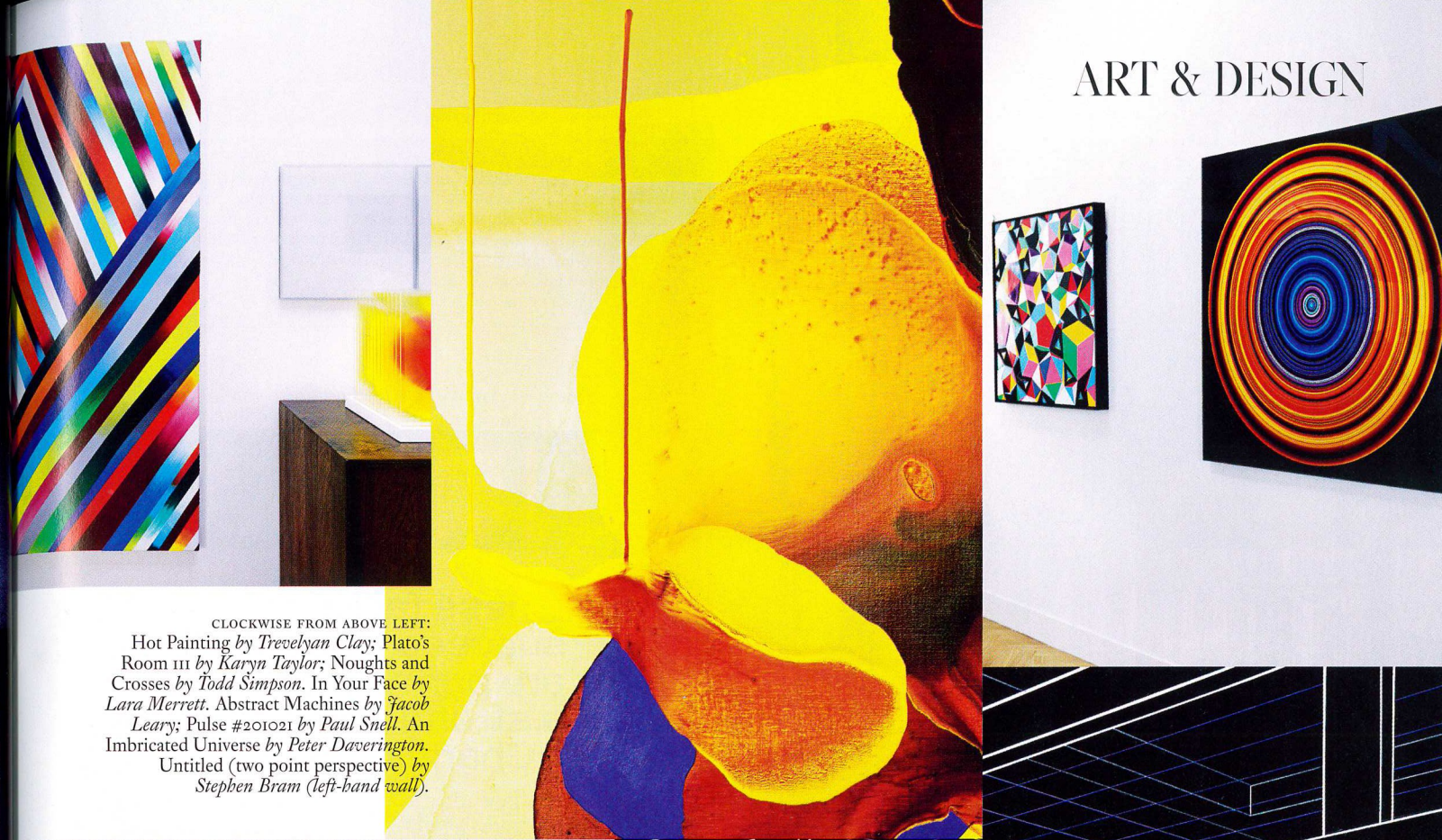
"It must have been about six years ago that we visited the Lyon Housemuseum in Kew," he says, winding back to the launch of the precedent-setting hybrid gallery, designed by its architect resident Corbett Lyon. "We wanted to do something that was positive and creative, and it just ticked all our boxes."

Having visited all the international 'archi-types', Justin pinpoints the Maison Particulière in Brussels and the Samlung Hoffmann in Berlin as "experiential" favourites for their owner-led tours and talks. He also expresses a deep appreciation for David Walsh's Museum of Old and New Art (MONA) in Tasmania — "nothing too didactic, just an unashamed pleasing of self". So the search began for a suitable site in Melbourne to affect similar outcomes.

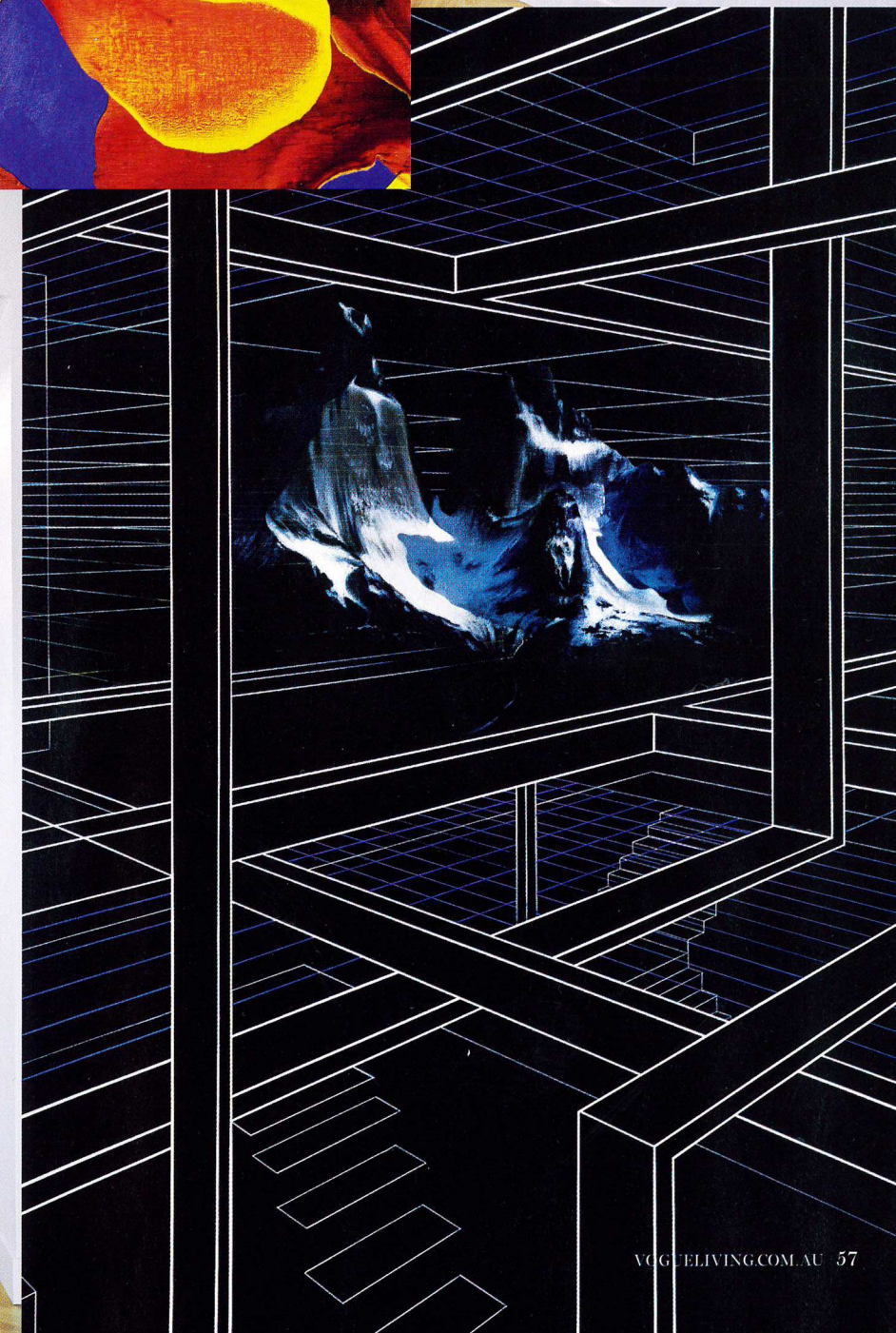
It took one year before a park-side block, replete with four older-style apartments, presented in central Prahran. "It was close to friends and family; close to the action of St Kilda and Chapel Street," Justin says. "So we just took the plunge."

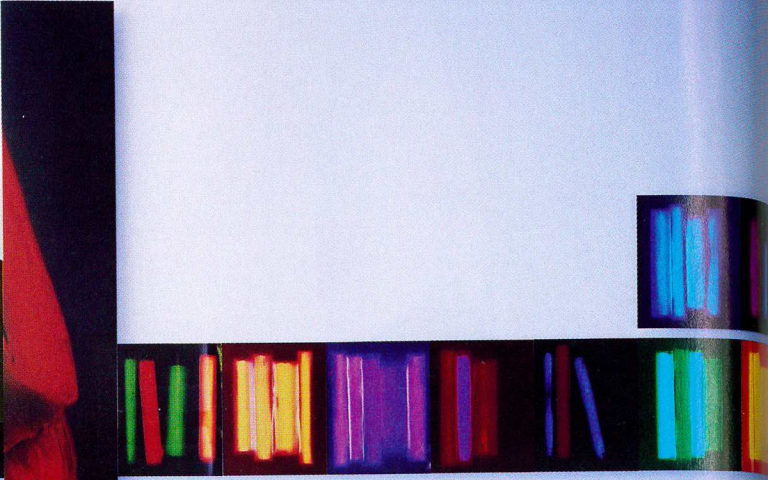
Brazenly flouting the wisdom that advises against working with family, the Justins summarily fleshed out a brief for their daughter, Elisa Justin, and just let her go on the design — relying on her familial experience and former employment at SJB to bypass the slow dance of establishing their "likes". The loose requirements were for the retention and renewal of the existing 1940s apartments, above which a first-level, museum-grade gallery and a second-level apartment were to be added. The specifics related to an eight-star environmental rating (a measure of energy consumption loads), a minimal palette of quality materials and the integration of art into the new architecture.

"This wasn't going to be art as lipstick," says Justin. "From day one, we wanted to commission projects for the façade, lift and stairs." »



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE LEFT:  
Hot Painting by Trevelyan Clay; Plato's  
Room III by Karyn Taylor; Noughts and  
Crosses by Todd Simpson. In Your Face by  
Lara Merrett. Abstract Machines by Jacob  
Leary; Pulse #201021 by Paul Snell. An  
Imbricated Universe by Peter Daverington.  
Untitled (two point perspective) by  
Stephen Bram (left-hand wall).





“These facilities succeed when they are permeated by a strong persona”  
– Charles Justin

THE WORD



CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT: *The library at JAHM*. *Untitled (small square)* by Gina Jones; *Positive Mask and Negative Mask* by Dinh Cong Dat. *Noughts and Crosses* by Todd Simpson. OPPOSITE PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: *Untitled (two point perspective)* by Stephen Bram; *Grotto Reflect* by Richard Blackwell; *Mid Eye-Con* by Samara Adamson-Pinczewski. *Atomic Cloud 4* by Gregor Kregar (on wall); *Pollen Yellow series* by Louise Blyton. *Index* by Penelope Davis. *Striped cladding in Easycore Colourbond* by Tunni Kraus. *Monet's Garden* by Catherine Nelson (foreground).

« Elisa Justin, now running her own practice, responded to the parental call for a cohesiveness of old and new architecture with a “big roof concept” — zinc skin wrapping down to ground plane like a geometrically progressing growth. She cocooned the gallery and penthouse within its folds, mediating space and service between the often conflicting concerns

of public and private use. “You are fielding the issues of fire evacuation and disabled access within a domestic setting that calls for discrete insertions,” says Elisa. “It’s not an easy journey to go on.”

Making the fulcrum of her composition the stair, Elisa detailed the conceptually loaded 39-step structure as a cranking spiral, drilling it three levels up through an allocated entry space. Its shape informed an “origami enclosure” suggestive of the largely non-figurative art collection exhibited within.

Lighting artist Ilan El (in collaboration with DigiSen) hooked his art concept for the stair into John Buchan’s 1915 thriller, *The*

*Thirty-Nine Steps*, riffing on the novel’s 39 stolen military secrets in interactive steps that flicker or fix in endless permutations of coloured light.

Artist Paul Snell worked with equally anomalous canvas and horizontal bands of colour, wrapping his digitised photograph of multi-stripes inside the passenger lift, so as to mess with all reading of its small space. Similarly, urban artist Tunni Kraus eulogised the stripe, making his material ode to the canvas awnings of the suburbs in Colourbond bands that externally badge the first-level gallery.

On what draws people to such public displays of the private, Justin declares home “the last bastion of personal expression”, citing findings from Georgina Walker’s doctoral thesis on the house-museum.

“These facilities succeed when they are permeated by a strong persona,” he says, in full realisation that retirement doesn’t afford a day off. “We will personally conduct tours, take coffee in the apartment and commit to two major exhibitions a year.” VL

*JAHM’s current exhibition, Divine Abstraction, curated by Dr Rachael Kohn, presenter and producer of The Spirit of Things on ABC Radio National, runs until 19 June. The Infinite Loop, curated by Melbourne artist Justin Andrews, runs from August to November 2016 (online bookings only). Justin Art House Museum, 3 Lumley Court, Prabran; jabm.com.au; justinarchitecture.com.au.*

