

**HD** CHRIS WALLACE

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CHRIS WALLACE A capital vote of confidence

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As spring unfolds this year, there's a sense around Canberra that, somehow, we've beaten the bastards. The Abbott government did its best to crush our collective spirit with a series of mean policy decisions; the third of the four most recent federal governments to do so. The Rudd and Howard governments were the others. The Gillard government didn't do us any favours but at least didn't gratuitously whack us the way the incoming Abbott, Rudd and Howard governments did. Yet we didn't crumble. Spring has taken hold and spirits have lifted. They tried to get us but Canberra's now deeply rooted resilience got us through, and the mood is up. Here are exhibits A, **B**, C and D from the alphabet of signs that not only have we survived, but that the Canberra moment might be arriving, too. Exhibit A is the opening of NGA Contemporary on the southern foreshore of Lake Burley Griffin. Ron Radford arrived in Canberra determined to do many things with the National Gallery of Australia, and achieved a remarkable number of them. Getting contemporary Australian art out of the "attic" - as he calls the top rear galleries of the NGA building where it's housed now - was one of them. Not getting stage two of his redevelopment plan up before completing his directorship, it looked like it he wouldn't manage it in any form. Then, on the eve of leaving, came Radford's inspired takeover of an underutilised

National Capital Authority building within NGA strolling distance to showcase contemporary Australian art; just until stage two is approved, funded and built, of course. A brilliant move. Exhibit **B** is The Code running in prime time on Sunday nights on ABC TV. Could Australians get a visually sexier new look at their national capital, or be more stimulated to think about what actually goes on here and what it means for them and the world? I don't think so. The ABC executive who green lit The Code ought to get if not the keys to the city, at least an arboretum grove dedicated in their honour. The producer, writer, director, art director, cinematographer and key cast all ought to have streets named after them as a thank you. And let's include the main title designer in that list; the titles are exquisite. The Code reveals to the outside world what we've always known: from the coolest contemporary building (think John Curtin School of Medical Research) to the daggiest fast-food caravan, from here to the coast, we live in an incredible place. From David Wenham's evil deputy prime minister, to Adele Perovic's compromised hacker and Dan Spielman's questing, caring journalist - yes, they exist - we've got good and bad like everywhere else. We're not boring. Exhibit C is noted national food critic John Lethlean's recent reviews of Canberra restaurants Monster, Aubergine and Temporada. Lethlean is one tough hombre as a restaurant reviewer. Temporada's food was praised highly (though he bagged out the

allegedly more interested in each other than the customers staff). He eulogised Aubergine's food and service while Monster had him in ecstasy. Is Monster's yabbie jaffle Canberra's defining dish of the early 21st century? Fun, cool, innovative, nutritious, delicious; yes, that's early 21st century Canberra to me. Once it was hard to get even decent **bread** in Canberra. Now we not only pass but have restaurants that thrill exacting Lethlean. That's significant. Exhibit D is how often Canberra and our region, the Monaro, turn up one way or another in wider Australia these days. This month you can see Kryptonite, Sue Smith's new play at the Sydney Theatre **Company**; billed as a love story for the Asian century, but equally a hard look at Australia-**China** relations and contemporary gender relations. One of the two characters, Dylan, is a Greens senator whose personal and political crisis is our daily **bread** and **butter**. While in Sydney, you could drop into the Hughes Gallery in Surry Hills to see if the sole remaining Weed painting from Lucy Culliton's just-closed Weeds of the Monaro show is still in the stockroom for **sale**. Culliton's other 26

Weeds of the Monaro pieces all **sold** at prices ranging from \$5000 to \$9000. It was a great show. I look at weeds in a different light now. Even though Culliton lives at the other end of the Monaro, where the Monaro Highway crosses the Bombala River, Canberra is hers, too.

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**CO** nlgllu : National Gallery of Australia

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