

A sculptor with the heart of a Lyon



Award-winning sculptor Jon Dixon has spent 20 years creating the Lyons Sculpture Park, near Heywood, in an organic and creative project that has no end.

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[/dropcap]f sculptor **Jon Dixon** had his way, this story would contain only a single sentence: "art is important".

"That's all you need to write," he says, as we start our tour of the 15-acre **Lyons Sculpture Park** that he and his wife, Chris, have created on their bush property 21km west of Heywood.

After walking just two or three minutes through what is a combination of sculpture, gardens, raw bush, and farmland it is patently clear, however, that one sentence is not going to cut it. Sorry Jon.

Indeed it is difficult to describe the park, because it refuses to slot into any simple category.

It is a “park”, but not a manicured one. It is a gallery, but without an entry fee or labels on any of the works. And it is full of stone, wood and metal sculptures, some of which are obvious to the eye, but also others that are tucked in nooks and crannies: up a tree, behind a bush, attached to a fallen log.



The natural bush on the 15 acre property is studded with gorgeous sculptures, including this one from pink dolomite.

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[/dropcap]he sculpture park – and the Dixon home – sits on what was once the township of Lyons and covers 30 individual titles: all half acre blocks that were once occupied by the small community built around the timber industry.

Jon and Chris bought the property 20 years ago, after Jon decided to quit his executive lifestyle and return to his first love of art.

“I was running my own industrial door company (in Melbourne) and I watched all of the company executives I knew climbing up the corporate ladder, stepping on heads along the way, burning people off along the way...and they were all miserable,” he said.

Once Jon and Chris, who is a secondary school English teacher, found the Lyons property, they knew it was the perfect place to stretch out and exercise their creativity.

Born in England, but raised in working-class New Zealand, Jon was immersed in the artistic and cultural symbols of the Maori people and this influence is clear in his style today.



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[/dropcap]ost of Jon's sculptures are worked from local limestone and bluestone, sometimes paired with "found" objects such as a recycled milk vat or a cemetery headstone, or the remnants of industrial farm machinery, equipment or tools. He also creates large metal sculptures, the most striking of which is a life-size silhouette of a rearing horse placed among the tall, yellowing grass of the property.

[box] **Jon has generously donated a gorgeous sculpture valued at \$600 to be given away to one lucky paid subscriber. [Click here for details](#) on how to win this wonderful piece.**[/box]

One of the engaging things about the park is that there is no particular theme and it moves easily from the abstract – an overgrown field full of female torsos – to the spiritual, such

as the “Stonehenge” style installation in a perfectly mown circle of a grass, to the political. The lack of labels or interpretive notes lets the viewer see what they want to see.

The raw bush, which Jon clearly loves and is slowly restoring to its native state, also contains a range of works, including a simple stone disc punctured with numerous holes.

Jon tells the story of a visiting Asian family who were captivated by this piece after he invited them to find “the most beautiful leaf” from the many gum leaves on the ground and place it into a hole.

“This was a family that, at home, had to drive two hours to find open space and here we have beautiful, natural bush. They stood here for a long time, just picking up leaves – dead ones, green ones – and placing them into the holes,” he said.

You are right, Jon. Art is (so) important.



[box type="bio"] Jon Dixon has received numerous accolades for his work, including winning the prestigious [Montalto Sculpture](#)

[Prize](#) in 2003. You can see more of Jon's work at his [website here](#) and find him on [Facebook here](#). The Lyons Sculpture Park is at 4143 Princes Highway, Lyons. Ph: 0437 000 433. Open daily 9am – 5pm. Free. [/box]



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From ugly quarry to garden of eden



Landscape gardener Paul Ryan with “Tina” (made by Lust for Rust) who presides over a corner of his magnificent 10-acre garden on Hopkins Point Road, Warrnambool.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A02F2F;"]P
[/dropcap]aul Ryan has the salty-haired, stocky, sun-browned body of a person who has spent a life working outdoors and swimming in the sea, and these twin loves are behind a project that has dominated his life for almost a decade.

The self-taught landscape gardener and avid surfer has spent the past eight years slowly transforming an abandoned quarry on the corner of Hopkins Point and Tooram roads, Allansford, from an overgrown and derelict eyesore into a magnificent, 10-acre garden that almost defies description.

Paul, 45, who grew up on a farm on Terang, had always dreamt of creating a “big acreage garden” and when he saw the ‘for sale’ sign on the old quarry property, he could instantly see the potential.

“There was 2.3 acres of flat land at the top that I thought would be ideal for a house block and the remainder was in pretty bad shape, but it was a good size and at a reasonable price,” he says.



Low-water, low-maintenance plants have been used throughout the garden to ensure environmental friendliness and far less upkeep.

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[dropcap]aul bought the land and lived in a caravan on the site for eight months while he built his house, then he set to work dividing the garden into different rooms, or zones, each with their own distinct character: traditional European, modern Australia, renaissance and a gothic garden among them.

Each room has been methodically and meticulously brought to life with mass plantings of extraordinary succulents, grasses,

trees, shrubs, bushes and flowers – including rare species such as a South American silk floss tree – that require little water or ongoing maintenance, which are both critical to a large-scale garden.

“When some people see what I have done, they ask how I maintain it all, well a lot of it looks after itself – apart from the mowing and I like my ride-on mower, it is a form of meditation to me,” Paul laughs.



The striking trunk of the rare South American silk floss tree that is part of Paul's collection of more than 6000 plants.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A02F2F;"] W
[/dropcap]hile Paul has not kept count of the number of plants he has planted, he believes there would be more than 6000 that he has collected, bought or been given over the years.

“Nurseries to me are like supermarkets. I can walk in and, within a minute or two, I know if there is something there that I want: I know what to look for,” he explains.

“You also learn things as you go along and evolve as the garden evolves. I am always learning more about plants, their heritage and their various meanings to various cultures.”



Recycled driftwood camouflages an otherwise ugly shipping container used for storage.

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[/dropcap]he plants, however, are only one half of the story. The stunning garden is also a showcase of recycled objects that have been used to landscape or beautify various parts of

the property, many of which Paul has collected while surfing – an almost daily ritual.

An ugly shipping container, for example, has been completely camouflaged by long pieces of driftwood. Dozens of discarded fishing buoys decorate a wooden fence and, in another part of the property, a heavy-duty line of marine rope serves as a hand-rail for a boardwalk.

Building materials – timber, bricks, masonry, stones – have also been recycled as paths, walks, and rockeries and the property is dotted with sculptures that Paul has either purchased or made himself.



The two enormous urns at the gateway to the ‘gothic’ garden are recycled cement mixer barrels tipped on their end.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A02F2F;"] 0
[/dropcap]ne of the most intriguing and eye-catching

installations are two enormous, rust-coloured urns that stand either side of the gated entrance to the “gothic” garden and house two equally enormous plants. Paul explains that the ‘urns’ are in fact cement mixer barrels that he has cut down and tipped on to their ends.

“It is hard work, but it is my therapy. I see it as garden Buddhism – breaking my rocks, mowing my lawn, fixing my mistakes – but it is also an obsession,” he laughs.

Paul’s great uncle and grandfather were gardeners at the prestigious *Minjah* property, near Caramut, so he thinks he has obviously been touched by the same gene that doesn’t shy away from gardening on a grand scale.

Will Paul’s garden, however, ever reach an end point?

“I am giving myself four more years and then it will be finished, but it still won’t be complete.”



Paul has also made some creative sculptures, like these balls of barbed wire, to decorate his

spectacular property.

[box type="bio"] Paul holds an open day at The Quarry about once a month until winter. Entry is \$10 to cover upkeep costs. Bluestone will let you know via our [Facebook page](#) when the next open day is scheduled. **Update:** the next open day is March 22 and 23. If you are a [Bluestone Club](#) member, check out how you can win [a double pass](#). We have removed our slideshow in the hope you will go and see the real thing – and tell Paul you read it in Bluestone! [/box]



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