

WOMBAT HOLLOW



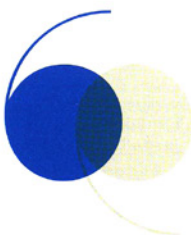
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Financial Review Magazine

Michael Yabsley

Honorary Federal Treasurer
of the Liberal Party

"I really like agricultural and industrial artefacts," says Michael Yabsley, who has

collected them most of his life. "As a child, my idea of bliss was going to the local garbage dump with my father [where] I would scavenge and find whatever I wanted. [These days], I keep an eye out as I'm travelling around, going to garage sales and markets. I have a collection of about 250 iron beds that were made between 1840 and 1910 roughly, [along with] hundreds and hundreds of industrial artefacts that could just as easily have gone to scrap metal."

Among this diverse collection of curious industrial-era paraphernalia there are leather-workers' tools, machine parts, filters and funnels and shoemakers' lasts. "Something like an old water sprinkler is sculpture to me," he says. "There's a real integrity in the form and in the material that you don't see in [contemporary] mass-produced items. I call these items 'orphan artefacts', because they have largely been discarded.

"I would like to think that a beautiful old leather-creasing machine could be seen as something that should be preserved. I think there is amazing art in an old grinder or sharpener. But the reality is that, unless they're given a new life, the prospects for these things are not very good at all."

And so the idea of turning the artefacts into lamps evolved. "My imagination had been triggered by some lamps I'd seen [which were made from old] tripods. Towards the end of 2007, I made a couple of lamps I really thought were working well. Then I got particularly interested in the combination of the base and the shade. You can't put a chain-store shade on these things! I've never made the [cloth] shades myself; shade making is a craft in its own right. But I experimented with different fabrics and shapes. I then seized on the whole juxtaposition of the industrial artefact with the fine fabric shade – a turn-of-the-century bench drill and a box-pleated silk shade – and I really liked the contrast of that," says Yabsley, adding with satisfaction, "Some say they're really blokey bases with really girlie shades.

"The shades are basically fabrics, hide, feathers and a few other things. I've become a big fan of muslin," he says, "and the quill shades are very quirky and a bit of fun. The metal shades we do in the workshop in Wombat Hollow [Yabsley's home in the Southern Highlands of NSW]. I have now got people working with me who are better at the manufacturing side than I am, because we are taking this seriously, [but] I get a real buzz from it every step of the way; taking the artefact through a repair and rejuvenation process, designing the lamp. It's my other world.

"My guiding principle in the whole process is to do as much as is necessary but as little as possible. These things should be a statement about their history and their life cycle. That's all part of the motivation; to create something that has these connections. I really want people to see the art in them. I prefer to think it [leans more to] sculpture than light. If you were looking for something to read *The AFR Magazine* by, it probably wouldn't be a Wombat Hollow lamp!"

Michael Yabsley's lamps can be seen at www.wombathollow.net.au ■

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