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Perfection surrounds a rags-to-riches achiever

By FIONA WHITLOCK

WHEN Dennis Gowing was 13 he had a tin of sand for his Christmas dinner. "That tin," he says, "it was not so much a tin of sand as it was a tin of hope for the sake of it, but of wanting not to be poor any more. I wanted to get myself out of the gutter."

His childhood in Essendon, from a tenement house in 1925 — entering the world within the sound of London's New Bell — he was born illegitimately. His mother was a prostitute. At the age of five Marshall Wayns, as he was named at birth, was adopted by the Gowing family, and became Dennis Gowing.

He was to enjoy very few years of security. When the German bombing raid on England began in 1939 Dennis became an evacuee and for much of the war was sent from one home to another — eight in all. When he returned to his adopted home it was by a new street and in fairly miserable circumstances.

Mr Gowing does not regard his childhood as extraordinary or deprived. "I don't know how other children lived, but I thought everyone lived like that," he said cheerfully, but after emerging in 1946 from the British Army he set out to make a bright future for himself. He headed for Australia to make his fortune. And, like Dick Whittington, found the streets were paved with gold.

The public knows him as Kevin Dennis, the car salesman who made a lot of money out of his sales empire. He sold cars for the Melbourne and his night-time television shows. (New Face and The Top Ten) were the best known.) He made his fortune, if not always



My Home and I
Dennis Gowing

Macdon. "The only thing I miss is having a dog that I could get a well-earned pat on my back," he said.

It is a very masculine place, with the air of an elegant gentleman's club. Many of the walls are covered with wood paneling and the furniture is very solid wood, or leather.

There is a no-fun perfection to the rooms that is usually only found in a place decorated by a man. John Perce, the artist, walked into one of my houses and said that even before he saw inside he knew what it would be like — rectangular and square-oid," said Mr Gowing.

Even the books on the wall, pale, lacquerwood coffee table are arranged precisely up and down, with volume on top.

Mr Gowing is a collector of art. He has a collection of 100 paintings, mostly by Victorian and Edwardian artists. He has a collection of 100 books, mostly by Victorian and Edwardian authors.

After hectic careers in cars, a steel firm, establishing restaurants, and home of a car driving, golf and fishing, Dennis is now in a "hanging mood" and is happy to spend some time at home, admiring the view, laughing at jokers whooping past his place, and watching the city at night.

He has a compact kitchen in the apartment where he occasionally cooks. He also enjoys making big pots of soup for his children, Tony, Samatha, Randolph and Christopher when they visit. (Tony, the oldest, runs the Gowing hotel at Mount Macedon.)

The apartment complex was a planned concept table and chairs that came from Dennis Gowing's former restaurant, Jackson's, Bob Hope, or Vincent Price, may have seen it in the window. It would certainly be haunted in some way by some film and executive from Hollywood's Chained 9 or 10 who were professional hunters at Jackson's.

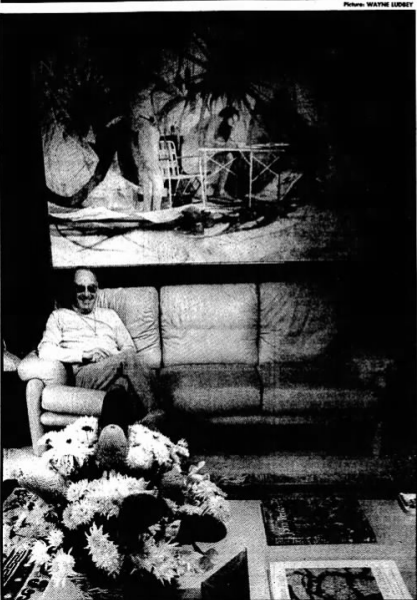
Even at home Mr Gowing seems prepared to lead many guests. He is a

dinner service in blue and white German porcelain, with dozens of pieces of crockery, including tureens and cake trays, which look charming on an old-fashioned dresser.

Mr Gowing enjoys his possessions while he has them, but also happily puts them to move to another home. He is again having fantasies of going to live in a house overlooking the sea in the north, for a couple of months, looking up to the "fantasy" of the great life in the great life is that you've got to find someone who is really compatible with you for the things you want to do in life. And there are few things worse than sailing with someone you fight with."

He has collected times sitting in his study, a brown suede-walled room with shelves filled with books that reflect his artistic and commercial interests and a magnificent rolling desk. Here he would sit in the middle of the night telephoning the future since he was going through a phase of buying and selling gold and silver futures since he was going through the greatest success game of all time.

At the moment he is deciding what to do next, so he goes off for lengthy lunches at his restaurant. "I find drinking can pass away the time quite well. I would like to be a racing alcoholic at this stage." Because "I want to be at



The Gowing sitting is dominated by a nude Clifton Pugh in a Frank Hodgkinson painting. "I'm very fond of the painting and I think it's lightness and airy blends in with the garden," says Dennis Gowing.

The House-hunter

No. 150

An Age Real Estate Promotions Feature

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EXISTING FRONT

PROPOSED

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DINING & KITCHEN WITH FIREPLACE

HOME RENOVATOR SEMINAR

The Age and the RAA are running a series of free home renovator's nights to provide home owners with information and advice on renovating or extending. Admission is Free.

At: City of Sandringham, Municipal Offices, Royal Avenue, Sandringham

DATE: Tuesday 8 July 1986 at 7.30 pm to 10.00 pm.

Renovation. Step one.

The problem with renovating or extending an old home is not so much knowing when to stop, but where to start.

If you start with our free lecture, our experts will lead you right through the maze. Planning, building regulations, loans, sub-contracting, energy-saving materials and appliances, and more.

So afterwards, you'll know the next step. All the steps after that. And all the traps to avoid.

It's on Tuesday evening, July 22, from 6 to 9, with coffee from 5.30. At our City auditorium, ground floor, 171 Flinders Street.

Numbers are limited, and interest is high. So book now, on 652 4222, extension 5757.

Renovation can be a complex and costly business. But at least the first step's free.

Gas and Fuel Corporation.

THE double-fronted Victorian terrace at 127 Clark Street, in Port Melbourne is, to coin a phrase, "a renovator's dream". That is not to suggest it is virtually unbuildable — quite the reverse, in fact. However, the premises have been "laid up" for so long ago, without much opportunity for the original style of the period.

Architects: The Royal Australian Institute of Architects advisory services committee, commissioned South Melbourne architect Brad Hooper to prepare a concept report which involves restoring the house to its former glory, while catering for the needs of a modern family.

If you would be interested in a similar assessment of your home, Architects will prepare a conceptual report for you. The cost is \$250 and can be arranged by telephoning Melbourne 819 4071 or Albany (06) 21 6410.

The Clark Street house consists of a master bedroom, three other bedrooms, a separate livingroom, central bathroom, kitchen with adjacent familyroom, separate television room and sunny north-facing rear garden.

Mr Hooper's first step would be to restore the front of the building. This entails replacing the existing aluminium windows with the timber double

hang variety. Further enhancement of this area would be provided by a big corrugated iron canopy over the bedroom windows. A "full wood" veranda complete with wooden posts would also be more in keeping with the character of the original building.

In addition, a new front garden fence to replace the current brick one and removal of the current paving to allow for landscaping would vastly improve the appearance of the facade.

Restoration of the interior could possibly be undertaken in stages, according to the client's budget. Basically, it is envisaged that the house be "opened up" to allow more light and a sense of the extensive back garden.

The hallway could have a skylight inserted to give a cheery aspect, to start with. Then Mr Hooper suggests stripping out the timber panelling and removing the suspended acoustic false ceiling, which doubles overcast lighting, such as ceramic and mosaic. The fluorescent light could be replaced by more appropriate fittings.

In Mr Hooper's plan, the dining room changes to a livingroom, and opens up to the remodelled kitchen. By demolishing one internal

wall, the fourth bedroom becomes a family/livingroom, which increases the amount of space in the house available for family interaction.

The fireplace could then be used as a focal point for the whole family, which would be particularly popular on a chilly winter's evening.

The bathroom and kitchen are just adequate at the moment, but could be upgraded with new fixtures, finishes and fittings, in line with the client's financial position. Mr Hooper recommends that the false ceiling in the bathroom be removed and that new lighting be installed in the kitchen, ensuring delightful lighting via a simple lamp, as well as ceiling and a simple aspect, as well as lighting the interior and outdoor entertaining areas.

A laundry and toilet are attached to the rear of the house. Mr Hooper plans to demolish these, and add a new laundry with a toilet on to the back porch. Timber would be used to construct this, as in the case of the veranda, to give added interest to the area. The side of the block allows for parking, considerable landscaping, vegetable and flower beds or the installation of a swimming pool. Rear access is available for self-drive parking of one or more cars, as well.

Mr Hooper describes his plans as a "substantial conservative proposal".

It does not alter the roof line and there are no alterations to the main structure. Another advantage is offers is that there are no large-scale items involved, allowing a reasonable amount of time to be spent on the existing building.

Nothing in the proposal, he has designed with a fairly casual lifestyle in mind, perhaps that of a young couple with a small family. For instance, there is no formal dining room, although a formal dining table could be put in the livingroom if desired.

A further appealing quality of Mr Hooper's idea is that the alterations will bring the house up to date, while still being in the present. For example, one may choose to install a new kitchen and remove the old. The next step could be to do the interior of the rear of the house, possibly followed by the restoration of the exterior, as future projects. Finally, improvements might be made on a room-by-room basis in accordance with the client's budget.

Work could be sub-contracted in packages, such as the window replacement, new veranda and new porch. Major tasks like the refurbishing of the bathroom and kitchen, however, are best handled and coordinated by a builder. The architect's role would be to help coordinate

staged renovation and to find the best builder for the job, both valuable tributes to the success of the renovation.

Mr Hooper strongly advises having an overall master plan of detailed drawings prepared by an architect which helps establish firm prices for the building work, and facilitates construction. Building approvals will be required by the local council and the architect can assist in the preparation of necessary documents. Most importantly, the overall master plan can help avoid costly mistakes.

The property, conveniently located in an up and coming part of Port Melbourne, close to beaches, shops and schools, will be auctioned by Hawking Stuart on Saturday 28 June at 12.30 pm. It is expected to bring at least \$120,000.

Estimates for the renovation works are as follows:

- Interior Kitchen: \$5000
- Bathroom: \$2000
- Laundry and toilet: \$2000
- Veranda: \$2000
- Demolition: \$2000
- Front garden: \$2000
- Electrical: \$2000
- Painting: \$2000
- Roof: \$1000
- Total: \$12,000

For more information, please call and contact Mr Hooper.