1913 Glorious Days! was a major exhibition held at the National Museum of Australia, Canberra, in 2013. It marked the 100-year anniversary of the development of Canberra as the new capital, the establishment of the Australian navy, and the hopes and aspirations of Australians in a progressive society before the outbreak of the Great War. McNeil was invited to write for the accompanying catalogue, Glorious Days: Australia 1913. An intensive planning day for this task with seventeen historians was conducted at the Museum in mid 2012, chaired by Professor Stuart McIntyre and attended by prominent Australian historians including Humphrey McQueen.

The invitation to McNeil was based on his expertise in the area of Australian material culture, architectural history and domestic life. His contribution emphasises that the domestic environment was not simply reflective of the political economy; it actively shaped that sphere too. Weather, health and morality were connected to new ideas concerning the modern consumer and householder. The development immediately before the War of the first working and middle-class garden suburbs with the model of low-density housing in detached or semi-detached ‘California’ style brick or wood bungalows suggested an ideal for family life that would transform the appearance of Australian towns and cities. The research therefore has implications for understanding the propensity for low density housing in contemporary Australia and matters of sustainability and urban planning today.
DOMESTIC ENVIRONMENTS

PETER McNEIL

By 1913, more than one-third (37 per cent) of Australia’s population lived in cities and we can marshal much evidence – from material culture, oral histories, and submissions before commissions into the living wage and housing – to create a snapshot of domestic life at this time. In the preceding century, the connections between high rates of disease, poverty and crime, and inadequate, overcrowded housing had become clear. Town planning, improved domestic architecture and the provision of basic amenities were increasingly embraced for their role in social engineering and as solutions to medical problems. Home ownership was seen as a path out of poverty and low respectable, and the loan schemes that enabled the purchase of homes in all Australian states by the 1920s have their roots in the workers’ housing Acts, for example, Western Australia’s Western Homes Act of 1911.

This was a dynamic period of social progress, marked by the professionalisation of housecraft, cookery and mothercraft within the domestic science movements that emerged in Australia and in the United States from the 1890s. New attitudes appeared at this time in Australian domestic architecture in terms of internal planning, the increased size of windows, ease of access to the outdoors and the management of light. The possibilities offered by living in a flat were promoted for the first time, and the impact of workers’ housing on productivity and quality of life came under increasing scrutiny.
Domestic Environments

Published essay:
Published essay:
1839 and 1849, the Royal Diner series functioned as a social event where food and drink were served, and the environment of the diner was designed to create a sense of luxury and exclusivity.

PETER McNEIL
Domestic Environments

Published essay:
The book "Glorious Days: Australia 1913" by Peter McNeil provides a glimpse into the domestic environments of that era. The foreword by the author sets the stage, highlighting the focus on the domestic sphere and the challenges faced by women during that time. The book includes a detailed list of contents, indicating its comprehensive approach to the topic. A weblink to the publication is available for further exploration of the content.

Weblink: