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PERSPECTIVES  
ON DESIGN, CULTURE,  
AND BEING PERTH.

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# Coast is clear

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Three generations later, a family-owned South West holiday home is reimagined to maximise the impact of its oceanfront locale.

It was a moment of not knowing what I was missing until it was right there in front of me. Or in this case, under my toes. As I entered the home and inevitably slipped off my shoes, the effect of an underfloor cooling system in the polished concrete floor delivered an instant wave of relief on what was a typically warm summer's day in WA's South West. Paired with uninterrupted views of the ocean beyond Dunsborough's signature Peppermint Trees, the dopamine hit was instant.

This particular part of Dunsborough, known to locals and regular visitors alike as "Old Dunsborough", evokes nostalgia in many. What was once occupied by a boat ramp, a fishing camp, a petrol station, and a bakery where surfers would load up on calories after hitting the waves, is now home to some of the most sought-after waterfront homes in the South West.

Aptly named after the Italian term for a work of fiction revolving around one single theme, Novella is the physical embodiment of a short story in prose. Situated mere metres from the waterfront, the home provides guests a moment in time to craft their own seaside tale.

The land was first purchased in 1931 for just 20 pounds by a hotel proprietor following the government's gazetting of residential blocks. In a show of the times and the level of value that was placed on location, other blocks one street back from the water were sold for 15 pounds, meaning the ocean view was worth just 5 quid.

The current owner's grandparents went on to purchase the land in 1933 for 40 pounds.

"They originally camped and had a caravan that stood there for a while, and then they built in the early 60's in the style of the day," owner David said.

Fast forward another 60 years, and the property was handed down to David and his sister, who subdivided the land to develop two dwellings, both taking in the stunning views of the bay.

After inviting a few architects to draft a plan of how they would foresee the new building sitting within its unique topography, David and his wife Lieve commissioned the expertise of PTX Architects.







While the building envelope was restricted with large setbacks and significant height restrictions, the built form achieved is spacious and allows generous access to natural light.

“The design is a contemporary response to the historic character of the Old Dunsborough precinct,” says Melanie Hößle, PTX Architects Design Director. “Weatherboard cladding and an articulated facade reference the traditional beach shacks associated with the area. Extensive floor to ceiling glazing in the living areas enhances the connection with the beachfront location. A northern courtyard and first floor terrace are protected from prevailing winds, catering for the coastal lifestyle whilst enabling light to penetrate deep into the living spaces.”

Situated on the upper level, the master suite puts on a show of its own with a footprint of 34sqm and a private ocean-front balcony. Two additional bedrooms, a bathroom and powder room complete the internal spaces on the second floor, while a rooftop terrace enjoys elevated views of the surrounding trees and bay.

A guest bedroom, bathroom and powder room on the ground floor sit in a quarter of its own to the rear of the property, providing absolute privacy for additional guests and opening up to the quiet courtyard.

Meanwhile, the central congregation point of the kitchen, living and dining spaces engages muted tones that elevate a sense of calm and elegance, with two large openings to the front deck and impeccable landscaped gardens.

“The reverse brick veneer construction method, high performance double glazing, and high levels of insulation optimise thermal performance, whilst an in-floor hydronic heating and cooling system increases the comfort levels,” says David Gibson, PTX Architects Principal Architect. “The project’s sustainability is capped off by an integrated solar PV energy and heat pump hot water system.”





With the owners permanently residing in Belgium, and with the view to enjoy their seaside escape upon visits back to WA, the design and build of the home was always going to be a remote process dotted with a few visits in between. But when the pandemic hit, the project became almost entirely virtual.

“Because we were building from a distance, we needed a quality builder,” says David. “We enlisted Mike Valmadre who has a great track record in the area and knew what stands up to this coastal environment. He was very particular on finished quality and we’re thrilled with that result.”

But what is a new home build without significant challenges? A difficult site in terms of access, David says the biggest unknown was how much rock they would find beneath the surface.

“There is a large rock on the front lawn that wasn’t a design feature . . . we simply couldn’t move it!” Side note: while unintentional, that rock now serves as the perfect ocean-viewing platform.

Flying over for a site visit in 2019 just before everything was locked up, David and Lieve embarked on a three-day blitz where they chose every feature that had to be built in.

When they finally returned in 2022 it was the same situation, this time with furniture, fabrics and wallpaper.

Struggling to find furniture pieces that resonated with their longing for a home-away-from-home, it was one fateful amble through the streets of Fremantle during their visit that sealed it all.

“As we entered Kartique it was very busy and full, and the owner was closing up,” says Lieve. “I saw a chair in the corner that really caught my eye. We came back the next day and found matching table and sofas, only to discover that most of it was Belgian design by Ethnicraft. So we came half way around the world to buy something that was made 30km from our home in Belgium.”

Renowned for its surrounding wineries, restaurants, swimming holes and hiking trails, this slice of South West paradise truly has it all, no matter the season. But having the right home to retreat to at the end of the day is just as enjoyable . . . if not more so. Consider it found.

To book Novella, visit [privateproperties.com.au](https://privateproperties.com.au)



Bush bananas in *In the dead house* (2020) represent the mutilation of Aboriginal bodies by coroner William Ramsay Smith, who in the early 1900s robbed graves and sold body parts on the black market to universities and museums in the United Kingdom.

*Remember Royalty* (2018), on loan from the TATE London, is a mixed-media work of archival photographs, vintage objects and hand-blown glass that is a tribute to Yhonnie's family and the legacy of Aboriginal Peoples as the First Peoples of Australia, whom the artist considers the true royalty of the empire. Bush fruit represent the grandchildren of Yhonnie's great grandmother, Granny Melba.

Yhonnie's award-winning glass and ceramic work *Servant and Slave* (2018) examines the treatment many Aboriginal women were forced to endure by their white women bosses in households and on stations.

Taking centre stage across two galleries are three pieces from Yhonnie's 'cloud' series – the first time the three pieces have been exhibited together. It's these pieces that account for the incredible complexity of the exhibition installation, which AGWA head of indigenous programs and curator Clothilde Bullen describes as the most complex exhibition she has curated in her 30-year career.

The monumental pieces *Cloud Chamber* (2000), *Thunder Raining Poison* (2015) and *Death Zephyr* (2017) speak to the impact of nuclear testing on Yhonnie's custodial Country in south-eastern South Australia. Small glass yams (each hung separately) create a vast, wind-swept form referencing the poisonous clouds that swept across parts of remote South Australia during nuclear testing undertaken in the 1950s and 60s.

*Fallout Babies* (2016) continues the theme of nuclear fallout around Yhonnie's homeland. In front of a photographic backdrop of graves, found hospital cribs hold blown-glass bush plums of various sizes and shapes, representing foetuses, infants and children who died or were deformed as a result of radiation poisoning at Woomera in the 1950s.

AGWA Director Colin Walker describes Yhonnie's narratives of the impacts of nuclear testing and colonisation as fiercely intellectual and uncompromising – critical and relevant for audiences today as the world tilts towards significant and potentially lethal global nuclear conflict.

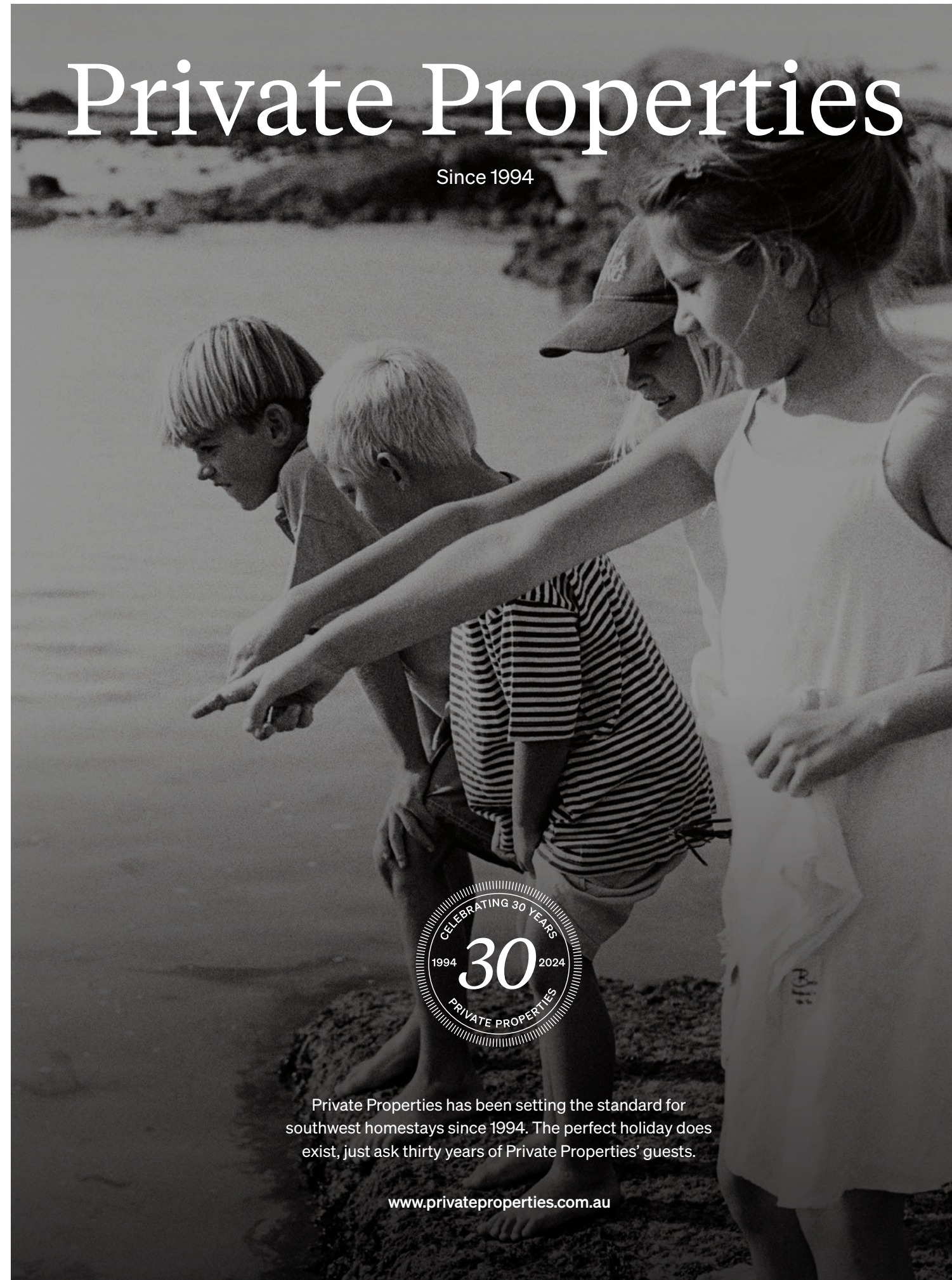
While the exhibition reveals and acknowledges historical hurts, Clothilde points out there is much to enjoy and admire in the scale and artistry of Yhonnie's work. "Yhonnie Scarce is unique in the Australian contemporary art space to be working at scale, interpreting tough narratives around the impacts of nuclear testing, indentured labour and the dual lens of science and racism upon First Nations people. It is possible to appreciate the beauty of the work and be challenged by the stories behind them," says Clothilde.

*Yhonnie Scarce: The Light of Day* runs exclusively at AGWA until 19 May 2024. It forms a key exhibition of the 2024 Perth Festival visual arts program. The exhibition is accompanied by a new 170-page hard-cover monograph (published by AGWA in collaboration with Power Publishing), featuring full-colour plate images, fold-outs, and essays by Timmah Ball, Kelly Gellatly, Natalie Harkin, and Tamsin Hong, with an interview between exhibition curator Clothilde Bullen and Yhonnie Scarce.

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