



# NGV

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# FIONA HALL UNEASY SEASONS

STILL RIDING THE WAVE: HOKUSAI / JAPANESE MEETS AUSTRALIAN  
MAKIGAWA'S ARCHIVE / NGV TRIENNIAL SPOTLIGHT: XU ZHEN  
ON ARTISTS / WOMEN IN DESIGN / CODING, CREATIVITY &...

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## LAST WORD

In the experimental, expanding, surprisingly boundary-pushing world that was 1930s Australia, a radical new piece of technology known as the radio 'brought the world into almost every Australian home'. Collector **Peter Sheridan AM** speaks about his love of Art Deco, and loaning forty of his own radios to the NGV for the *Brave New World: Australia 1930s* exhibition on display at The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia.

**NGV Magazine: You are a dentist, and a collector of radios ... What else?**

**Peter Sheridan:** I am by profession a dentist, but my hobby is photography and my obsession is collecting. I am an expert in clinical photography and give lectures and run courses for dental professionals all around Australia and New Zealand. My wife Jan and I live in Elizabeth Bay in Sydney which is a suburb steeped in the Art Deco style, which forms a nice backdrop for our collections of that period.

**NGV: Your collection of radios of the 1930s and 1940s is considered one of the best in the world. When did you start collecting radios and why?**

**PS:** It started serendipitously in London in the late 1990s when I saw a shop that specialised in plastics of the 1930s, and there were two radios which I found mesmerising. One was the iconic Australian AWA Radiolette of 1934 (displayed in the *Brave New World* exhibition) and the other an American Emerson from the late 1930s. I was taken with the vibrant colours, the Deco styling and fact that they were plastic. Our collection now contains more than 300 special radios with significant design features from fifteen different countries. While we collect traditional art, furniture, glass and sculptures in the Deco style, my

major collections have always been outside the mainstream. I choose something that attracts me, often something that others may not appreciate or value. I do not buy for investment, but if my collections become more sought after or valuable over time that is a bonus.

**NGV: Can you share any interesting stories and people you have encountered through collecting?**

**PS:** Many collectors are very private individuals and they can at different times be friends, colleagues and competitors. I have been lucky to see some extraordinary collections of radios and jewellery in the United States and of Chiparus and Preiss sculptures in Brazil. When I was in Rio de Janeiro a few years ago I found a couple of rare American Air King radios in an old antique shop. Both the shop owner and I were happy with the negotiated price. The word got around that someone was buying old radios and at dinner that night in a restaurant the locals arrived with radios in their cars hoping to sell them to me.

**NGV: How might collecting radios be different to collecting other objects?**

**PS:** Art Deco pieces of art, furniture, glass and sculpture are well-defined and have been collected for many years and formalised in

reference books. On the other hand, most radio enthusiasts have traditionally been technically oriented and interested in repairing the working parts of the chassis and valves as well as restoring wooden consoles. Another group are those who love the programming and characters involved in radio broadcasting. Being interested in the elements of design, material and colour of the cabinets of mass-produced small radios is more uncommon, but I have helped to popularise this with my two books *Radio Days: Australian Bakelite Radios* (2008) and *Deco Radio: The Most Beautiful Radios Ever Made* (2014). This has brought radio into the Art Deco and design world where they are now recognised as iconic examples of the genre and one of the first examples of art meeting industry. *Deco Radio* explores the almost unknown involvement of many famous industrial designers from the United States and United Kingdom in the design of these radios in the early 1930s, early in their careers and long before they became famous for other commissions.

**NGV: Tell us about your involvement in the *Brave New World* exhibition.**

**PS:** In 2008 the NGV, in conjunction with the Victoria and Albert Museum of London, held an Art Deco exhibition in which a few of my radios were displayed, and my first book was sold in



the Gallery bookshop. With this background, the curators of *Brave New World* approached me to lend one or two radios for the new exhibition. When they saw the collection they decided that they would highlight forty Australian radios of the 1930s because they reflect so many of the changes taking place in Australian life at that time, and so many of the themes of the exhibition.

**NGV: How has the role of the radio changed in our modern society?**

**PS:** Between 1930 and 1940 the radio brought the world into almost every Australian home, providing news, sports, drama and entertainment for every member of the family. The small tabletop radio was cheap yet stylish and colourful, and its portability allowed it to be used in every room in the house. Programs were not only for the man of the house, or for the whole family, but were targeted also at women, children and the elderly. Radio today continues as part of broadcast and communication media but, with the change from analogue to digital, is now becoming part of internet capability via a suite of applications which allow radio programs to be listened to at any particular time. Very soon a separate radio as a piece of furniture or a domestic appliance will not exist. Radio is already an internet option, and coming

generations will have no experience of the singularity that was once radio.

**NGV: If you could go back in time to the 1930–40s, what modern object would you take with you and what would you most like to do or experience?**

**PS:** The problem with going back in time is that you may impact your own future. That aside, I would go back to 1930 and take a book or even an iPad with the history of the Second World War in the hope that knowing the tragedy and horror about to unfold, it might be avoided. Also I would like to have been in New York in the early 1930s watching the Empire State and Chrysler buildings being built. I would have liked to see them punctuating the skyline as early expressions of the modern Art Deco-styled skyscraper.

BRAVE NEW WORLD: AUSTRALIA 1930S IS ON DISPLAY AT NGV AUSTRALIA FROM 14 JULY UNTIL OCTOBER 2017.

**‘WHEN I WAS IN RIO DE JANEIRO A FEW YEARS AGO ... WORD GOT AROUND THAT SOMEONE WAS BUYING OLD RADIOS AND AT DINNER THAT NIGHT IN A RESTAURANT THE LOCALS ARRIVED WITH RADIOS IN THEIR CARS HOPING TO SELL THEM TO ME.’**

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