



# CANBERRA

The Australian capital is being re-invented.  
We meet the cosmopolitan masterminds shedding the city's  
bureaucratic grey suit in favour of a more urbane and vibrant get-up.

WORDS FEDERICO MONSALVE / PHOTOGRAPHY SAM HARTNETT



## Out & About

**HOT AIR BALLOONS** often traverse the dawn sky over this compact capital city and the ride is said to be one of the most breathtaking ways to see the young city's purpose-built skeleton.

In 1911, Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahony Griffin – an American husband and wife team who had worked for iconic architect Frank Lloyd Wright in Chicago – won the international competition to design Canberra.

Their stunning maps and sketches were composed of a series of large, garden-filled circles and rectangles dotting the capital. Concentric streets surround these, while long avenues traverse them and connect them to similar hubs elsewhere in the landscape. The city plan is a delicious geometric abstraction.

Its main avenue, Commonwealth Ave, is a long axis leading from the grass-covered Capital Hill, over Lake Burley Griffin and into a large central park called City Hill (if you are driving while visiting here and don't cross the lake accidentally, you have not really experienced Canberra). Many of Australia's leading institutions – national galleries, museums, theatre, Supreme Court and Parliament and the University – are parallel to this avenue and their architecture, let alone the treasures within, are undoubtedly worth the visit.

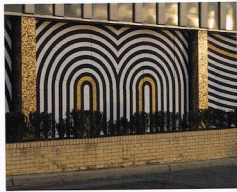
However, besides the built environment and cultural offerings, there is a palpable feeling of renewal in Canberra. It is driven by young locals, it is design-conscious, it has a strong urban soul and an innate desire to innovate.

An inherently conservative tribe of civil servants is being replaced by their younger versions expecting the little indulgences they have seen in other capital cities. Café culture is booming (the winner of the 2015 World Barista Championship is here), and there are very distinct, privately developed precincts injecting a sense of fun and cosmopolitan juice into this government town. As we found out, the most visible instigator of this change is the Hotel Hotel and the precinct it has created around itself. Yet, as the following pages attest, there are myriad other players making Canberra a true destination city.



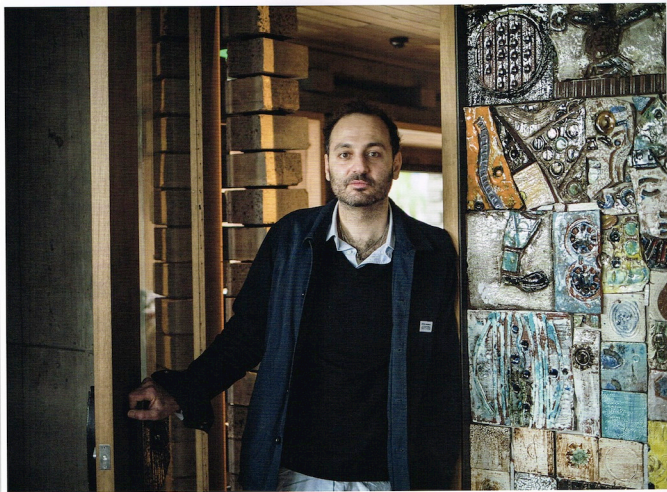
### These pages.

The 102-year-old city is flat and perfect for cycling. It is full of bold architecture, cultural institutions and is currently experiencing a palpable sense of renewal driven by great design.









## Johnathan Efkarpidis

*City maker*

**"COMING FROM A GREEK FAMILY AND** going and coming a lot to and from Europe, the thing you always wanted to do was leave!" says Johnathan Efkarpidis of Canberra. To change this state of limbo, Johnathan and his brother Nectar decided to create what they wanted in their city.

Through their Molonglo Group they began construction on the Nishi building – their most globally talked about contribution to the capital – in 2008.

"We ended up putting a board up on the wall and saying 'okay... if we have to

live here, what do we want to live next to?' That's how it all started," says Johnathan. "First, we thought... okay we need a bar!" he laughs, "then we'd love to have a hotel, a day spa, a supermarket, we want to be able to ride a bike, a place to get good coffee, we want to be close to a cinema... all those things."

And it is all of those things. The 24,000m<sup>2</sup> Nishi is a stunning, mixed-use building with architectural nods to brutalism and Japan. It forms part of Molonglo's sophisticated NewActon precinct, a 2.5 hectare chunk of the city's centre. Its interiors were crafted by more than 90 local artists and makers and it was recently awarded World Interior of the Year.

Johnathan is well versed on the larger implications of their work. "Canberra is too spread out. It is the size of London but for 300,000 to 400,000 people. So you get that dispersment effect where there is no connectivity." He mourns the effects

of technology on social interactions and misses the era of churches and other community spaces. NewActon – which employs a full time entertainment and arts programme manager – is conversant on the importance of community, ticks several environmentally responsible boxes and sees craftsmanship as critical in citymaking.

"I love living here," says Johnathan, who recalls that for some time, things were dire in Canberra's centre: "I used to leave the door to my apartment open just so I could hear the ticking of the traffic light and try to feel like I was in a city." Oh, how things are changing.

### Johnathan recommends:

- *Modern aboriginal art at the National Gallery of Australia*
- *The National Portrait Gallery*
- *Canberra Glassworks where you can watch people making and blowing glass.*



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**Facing page.**  
Jonathan Efkarpidis at Hotel Hotel.

**This page.**  
Inside the award winning Hotel Hotel. The Nishi building is one of the buildings within the New Acton precinct which is owned and operated by the Molonglo Group.





## Canberra Insider's Guide

### EAT & DRINK

#### Monster Kitchen

If you are not staying at Hotel Hotel (page 114) a meal here is the perfect introduction to this institution's luscious art and design ethos. Great place to linger over cocktails and graze. Do book. [hotel-hotel.com.au](http://hotel-hotel.com.au)

#### The Hamlet

Orchestrated by Nik Bulum (page 124) this urban village includes a hub for food trucks and carts selling international street food.

[inthecitycanberra.com.au/hamlet](http://inthecitycanberra.com.au/hamlet)

#### Parlour Wine Room

Dark, moody, elegant, slightly boisterous and with relaxing couches, the Parlour has an excellent drinks menu and generously sized tapas. The roast bone marrow with Lyonnaise onions and pork crackling is heart-stoppingly good.

[parlour.net.au](http://parlour.net.au)

#### Grazing

In Gundaroo, 30km from Canberra, this 1865 pub has been restored and retains a rustic, country feel to its decor. Much of the produce used here is grown on site. Vegetarian friendly.

[grazing.com.au](http://grazing.com.au)

### GALLERIES & SHOPS

#### Craft ACT

Canberra's craft and design centre is a member-owned advocate and exhibition space for local makers, craftspeople and artists.

[craftact.org.au](http://craftact.org.au)

#### National Portrait Gallery

Portraiture in all its various guises, including painting, photography, sculpture and more give a glimpse into the Australian identity. This remarkable gallery was designed by Johnson Pilton Walker.

[portrait.gov.au](http://portrait.gov.au)

#### Kin Gallery

A small shop at the back of The Hamlet specialises in jewellery and design objects by local makers including Alison Jackson and Kelly Austin. It is surrounded by other similar pop-ups.

[kingallery.com.au](http://kingallery.com.au)

#### Drill Hall Gallery

Australian National University's gallery space offers a variety of contemporary shows, talks, music and more. Great place to catch up-and-coming artists.

[dhg.anu.edu.au](http://dhg.anu.edu.au)

Above.

Night view of Canberra across the Burley Griffin Lake.

### PLACES

#### National Arboretum

This two year old sprawling garden still has some growing to do, nonetheless you can see the beginnings of over 100 "forests of rare, endangered and symbolic trees from around Australia and the world." The visitor's centre and children's playground are impressive.

[nationalarboretum.act.gov.au](http://nationalarboretum.act.gov.au)

#### Parliament of Australia

Most of the grounds are open to the public and the interiors are, at some points jaw-dropping art deco extravaganzas; at other points, quirky 1970s relics.

[aph.gov.au](http://aph.gov.au)

Federico Monsalve and Sam Hartnett travelled to Canberra courtesy of Panasonic Lumix G. Hartnett shot this feature using the new Lumix GX8 camera. The GX8 is Panasonic's latest premium micro 4/3 interchangeable lens camera and features a brand-new 20.3mp sensor plus 4k video, weather sealing and a large tilting live viewfinder and Wifi. It is available now in NZ from leading photo specialists with pricing starting from \$1649 for the body.

**Panasonic**