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WORLDWIDE LIVING

AUSTRALIA





HOW ARTIST DAVID BROMLEY wakes up knowing what he's going to do each day is anyone's guess.

Celebrated primarily for his Pop-Art-meets-Expressionism paintings of boys seemingly sprung from *Boys Own* annuals and 1950s storybooks, Bromley also sculpts. Oh, and he's also a potter, a print maker, a collector, designer and a filmmaker – having just sold animations of his paintings to SBS.

There's more. With his partner, Tori Dixon-Whittle, and their two children, Holly, three, and seven-month-old Willem, Bromley ricochets among several properties, states and studio spaces, producing art while adding to his cache of collectables and overseeing three shops. Called *A Day on Earth*, the shops, in Victoria's Armadale and Daylesford and in Brisbane (see page 93), stock whatever has appealed to Bromley – from his own pottery, to re-claimed furniture, architectural fittings, toys and ephemera.

How does he do it? *Why* does he do it? "It's a bit full-on," Bromley concedes. "It's fun, but it is a compulsion, and it doesn't make a lot of sense. But that's sort of what I like about it. Tori and I are driven to do things that interest us. I love it. I'm like a mad conductor."

His partner concurs. "We're too busy to do something that doesn't interest us," says Dixon-Whittle, a painter in her own right, who also designs children's clothes and recently returned from a buying trip to Latvia and Lithuania for the shops.

"David is remarkable; he has this incredible ability to have a great overview. In saying that, we're also a great team. I look after the administrative, boring stuff. I like making things work."

One antidote to their daily juggle is the house in Daylesford, a creatively dynamic and dozy-paced town an hour west of Melbourne.

The lush garden is a wonderland, set across five acres, and partly planted by the team who worked on Melbourne's Botanical Gardens. The hanging cane chair from Tarlo and Graham provides a spot from which to wile away the hours. **ABOVE:** a papier-mâché rocking horse, picked up in St Kilda, sits on the verandah.



LEFT: the hallway leading into Bromley's studio is punctuated by his bronze sculpture, *Boy Painting*, which sits in front of a Russian painting and alongside a French hot air balloon cage. The kitchen, **BELOW AND OPPOSITE**, is dominated by the working fireplace which Bromley calls "the heart of the place" and the early Australian gum and kauri pine dining table. On the kitchen bench are plates and bowls made by the artist. Nelson 'Bubble' lamps, a modern classic, hang overhead adding a contemporary note. Presiding over the room is a colourful Mark Howson painting. On the wall opposite a still-life pear painting by Tori is propped below a Mark Schaller painting. To the right of the stove is a Bromley sculpture in forged steel, *Journeys to Come*.

When hemmed-in living left Dixon-Whittle craving easy access to nature, the initial wish was for rolling hills, acreage and maybe a creek, she says. "Then we found this town and we love it.

"The thing is that when we drove to here for the first time, Holly said, 'Is this our house?' She loved it, jumped out, took off and ran around, when normally she's very clingy. We just said, 'Gotta have it.'"

The house was overdue for some love. Having been owned by an elderly man who simply shut off most of it for the last 15 years of his life, it was being eyed by a developer with demolition on his mind.

Of course, his reasons for demolishing were what captivated Bromley and Dixon-Whittle. "I love the fact that this house is like stepping back into another time," Bromley reflects. "We sort of yearn for time gone by, but without that sense of nostalgia. We like the values of the times, the beautiful timbers and the finishes. We love fixing up old places; it's sculptural to us, I suppose."

"I've always been a bit evangelical about the creative process. I don't see the point of a kitchen just having your plates, cutlery, pots and pans. You need something that makes you feel that life is more than just the pragmatic. It's the triumph of the spirit or the soul."

Out of appreciation for the house, the changes Bromley and Dixon-Whittle implemented were few: peeling wallpaper was replaced with paint and ripped-up carpet revealed pine floorboards, which were then stripped and coated with lime.






PHOTOGRAPHER: EARL CARTER
PRODUCER: LEESA O'REILLY



COUNTRY PRACTICE

Artist David Bromley finds peace and creativity in his charming home in Daylesford.



STUDIO WALL: The studio is dominated by Biondy's graphic wall mural. **TABLE:** To the right hangs a small portrait of a man by Melissa Edwards. **YEAH, RIGHT:** The Bay on Wall, to the left of the window, from the Young Artful series, is a welcome distraction from work in progress. **BOY IN HEAVEN:** which sits on the wall. A red Chinese lacquered stool, where Biondy sits to ponder the world, sits to the side of a vintage Danish leather lounge. **TABLES:** and paper.



Humble finishes in grand proportions. Seven chairs picked up in India attend a French spindle leg table. The timber rabbit from Japan and ceramic vase, on table, often spark discussion, and all is laid out on a rug from Afghanistan. The Tarlo and Graham depression-era lockers, left of the fireplace, hold another Bromley sculpture. The ceiling light was fashioned from a 30-piece installation by artist Chaco Kato. Bromley's Study of Lichtenstein painting, right of the fireplace, eyeballs the viewer. Boy with Dog bronze and Zaishu stool, complete the room.







OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP LEFT: keeping watch over the firewood in the garden are two cubist Latvian copper sculptures. **LEFT:** the generous living room has plenty of space for some treasures picked up from overseas: a life-size papier mâché woman from Japan; a Danish leather lounge suite; and a 1930s American painting, over the fireplace. But the artist still gets a nod in this room with a Bromley oil painting, *Storybook Children*, and his *Journeys To Come* sculpture in forged steel. More of the 30-piece Chaco Kato installation hangs from the ceiling and forms a decorative piece in the fireplace: **ABOVE:** a pile of collage remnants. **BELOW:** Bromley's *Boy With Dog* in bronze. **BELOW, LEFT:** a Bernard Buffet sketch, which was given to Bromley by a friend when his daughter Holly was born; school chairs find a nifty home on the wall and can be easily pulled down when needed. **OPPOSITE PAGE, BOTTOM RIGHT:** outside, an old wool sorting bench and Chinese stools provide the perfect spot for lunch. **OPPOSITE, FAR LEFT:** Bromley's thoughts are scrawled across his studio walls, complementing a large painting by *Cherry Hood* of a blonde, blue-eyed boy, and a black glass Italian chandelier.



OPPOSITE PAGE: a Richard Dunlop painting, bought from Jan Murphy Gallery, sits above the bed in the master bedroom. A 1940s mirrored sign is just visible, sitting on top of the Czechoslovakian grey wood cupboard. **RIGHT:** Bromley's bronze elephant squats in the corner of the bathroom, surrounded by Japanese fishing floats. One of Holly's chairs stands in front of a French table and a Danish painting hangs on the wall. **BELOW:** the down hill racer, "a housewarming present from a friend" keeps company with Bromley's Muscle Boy in the garden. Details, last pages.



At the same time, a wall between the dining and living rooms was removed, and a kitchen fireplace was restored.

Throughout the house, furniture is a blend of cultures and ages. Above a favourite old kauri pine kitchen table hang contemporary Danish lights. In the dining room, an antique French oak table keeps unaccustomed company with Indian chairs, while living room sofas are both Danish, both leather, but separated in age by a century.

Friends who frequently come along for country weekends are adept at doing their own thing and going with the pervasive creative flow. It is, after all, bigger than they are. Witness the Friday night when Bromley had determined not to paint and had therefore brought no canvasses ... he woke in the night and simply decided to paint on his studio walls instead.

Having had a few lost years in his youth, Bromley's outlook now is determinedly optimistic. "I do feel that an artist somehow needs to look at what's going on in society and to question it a bit," he says. "That questioning seems for a long time to have come from cutting edge intellectualism or an anarchistic approach, of which there's a lot in society at the moment. I would simply ask people to look into their past and parts of themselves that are the child within - into a reality that's a bit more gentle."

DEBORAH BARTLETT PITT

David Bromley's Young Artist Series will be showing internationally at Art Santa Fe, July 12-15, www.artsantafe.com; www.davidbromley.com.au.