

SUMMER

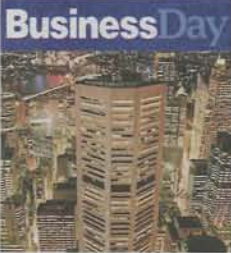


SportsDay

Bad call

India are under fire for refusing to allow DRS reviews after the controversial dismissals of Mike Hussey and Ed Cowan yesterday.

PLUS SYDNEY TO HOBART



BusinessDay

Hot Property

Super funds and wealthy private investors tipped as big buyers of commercial real estate in 2012. **PAGE 20**

CONTENTS

- iPhoneography.....PAGE 2
- In praise of procrastination..... PAGE 3
- The Esky reviewed PAGE 4
- Stephanie Alexander's other passion..... PAGE 6
- David Williamson draws the Queen PAGE 7
- GOOD LIVING**
- Terry Durack finds Italy in Cronulla PAGE 10
- Light lunches from Jeremy and Jane Strode PAGE 11
- ARTS**
- The year's theatre highlights PAGE 14
- PLUS**
- Summer Planner PAGES 8-9



Drawn and watered

Nick O'Malley visits Sydney's most intriguing drawing club

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summer

cover story

unlikely CRITIC

Each day a reviewer turns their attention to those things ordinarily overlooked.

THE ESKY

★★★★☆

At the firm resolve of the polypropylene shell, the cool welcome of the polyurethane belly and the faint but unmistakable scent of last summer's prawns. The Esky and its contents are a feast for the senses. No wonder that, since it was first opened in 1952, the Esky has established itself as a much-loved attraction on Australia's food and beverage landscape.

Its origins are distinctly proletarian. Whether on the Hill at the SCG or in the factory canteen, its appearance invariably prompted cheers of delight.

But it has transcended its working-class origins — these days the Esky is as likely to contain Moët and canapés as VB and chook.

Yet perhaps its continued popularity is merely a nostalgic affection.

At this point, I must confess my own bias. I am German-Australian, which means there are two things I am genetically programmed to love: beer and the great outdoors. The Esky enables me to combine the two. As a baby, I was raised to consider the Esky as a brother. And, as with any sibling, I had to compete with it for my parents' affections. It is as much a part of my identity as heatstroke and hangovers.

With a name derived from an abbreviation of "Eskimo", the coolers were developed by Malley's, a Sydney refrigeration business. They keep food



Some big events no longer allow patrons to bring Eskys. This is un-Australian.

and drink chilled, but they are good for so much more: sitting on; standing on; storing freshly caught fish; substituting for stumps in beach cricket; providing impromptu flotation aids for anyone caught aboard a sinking ship.

In 2009, the Esky range was bought by US outdoor recreation company Coleman. Eskys are no longer Aussie but they remain practical. The brick-like coolers range from the modesty of six litres to the majesty of 50 litres — not to mention the 65-litre Ice King, which comes on wheels and obviously requires that punters drink in moderation to avoid driving under the influence. There are now soft-sided coolers, too.

Some big events no longer allow patrons to bring Eskys. This is un-Australian. For Eskys themselves are quintessentially Australian, right from their politically incorrect name to the fact that they are no longer Australian-owned. Above all, Eskys are Australian because they do what they set out to do.

SACHA MOLITORISZ



Palettes loaded, lines drawn

Nick O'Malley drops in for lunch with Ken Done, at a club where artists share cutlets and criticism.

"Drawing," declares the chairman, "is more important than sick children. We're not here to discuss sick children." The artist Sassy Park puts down her phone and rejoins the meeting. Her daughter will have to wait.

We're sitting around a table at the foot of a pile of gardens and lawns and follies and pathways that tumble over one another to a two-storey boathouse that seems to grow out of the foreshore sandstone in Mosman.

Book Club is in session, an occasional gathering of a handful of Sydney artists who meet to discuss drawing.

This meeting's host is Ken Done, whose home is somewhere up above us through the tangle of bougainvilleas, frangipanis and angophoras. But the chairman, Noel McKenna, remains in control.

In his neat jeans and pale blue shirt, McKenna, a sculptor and painter known for his naive-style Australian scenes, looks more like a banker on a day off than an artist. He is softly spoken but given to firm views offered in uncompromising terms and the rest of the club naturally defer to him.

Also around the table are Park, probably best known as a jewellery painter, and Joanna Braithwaite, who paints portraits of guinea pigs and birds of an oddly noble demeanour.

There is McLean Edwards, who paints the figures that ramble through his dreams and is prone to the sort of linen suits you usually find in Graham Greene novels. He has been shortlisted for the Archibald Prize four times.

And Done remains just the way you remember him, perhaps a little greyer but relaxed and tanned, dressed in colourful striped shorts and a black T-shirt. He looks like Michael Catton playing a rich happy bloke.

It turns out Done is still big in Japan. As we wait for everyone to assemble, Done starts showing sketches for a series he has just done based on the Japanese midjet submarine attack on Sydney in World War II.

"I'm trying not to illustrate it, just to give an idea of what it must have been like," he says, as the others flick through the work.

The thought of scared, young Japanese sailors being sealed in manned torpedoes to hunt ships under the Harbour Bridge seems impossible on this sun-blasted afternoon in late spring, days before Sydney's summer retreats back into winter.

FROM the front porch of Done's stark, white 1950s home, we look out over the water to Clontarf and Balgowlah. The only sprays of colour I noticed as we walked through the house were a single orchid by the front door and a vase of nasturtiums, both yellow, a colour Done later tells me he likes because it is "on the edge of madness".

The others arrive and troop down to the boathouse to sit by a barbecue hewn out of the sandstone. Done starts a driftwood fire as McKenna unpacks his home-made gaol and sounding board and the Book Club's book of minutes. It is bound in a rich, golden yellow.

Done's wife, Judy, offers around wine and olives, stuffed peppers and grissini and

McKenna opens the proceedings. He explains that each week everyone brings an example of someone else's work that they like and he begins with his own, a book of paintings by children who eventually became famous.

McKenna invites people to guess the names of the artists as he flicks through the pages and the fragile order he had nurtured descends into cheerful chaos.

"Chagall!"

"Picasso!"

"Dufy!"

McKenna interrupts. "I'll give you a hint: Swiss."

"Klee," Park guesses correctly.

"Shit, he could draw at 10," Edwards says.

The gathering rises and pores over the book together. There is work by E. E. Cummings and one by Louis VIII at age six.

Edwards ducks into the kitchen in the boathouse to grab a beer. Judy is inside putting lunch together.

"Hey McLean, there's a meeting on!" yells McKenna, raising a yellow card from the book of minutes.

"That's not a yellow-card infringement," Edwards complains. "I was just talking to Judy."

"Well, we're not here to talk to Judy."

(Judy has distracted the group before. It was once alleged Done had dashed off a portrait of Judy with her lipstick in the car on the way to the meeting. Another time, Done caused controversy by dumping a framed Bonnard onto the table when it was his turn for show and tell.)

The meeting moves on. Edwards burrows into his bag and pulls out a book of paintings by the Melbourne artist Rhys Lee and a pile of his own work — a collage and three little ink drawings of his own on what look like wooden tiles but are boards coated in gesso.

'I just love drawing and I think drawing in Australia is not taken seriously enough.' Noel McKenna, artist



Bird's view ... drawing by Joanna Braithwaite.



Hungry eyes ... (top left and main) works by Ken Done, who hosted the gathering at his Mosman home. Photos: Taniara Dean

It's these that the group seize on first. "Ooh, they're nice," Braithwaite says, rubbing her fingers over the reactive emulsion on the painting surface.

Done is more taken with the collage, which Edwards constructed out of old work lying about his studios.

"Artists' studios are like hospitals," Done says. "In the front there are the ones you are working on. Half way down they are coughing a little bit, in the back they are f---ing almost dead."

"And sometimes you get into the studio and you hear this wincy cough and you go and have a look at it and you'll pick something up and you think, yeah, I know how to save that."

Park claims to be nervous, although it doesn't show.

"I've been asked many times but this is the first time I have come, because Noel is so mean and daunting," she says, unpacking her notebooks, which are filled not only with drawings of her children, but by them.

The group peers into the book.

"My son has a speech problem and he is struggling through school, and I am very committed to helping," she says, as they turn the pages.

"We don't know what is in his head because he won't talk much but he has become a drawer and he makes up these characters. He is getting the idea of composition but I don't know why he is leaving blank pages."

Later, as conversation drifts, McLean Edwards brings them up. "That's the thing about drawing," he says. "A sketchbook has intimacy. Like with Sass's drawings of her kids at rest and play. Just a biro and a few strokes gathering all that intimacy and joy in just five minutes. It's a glorious thing."

Braithwaite unloads a series of black-and-white drawings of magpies. She has used bamboo dipped in ink.

"I like the fact that you have control but at the same time you get blobs and lose control," she says.

Done says: "You've got the softness there against the harshness. It's like jazz; that's how you played the note, it's lovely."

McKenna spreads his own work on the

summer



guided TOUR

Richard Evans

Sydney Opera House chief executive



This summer, Richard Evans is looking forward to bringing guests home to Birchgrove and cooking up relaxed meals on his brand new barbecue.

ASIAN SYDNEY

"It's great just to get out and explore the quintessentially Asian part of Sydney. There's nothing like going to Marrickville for pho ... And I love going to Chinatown and to places like Home in Sussex Street, where all the wait staff have iPads in faux Louis Vuitton cases."



ORANGE GROVE GROWERS' MARKETS

"We often take visitors on shopping trips [before firing up the barbie] to one of Sydney's great markets, such as Orange Grove. It has a fantastic mix of locals and you pick up on the vibe of the inner west there. Plus a great yoghurt stall, organic meat and vegetables."

BIRCHGROVE FERRY

"You get to go under the bridge, which is an unusual aspect, and past all the Walsh Bay wharves. If you get off at the Thames Street stop, it is interesting to see the disused industrial area at the back of Cockatoo Island."



WALK TO ART GALLERY OF NSW

"One of the most beautiful things to do in Sydney is to walk from the Opera House through the gardens up to the gallery, going around Mrs Macquaries Chair and past Boy Charlton pool."

BERTA RESTAURANT

"Going out to eat, I really like taking people to my friend [chef] Tama Carey's restaurant, Berta, in Alberta Street in Darlinghurst. She makes her own version of Italian, which is awesome, lots of small plates."

Interview by Lynne Dwyer



Knives out ... drawing by Sassy Park.

table, a series of ink and watercolour drawings featuring mean-looking knives. They'd be called whimsical if it were not for the vaguely threatening air about them. They are based on a poem by his friend, New Zealand's former poet laureate, Jenny Bornholdt.

Everyone seems taken by the space and line on the page, and the way whimsical drawings of a knife have conveyed so much menace.

I ask if the debate ever gets heated. "Not here," Edwards says, gesturing vaguely at the parrots chattering above us. "This place is heroin."

McKenna remembers a dispute prompted by his own work.

"I had been burning lines into wood and McLean stood up and said, 'These are not f---ing drawings, McKenna', and he got gavelled. The gavel helps. I like the gavel."

Edwards concedes the point. "At first I didn't think it offered a lot of possibilities in the way



Dapper gent ... a work by McLean Edwards.

of light and pressure ... I only realised later that your line had changed and had a different quality as it went along."

Braithwaite says things tend to get more lively at Edwards's studio, a chaotic mound of paint and canvas in a converted Chippendale warehouse apartment block. Edwards generally serves lots of booze and takeaway pizza.

At McKenna's the food is good and home cooked, and the chairman tends to invite guests without warning. (A few days later McKenna sends me a list of all the former guests - there are 14 names in all, including many of Sydney's most accomplished artists, curators and gallery directors.)

Over a lunch of lamb cutlets, smoky from the driftwood barbecue, McKenna explains how he gathered the group.

"I was watching a documentary on a sculptor called Louise Bourgeois," he says.

"She lived in New York and every Sunday she used to open up her house and an artist would come around with drawings and a group of people would talk about it. And it just seemed like a nice thing to do."

More importantly, he is concerned about the state of drawing.

"I just love drawing and I think drawing in Australia is not taken seriously enough. A lot of galleries do not exhibit drawings."

Done says drawings are often more satisfying to make than paintings because of their immediacy, because of how much you can get away with leaving out.

McKenna rounded up Edwards and Braithwaite first and then called Done to get a wider mix of ages and styles.

"I'd met Ken years ago and I'd always admired him," McKenna says.

Done says he'd wanted to own a piece of McKenna's work for a long time. He signed up immediately. The gatherings have had an impact on his work, he says.

As the afternoon drifts on, McKenna loosens the reins and discussion turns to earlier meetings.

Edwards finds himself defending a position he took during a visit by Tom Carment.

"I just wanted to know why he did plain air painting, out there in the wild, dealing with the f---ing public, god forbid," he says. "Dealing with people coming up and looking over his shoulder and saying, 'It doesn't look like that.'"

"And he kept on running back to McKenna like a baby."

McKenna looks in the yellow book. "That's not in the minutes, you're making it up," he says.

"Just because it's not in the minutes doesn't mean it didn't f---ing happen," Edwards says, outrage mounting.

So McKenna reads: "Tom Carment bought small plein air mainly pencil sketches of Nielsen Park etc. As an example of another artist he bought an old tatty small book of Holbein drawings. Good meeting I thought."

"Tom ... proved to be a bit of a reluctant guest. He did not relax. I get the impression he thought we were a bunch of no-talent bums. He may be right."