



*The* **CANBERRA** *story*

/

Narrative outline



## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY**

We acknowledge the Ngunnawal people as traditional custodians of this beautiful Country we have the privilege to call home and recognise any other people or families with connection to the lands of the ACT and region. We pay our respects to their Elders, past and present, and the contribution they make to the life of this city and to its success. We recognise the land known as the Australian Capital Territory has been occupied, used and enjoyed since time immemorial by Aboriginal peoples, and they continue to be interconnected with it today.

WELCOME

The CANBERRA story





LAURENCE KAIN  
*Capital Brewing Co.*

For much of Canberra's history,  
others have tried to tell us who we are.  
Politicians and public servants.  
Open space and roundabouts.



But what *else*?

What makes us who we are?

As a place, as a community?

What's in our DNA?

What is it about Canberra that's true  
for this city and nowhere else?



AMANDA WHITLEY  
*HerCanberra*

*We need to tell our  
own story.*

So, we listened. This story was one that couldn't be created so much as it had to be uncovered.

We talked to Canberrans from all walks of life. We read the earliest stories of our city. As we listened, closely and carefully to each person's experience, we looked for the common threads: moments of truth that we could weave together into one master story.

This story can shape the way we talk about ourselves. It can be a touchstone for decisions, a guide for starting something new. This story shows who we are, how we've been formed by our past, and how we can take all that we have to shape our future.



**DR SOPHIE LEWIS**  
*Climate Scientist*



**SHASHANK BEHL**  
*Engineer*

## Why a story?

It's easy to stay abstract — to read a list of statements about Canberra that we agree with and nod our heads to. But that changes nothing. It inspires nothing.

A story digs beneath the surface. Stories are powerful, they bring our experiences to life.

They're fundamental to how we create and share meaning. Societies have been telling stories for thousands of years. It's how we learn and connect. They're emotional, they're memorable. We respond to narratives in ways we do to little else.



**RICHIE ALLAN**  
*Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation*

# *Elements of the story*

## **WHO WE ARE AT OUR BEST**

describes our values, our character and what about Canberra that makes it possible for us to be like this.

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## **THE CANBERRA STORY**

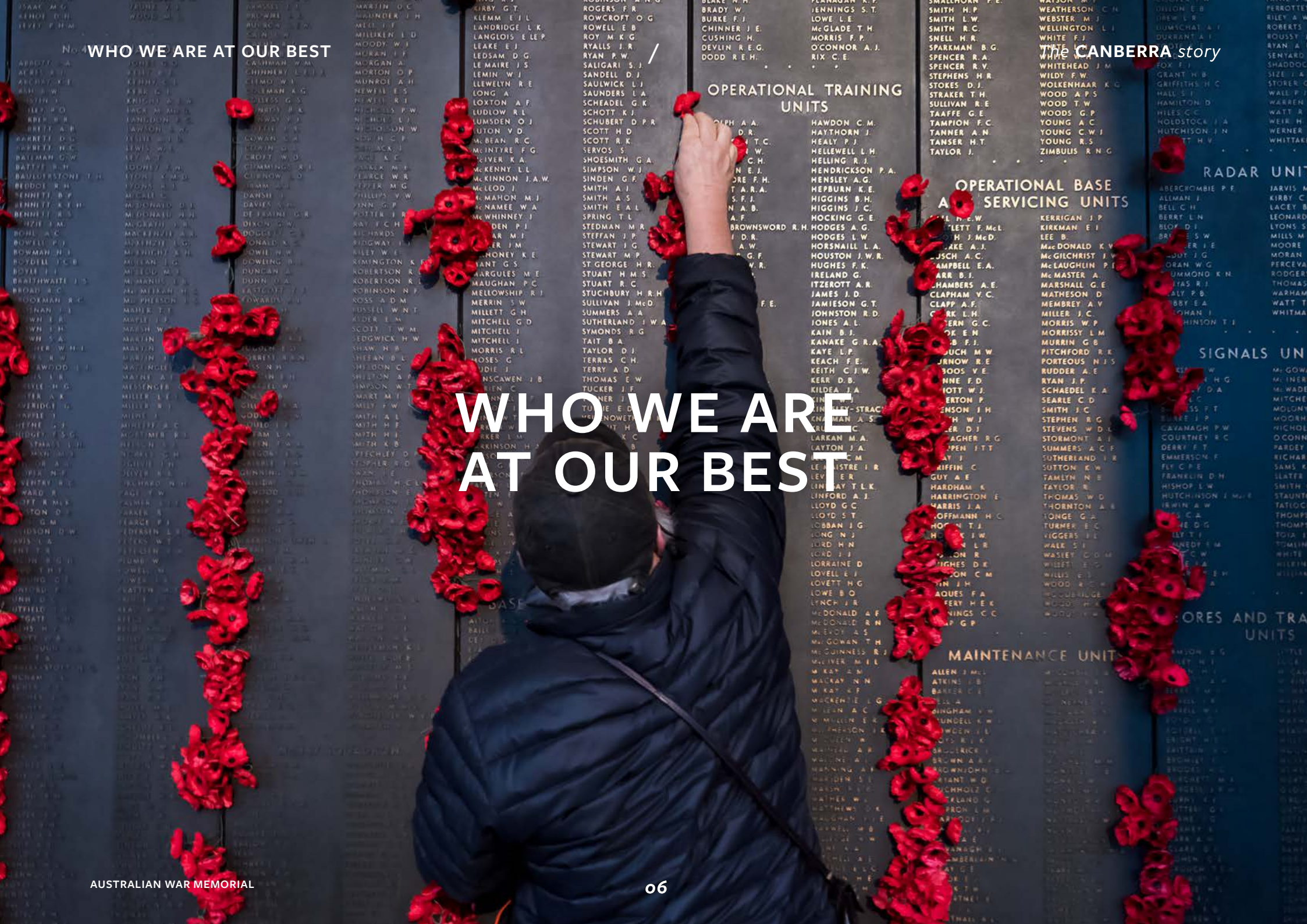
brings this all together into a master story.

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## **THE STORY ARC**

describes the story structure that emerged from the common threads we saw in the lives of people we spoke to; how they moved from arriving in our city to finding their place here.

*What we're sharing  
with you has a few parts.  
Use them in whatever  
way makes sense for the  
story you need to tell.*



WHO WE ARE AT OUR BEST

The CANBERRA story

WHO WE ARE AT OUR BEST

OPERATIONAL TRAINING UNITS

OPERATIONAL BASE AND SERVICING UNITS

RADAR UNITS

SIGNALS UNITS

MAINTENANCE UNIT



# We are nurturing

We create space for new ideas, and help them grow. People are confident starting something new here because they know this community has their back. We have the highest donation and volunteer rates in the country. Our generosity is evident in world-leading ways and in everyday acts of kindness.

Canberrans don't just exist for themselves: we look outwards, think of others and we're glad to share what we have.

*"When people show up, it's less about how it looks and more about how it feels."*

- BRIDIE MCARTHUR

/ GIVING FREELY

/ FOSTERING CREATIVITY  
AND COMMUNITY

/ SUPPORTING NEW  
IDEAS AND OTHER  
PEOPLE'S AMBITIONS

/ OUTWARD LOOKING

# We are interested

We ask the big questions because we live in a place where they can be answered. We attract both people eager to learn and international experts. Canberra is open to the new, perhaps because we're so new ourselves. We flock to the new and the different. For us, showing support means showing up. Canberrans value breadth of experience: there's room to explore the range of interests that make life good.



*"I think we're experience seekers and we're curious."*

- AMANDA WHITLEY

/ **CURIOS ABOUT THE WORLD AROUND US**

/ **LOOKING FOR THE 'NEW'**

/ **OPEN-MINDED**

/ **INVESTED IN EACH OTHER'S SUCCESS**

# We are purposeful

In this place, we live intentionally. We choose how we spend our time, raise our children, and contribute to the lives of others. We are a city born from a sense of purpose: designed to capture the way of life, aspirations and ideals of a nation.

Our work has meaning. In our companies, educational institutions and government departments, people dedicate their time to making something better. We create value and share that far beyond our borders.

We're courageous. We're not afraid of sticking our necks out. To be first. To be the place where social change begins.



*“Canberra has a purpose that precedes the place.”*

- JASON VAN BALLEGOOYEN

/ A DESIGNED CITY

/ A PLACE TO PURSUE YOUR AMBITIONS

/ LEADING CHANGE

/ ACTING FOR THE GREATER GOOD



# We are balanced

We have time and space to decide the tempo of our lives. To be present and enjoy the moment. Being surrounded by nature, it's easy to find our way to the bush, to restore and recharge.

Having time and space makes us reflective, not reactive. Our decisions echo across the nation, so we take a considered approach. We think through the questions, and arrive at what feels fair and true.

*“Many places in the world have unique elements to them. But putting them all together and getting a balance, that’s what is special about Canberra.”*

**- VIKRAM SHARMA**

**/ A MIX OF EXPERIENCES**

**/ DIFFERENT FACETS  
OF LIFE IN HARMONY**

**/ CONSIDERED  
APPROACH TO ISSUES  
(NOT REACTIVE)**

# *What you told us about the city*

Our setting and urban design came up often.

Here are the common things you told us you value about this place.

## **ABUNDANCE**

Our city brings together Australia's most precious things: in our galleries and museums and in the natural beauty of this land.

We curate those gifts, and we share them freely. We know we're lucky to live and work here. We're not exhausted just getting through the day; we still have time to be kind.

With everything at our fingertips, we can design a life we love.

*"There was a new energy here and new ideas. Now there are so many new things happening, I can't keep up!"*

**- DION BISA**

## **SPACE**

It's hard for others to understand a city with bush between its town centres, satellite suburbs and big backyards so close to the city. But in Canberra, space defines us - literally and figuratively. We have space to move, to breathe, and to create.

Canberra is not finished, locked in, or bursting at the seams. On the contrary, there's room for new people to find their community and make a place their own.

*"As soon as you drive into Canberra you see how much space we have. It's a sense of calm and control, a sense of home."*

**- SHEENA IRELAND**

## **CLOSENESS**

Even with all our open space, there is intimacy and familiarity here. It's in the sound of kookaburras in the early morning. In the waves to people we know on walks down Lonsdale Street and up Mount Ainslie.

In the nation's elected officials sitting next to us in restaurants. We're connected by the sporting teams we love, the causes we back and the work that needs to be done. And we're unbelievably good at celebrating our successes.

*"I trod on his toes and realised it was the Governor General."*

**- ALEX SLOAN**

A man in a dark t-shirt is seen from behind, pointing his right hand towards a large tree trunk. The tree's bark is peeling, revealing a lighter, smoother layer underneath. The scene is set outdoors with a clear blue sky and some green foliage visible in the background. The text 'The CANBERRA story' is overlaid in white on the tree trunk.

*The* **CANBERRA** *story*

## The **CANBERRA** story

For thousands of years, the Ngunnawal have hosted guests from other nations and shared the gifts of this region. Then, when Australia came together in Federation, we needed a capital. And this place of limestone plains was chosen. They named us Canberra.

It was the chance to design a new kind of city. The hope was that our capital would reflect the best of what Australia could be.

We were imagined as a place of flowing water; conversations unfolding along tree-lined avenues.

Compromise is never easy.

Our first residents saw us as more sterile; more concrete. When a city's business is government and administration, it can feel all function and process. A place where politics happens and not much else.

People came here reluctantly; just to get ahead in their careers. Preparing to leave even before they arrived.

Yet the spirit of this place worked on them. Where some saw barren space, others saw room to create. To plant something and watch it grow.

Many of us came from somewhere else, which fostered a distinct sense of community. You see that in the way we look out for each other. In the sporting teams we love, the causes we back, and the work that needs to be done.

/

With layers of commitment, Canberra came to life. We became a city worth staying for. This place of arcing roads and autumn trees became home.

Living here means having space to draw breath. We choose the tempo of our lives. We throw ourselves into our work, and we celebrate when it's done.

We look out our windows and see big blue skies and the snow-capped Brindabellas. Kids swim in rivers, and hear the calls of cockatoos and rosellas. There is room to roam and explore.

We succeed in Canberra by collaborating. By believing there's room for everyone: for new people and new ideas. It's why businesses are sprouting almost every hour: baristas, curators and ecowarriors. Tradies, engineers and artists.

We look outward and forward. We ask the big questions with the optimism we'll uncover the answers. We love exploring. But we also love knowing we're home when we catch sight of Black Mountain's tower.

Don't expect us to be like other cities. We were always intended to be a different place.

***We're ready to welcome you*** — whenever you come around.

UNDERSTANDING STORY

The CANBERRA story

# UNDERSTANDING STORY



## UNDERSTANDING STORY

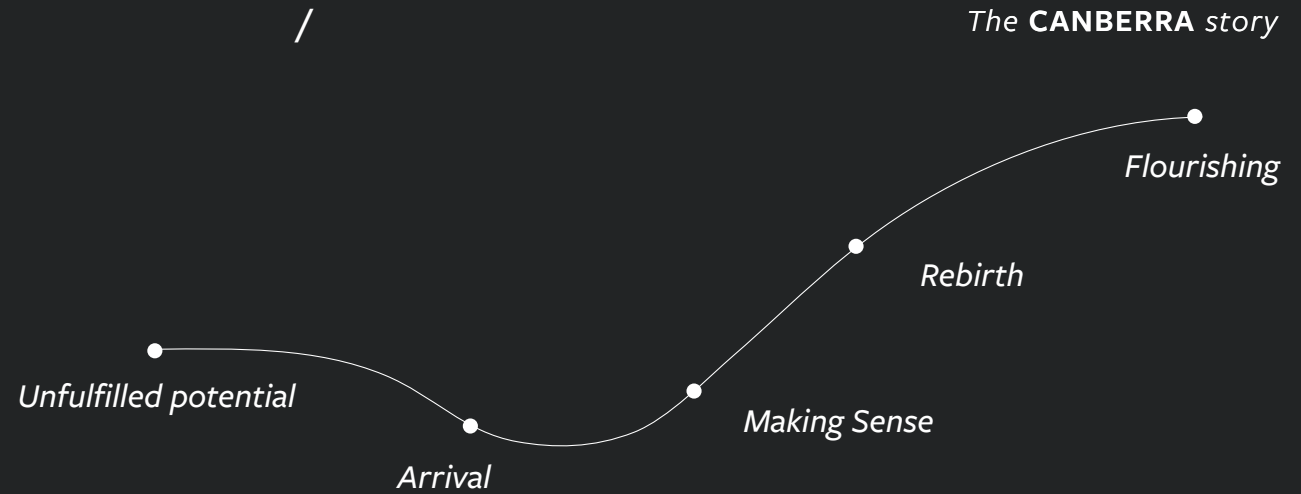
Author Christopher Booker theorised that there are only seven kinds of plots that a story, any story, will follow.

- / **Overcoming the Monster** (e.g. David and Goliath)
- / **Rags to Riches** (e.g. Cinderella)
- / **The Quest** (e.g. Lord of the Rings)
- / **Voyage and Return** (e.g. Back to the Future)
- / **Comedy** (e.g. Sense and Sensibility)
- / **Tragedy** (e.g. Romeo and Juliet)
- / **Rebirth** (e.g. A Christmas Carol)

# Rebirth

While Canberra is a diverse enough place to contain stories that reflect all these plot types, the plot structure that seemed to come up again and again in our conversations with Canberrans was ‘rebirth’.

Canberran stories often follow this narrative arc.



### *Unfulfilled potential*

Our hero is not being and experiencing all that they could. They may be aware of what they want to go after: an ambition, a purpose, a curiosity, or a different way of life. Or they may not yet be fully aware of what's lacking. But there's always a reason for our hero to move from the status quo.

### *Arrival*

Our hero either arrives in Canberra from somewhere else or commits to the city in some new way with the hope of addressing unfulfilled potential.

### *Making sense*

Our hero experiences disorientation. They're not sure what to make of this new place they're in. Gradually, though, they begin to find their place.

### *Rebirth*

Something new is created that replaces or improves on the status quo. This could be a new way of life. A new sense of purpose. The potential is becoming real.

### *Flourishing*

Growth continues into the future. Even more becomes possible. This unfolding can happen in the life of our hero. We may also see this in the lives of others, who our hero is able to serve.

# CANBERRAN STORIES





# Nikos Kalogeropoulos

## MOLONGLO GROUP

Nikos Kalogeropoulos remembers a time when he found the vast space between Canberra's town centres, suburbs and buildings "terrifying".

At 19, Nikos was "dropped off" in Canberra by his parents as they headed to India on yet another diplomatic posting. The capital had been the Kalogeropoulos's home during an earlier posting, and the thought of returning made a teenage Nikos sick with anxiety.

"I didn't want to go back to Canberra. I just thought - and it's really hard to explain - but I felt there was too much space in Canberra," Nikos says.

"And I really didn't understand how to fill it. Not just physically - but mentally and emotionally as well."

He filled it with books. Long walks exploring the city. Standing and staring at the buildings that intrigued him. And sitting at home playing music.

"By doing nothing, I was actually doing a lot," he says.



"I got really really comfortable with myself. It was really introspective stuff. I found solace in loneliness - which sounds depressing but was actually an incredible skill to have.

"I really appreciate those first few years back in Canberra."

The impact of his decision to stay in the capital would be realised in the decades to come.

While studying Economics at ANU, Nikos met brothers Jonathan and Nectar Efkarpidis; at the time they bonded over their Greek heritage and curiosity for the human condition but 13 years later came together as Molonglo Group, a property development company with the vision of bringing a brand new way of living to Canberra. It was called "urban precinct lifestyle" and was popular in western Europe.

First came New Acton, with concrete pineapple (and apartment building) Nishi at its heart. The precinct embraced the 1927-built New Acton hotel, and a series of brand new apartment buildings became further anchor points for "filling the spaces between". Amid the larger buildings sprouted galleries, commercial buildings, cafes, restaurants and even a cinema; places to live, work and make.

New Acton had a dramatic effect on the built environment in Canberra but also in the way people engaged with the area in which they lived.

“Canberra’s city planners made one really crucial mistake in the way they set out the city,” Nikos says.

“And it wasn’t necessarily the disparate arrangement of the city - the whole idea of satellite towns is quite interesting and beautiful.

“The biggest issue was a planning issue. The idea that you live over here, and then you work over there and then you make here and then you shop over here.

“It’s madness.

“Why would you separate uses? I think that was the biggest flaw and the biggest hurdle for really creating the new sense of place for Canberra.”

Like New Acton, Molonglo Group’s new precinct, Dairy Road “strives to unite a diverse group of people living, working and making in the same place”.

“The intersection of retail, creating, working, living and relaxing - that’s where life’s moments happen. We have very little in Canberra so we’ve had to create it.”



Three international architecture firms were invited to submit a masterplan for Dairy Road, which concluded with the recent appointment of one of the world’s most respected architectural studios, David Chipperfield Architects. The feedback from those design firms about the capital has been “astounding”.

“They all see Canberra as something so interesting, so unique, so weird,” Nikos says.

“We described Dairy Road’s location - close to the city but on the banks of the Jerrabomberra wetlands and they were like, ‘this is nuts’.

“I think we forget that - just how unique our city is and intriguing internationally.”

Does it occur to Nikos that his work now fills the vast space he was once so afraid of?

“Absolutely,” he says.

“[At Molonglo Group] we remind ourselves every day we’re driving a new way of living in this city - we’re literally redefining the space that’s played such a huge part in who I am.”



# Yolande Norris

## FESTIVAL CURATOR

For Yolande Norris, Canberra’s creative heart beats not only from the uber new buildings of the city centre but from disparate and unexpected places like our research institutes and outer suburbs.

“Every second of every day, a new idea springs to life in Canberra,” she says.

“Whether it’s a drawing on a beer coaster or a multi-million dollar research project, envisioning – and then implementing – change comes pretty naturally to Canberrans.”

Unearthing the original, purposeful and progressive work happening right across the capital just became Yolande’s full-time job.

She’s the director of Canberra’s brand new — as yet unnamed — innovation festival. Across 10 days in July 2023, the festival program will showcase a broad range of local organisations, institutions and businesses, uniting creative thinkers, innovators, artists and entrepreneurs. Yolande hopes the festival will take Canberrans to new intellectual terrains and introduce them to new creative forms. A multi-talented creative herself – she’s a writer, producer and curator – Yolande is a graduate of Australian National University’s School of Art and Design.



She was “an average artist but a really great writer and talker”, she says, and as her university classmates moved away to Melbourne and Sydney to go pro, Yolande decided to stay. She immersed herself in the administrative side of the arts.

“There’s no doubt staying here gave me the kind of opportunities that many of my classmates could only have dreamed of,” she says.

Yolande worked in marketing at the National Gallery of Australia, and was the program manager and administrator of Canberra Contemporary Art Space for many years.

In 2011, she curated a series of organic, experimental art experiences for the very first You Are Here festival. Yolande and co-producer David Finnigan were tasked by Robyn Archer with developing a festival that showcased the best of Canberra in the lead-up to the centenary.

You Are Here was a phenomenal success, continuing well after the Centenary, and still exists, though in a different format, today.

Canberra has — and continues to — play a critical role in Yolande’s creative growth.

To this day, she'll "walk past a house in Ainslie and O'Connor and think, 'I've been there before!'" Memories of once working on a random creative endeavour with friends at the house – or in its yard – will come flooding back.

"The suburbs feature hugely in my time in Canberra," Yolande, who, like many Canberrans, grew up in a constantly-relocating military family, says.

"And I feel like a lot of the amazing things in Canberra actually happen in suburbia: in houses and neighbourhoods.

"It's one of those happy accidents that comes with a city or a town that doesn't have much infrastructure. People just naturally go, 'Oh well, we'll just use my house'."

After almost three years of bushfire/COVID trauma, Yolande is hoping 2023's innovation festival will provide the perfect platform for Canberrans to rekindle a love affair with their city.

"I want people to say, 'Okay, what am I interested in? What do I want to reconnect with? Or do I want to connect with parts of the community that I've never been connected with?'" she says.



"And offering a festival is a really wonderful way for people to do that.

"I hope the festival sparks inspiration – the Winter period is all about slowing down and thinking, what's next? Where do I want to invest my energy? What's really lighting me up? So that you can start to plan for spring and summer."

Just like her experience on the You Are Here festival, Yolande will have the mammoth task of building the innovation festival from scratch - including a name, a brand, curation, marketing, operations and measuring success.

"It's absolutely a formidable task but the content already exists," she says.

"And we'll unite it in a way that's original, purposeful and inspiring"



# Vikram Sharma

## QUINTESSENCE LABS

Vikram Sharma bounced around the world throughout his childhood. From Dar es Salaam to Chicago and Delhi, it was a dramatic change for the family to land in Canberra in the early 1980s, when his father was posted here as India's High Commissioner.

"We arrived in winter," Vikram recalls. "It was just a fledgling city then, and much smaller than anywhere else I had lived.

"I recall looking at the rolling hillside around me and being struck by the lack of density, the sparsity."

Studying at what became the University of Canberra, it was the Canberrans themselves who made their mark on Vikram.

"It was the friendliness, the openness, the genuineness of the people that I met," he explains.

"My initial impressions were of a stunningly beautiful place and very welcoming people."



Making friends helped entrench Vikram in the city that became his primary home for the next 40 years, despite the world's best efforts to lure him overseas. He chose to stay on in the capital to finish his first degree after his father's posting finished. On completion of the degree, he was recruited by an Australian computer technology company expanding into New York.

His stint in the United States was an extraordinary opportunity. The company was keen to sponsor Vikram's Green Card, but his heart lay in the quiet, familiar and lush capital.

"The magnetism of Canberra drew me back," Vikram says.

He went on to establish his first company in Canberra and its expansion led to an opportunity to spend more time in India.

"But again, I chose to return to Canberra," Vikram says.

Next, he received an incredible opportunity to join the renowned Sloan Program, at the Graduate School of Business at Stanford University, located in the heart of Silicon Valley.





“At the conclusion of the program something odd happened,” Vikram recalls.

Taking a sabbatical, he sat in on quantum physics PhD-level classes at Stanford. Quantum technologies were emerging, and the technology’s intersection with cybersecurity piqued his interest.

“I was absolutely astonished to find that, back on my doorstep, a team at the ANU was about to embark in cutting edge research in exactly this field,” Vikram says.

Expecting a second child by then, Vikram and his wife resisted the allure of other world-class opportunities on offer and returned to Canberra for a third time.

“That mid-career opportunity to come back and join research work at the ANU led to some world firsts,” Vikram says. “Our team was awarded the national Eureka prize for science in 2006.”

Vikram founded quantum cybersecurity company QuintessenceLabs in 2008. His team has found a way to use quantum physics to create security so robust, on such a large scale, they’ve become the first choice in advanced data protection for government and large enterprises.

“It’s no news to anyone that the number of data breaches and attempts to steal sensitive information are escalating rapidly,” he says.

“In parallel, billions of dollars are being spent all around the world to build quantum computers, because they will offer us incredible capabilities – solving all kinds of problems that we can’t solve today. For all the benefits they will offer, quantum computers will break most technologies in use today to secure sensitive data.

“With quantum computers at scale becoming a reality in the next few years, we help organisations protect themselves against the cyber threat from a quantum-enabled adversary. We support them becoming quantum resilient.”

Emerging from world-leading research at ANU, QuintessenceLabs is now a global leader in its field. Vikram serves on the World Economic Forum’s Global Future Council on Cybersecurity and is a member of the Wall Street Journal CEO Council, the Forbes Technology Council, and the Sydney Quantum Academy Advisory Board.

“I’m a long-term Canberran and absolutely in love with our city,” he explains.

“But more than my personal passion for it, the city provides an incredible array of facilities which make it a perfect place to start and scale a deep tech company like QuintessenceLabs.”

Canberra provides access to policy makers, Vikram says, as well as large-scale customers to support early validation of ideas, technology and capability.

“This city offers you access to a highly skilled workforce through the excellent university system, and personnel with government and defence backgrounds who are very experienced in technology,” he says.

“As we matured the deep science which underlies our product set and translated it into high-value cybersecurity solutions for government, defence, and enterprise customers, we’ve seen significant overseas interest in supporting scale-up of the company and investing into the Canberra economy.

“Whenever in overseas markets, we proudly announce we’re Australian headquartered - based in Canberra.

“We’re doing cutting-edge science here that has never been done anywhere in the world.”

# Learning the story

The lengths we went, to learn out story reached far-and-wide.

## QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS



*Canberrans*  
interviewed one-on-one,



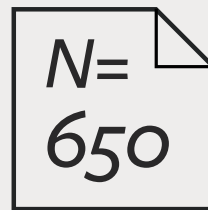
*conversations*  
with story tellers

designed to dig for



*lived experiences  
& deep meaning*

## QUANTITATIVE SURVEY



*representative sample*  
of the Canberra  
Region community



*online survey*

designed to understand



*which aspects of the  
story resonate in  
different scenarios*

## SHARING



*If you'd like  
to know more*

about the work and how we can  
make it useful for you, contact us:



[canberra@act.gov.au](mailto:canberra@act.gov.au)



**ACT**  
Government

Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate

*The **CANBERRA** story*