


YOURS TO KEEP SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2024

# the Brighter

side of banking

## Scott Cam

The *Block* host  
shares his  
hard-learned  
money lessons



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Scan here to  
start your Will



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“How could I say no to creating a home somewhere so forward-thinking and rooted in community?”

GERALD POWER

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### *Live your best life*

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# Welcome

Financial abuse is one of those things that once you know the signs, it becomes impossible to miss the flags popping up around you. Or you may be haunted by the ones that flew by when you didn't know any better. At least, that's been my experience. Looking back, I've had conversations with friends that I now realise were missed opportunities.

It's normal to get together with friends and – yes – vent a little. A while ago, I was commiserating with a friend whose husband cancelled a holiday she'd been looking forward to because she'd had too much fun at a party. He didn't like it so the trip was taken away. Another time, a former colleague told me that she never had any money because her partner made her buy all the groceries and anything the kids needed so he could save his salary in an account she couldn't access. These are signs of financial abuse.

It's not that one data point defines someone's situation but now I wish I'd said something like: "Does this happen a lot?" or "Is that what you want?" or even shared the phone number that anyone can call to get free advice (detailed on page 16).

There are no time machines and I can't go back to those moments with my new-found perspective. But what I've learned from the CommBank Next Chapter team is that knowing the signs could help you start a conversation with a friend or family member who may be experiencing financial abuse. In my opinion, there's never been a better reason to brave an awkward conversation.



**Brooke Le Poer Trench**  
Content Director

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# Know

*Money matters*

PHOTO ESSAY

## Orange crush

A tree change sparked a fruitful journey for food writer Sophie Hansen.

*Photo Essay*

# Bright Orange



STORY BY DILVIN YASA

One of the most popular destinations for people making a tree change, this regional NSW town offers festivals, great food and some vineyards to wander down, too.

Food writer Sophie Hansen moved to Orange for love but her tree change resulted in an unexpected career pivot.

“My whole life turned upside down when I met Tim in 2005. I was Sydney born and bred and very happily working in publishing but when I got engaged to a man whose business was based on a farm near Orange, I knew it was me who was going to make the move.

I knew enough about the burgeoning food and wine scene to understand that making a life here wouldn't be too hard. It never



“It’s an exciting time for women in regional towns like Orange.”

occurred to me to take my job with me. I just walked into my publisher’s office and said, ‘I’m engaged and I’m moving to the country. Thanks – it’s been great.’ Today, women around Australia are doing extraordinary work from farm offices that none of us could have imagined. It’s a really exciting time for women in regional towns like Orange.

When I moved to the farm, I was keen to carve out my own space and source of income and I wanted to keep writing and telling stories. And so my blog, *Local is Lovely*, was born. I plugged away at it for a few years before a publisher asked whether I’d be interested in writing a book and my career has evolved from there. Earlier this year I launched my latest book, *What Can I Bring?*, and I run a B&B on the farm, hosting monthly cooking classes and co-hosting a podcast called *Something to Eat and Something to Read* with bibliotherapist Germaine Leece.

Our family has grown, too. Tim and I have two teenagers so we’re keeping pretty busy. Many producers underwent a period of evaluation during the pandemic and we were no different. We decided it was time for a change from farming red deer and now do Angus cattle. It’s been a big shift.

Orange has always had a reputation as a beautiful area and I can barely turn around these days without meeting someone who’s moved here recently. I can’t blame them; we have four distinct seasons, a year-round calendar of events and interesting people in the community flying the flag for what a great lifestyle you can have here.”

For Mel Mooney, an agribusiness executive in Orange who works across Central West NSW, her economic and agricultural background is a valuable resource for the farmers she supports.

“I’ve always lived in regional NSW. I was an agronomist on the Liverpool Plains – the state’s breadbasket – and moved to Bathurst eight years ago for my daughter to go school there. A lot of my work was helping farmers apply for finance so I went into banking and joined CommBank two years ago.

My work is mostly based in Orange and I spend a lot of time meeting farmers who are restructuring or diversifying or whose crops are struggling and need some extra support. To farmers, an agronomist is like a doctor. My customers know I understand their business, whether that’s cropping, vineyards, livestock or vegetable production.

I love the diversity and resilience of the communities I work with. In 2022, floods affected Eugowra and Molong and through Rural Aid, five CommBank staff spent a day replacing fences on a property. I think the farmer wondered what bankers knew about fences but we’d all grown up on farms and drove the tractor and put in new posts. By the end of the day, he was pretty impressed.”

“I love the diversity and resilience of the local communities.”





“Orange felt like the perfect place to raise a family.”



Former rugby player Peter Mortimer and his wife, Julie, moved to Orange to give their five sons a country upbringing. He’s now the owner of Mortimers Wines.

“My wife, Julie, and I knew we wanted to raise our kids in the country. We both had an idyllic childhood in Wagga Wagga but we felt it was about an hour too far from Sydney. Mum and Dad were around the corner in Millthorpe so Orange made sense; we bought land in 1993 and moved when our eldest was 10, with our youngest arriving soon after.

I don’t know that I had any burning desire to produce my own wine in the beginning. With five boys at home, I needed an income and it made sense to use the land we’d bought.

Our goal was to grow and sell grapes to other wineries but after we saw the first bottle of chardonnay made from our grapes with another name stamped on it, Mortimers Wines was born. By 2007, our winery had grown so much that I gave up my TV job to focus on this, working alongside Julie and our son Daniel, who is the general manager.

All five of our boys moved away at some stage but then they started to come back and I think it’s proof of Orange’s pulling power. Locals will tell you our town is progressive and we have a great range of top-notch facilities for bringing up a family; we found the schooling here to be terrific. We’ve seen tourism boom in recent years – particularly around food and wine and whenever there’s a festival nearby, whether it’s the Parkes Elvis Festival or the Bathurst 1000. You won’t find a more vibrant town in regional Australia.

Adjusting to conditions can be tough – there are times when you’re blown off your feet and times when you’re watching crickets – but we’ve got a great support network, which counts for a lot. When you’re growing a business you need solid management behind you and over the past 25 years I’ve been a CommBank customer and had excellent business managers looking after my interests. When we expanded to add a new barrel hall and accommodation, I wasn’t sure how we were going to afford it but they made a plan we could stick to and we haven’t looked back. Now it’s all about creating a place where we can spend quality time with our children and 11 grandchildren. That was the whole point of the move, after all.”

Proud Juru/Kanaka man Gerald Power was attracted to the welcoming nature of the locals. He's now the deputy mayor of Orange and the founder and CEO of Indigenous Cultural Adventures.

"It wasn't cool to be Aboriginal in the 1970s and as I travelled from my home at the time in Bowen, Queensland, I encountered discrimination in some communities - until I got to Orange in 1980. Here, I found everyone welcoming. The council had a resettlement program where they were trying to attract Indigenous people to the town with housing and employment opportunities. How could I say no to creating a home somewhere so forward thinking and rooted in community? I've been trying to pay it forward ever since.

**"I'm the first Indigenous person to be elected to this council."**



I'd always wanted to share our culture with visitors to Country but since I'm not Wiradjuri [the Country Orange is located in], the process was not straightforward. I had to approach Elders for permission to do tours on their behalf and they had some reservations about a Juru/Kanaka man leading them - rightfully so. Fortunately, the launch of Indigenous Cultural Adventures in 2016 came at a time when focus on First Nations history increased dramatically. The Elders couldn't believe how much interest there was in their history, culture and customs. Eight years on, we're offering both cultural and bush tucker tours with a team of nine. I want to keep growing and create employment opportunities for First Nations youth.

It's crazy to think I'm the first Indigenous person to be elected to Orange City Council. I set the goal of becoming mayor in 2004 and it took 17 years to become a councillor then be voted in as deputy mayor. I was thrilled to be able to show First Nations people here that you can be successful and have a powerful voice.

The community here is vibrant, with a large population of immigrants of many faiths and strong support for asylum seekers. I'd like to see more migration and create more opportunities for young people. We're a strong community but there's room for improvement." ♦



Kirsten Cunningham

COMMBANK  
SUPPORTS

### *Bush Summit*

Orange was one of several host towns of this annual initiative, which spotlights the challenges that regional and rural communities face. Launched in NSW in 2019, the summit aims to help develop agendas and policies that will enrich the lives of everyday Australians. To date, it has led to real, beneficial outcomes, including the establishment of a Regional Youth Taskforce to advise the government on issues affecting young people in the country.



**Cash Flow**

# What I know about money

INTERVIEW BY JULIE LEE + PHOTOGRAPHY BY NIGEL LOUGH

Scott Cam, host of *The Block*, admits to making a few money mistakes in his time but never when it comes to building or renovating homes.

You probably know Scott Cam from his role on *The Block*, guiding would-be renovators around a job site, but it was while swinging a hammer for his own building company that he learnt the ins and outs of money. Scott says he may not have had the best business head but the father of three is proud that his hard work meant there was always food on the table.

**What are your money memories?**

Not having much! Money was always a struggle when my wife, Ann, and I were younger – we had three kids under three and one income. We were getting by and living week to week, which was fine. We were happy. Money was important to us to move forward and make sure our kids grew up happy and healthy and got a good education. People say you can do all of that with love but it takes money as well.

**Did you budget during that time?**

We've never really done a budget but we knew not to waste money. For example, Ann and I have been married for 30 years and I don't think we bought a bottle of wine until we were in our 40s – we drank cask wine.

**How did you learn about money?**

I had my own business from a young age so I was in charge of the money. If I didn't work, I didn't get any money in so that's why I never had time off work. I'm not suggesting I was a great businessman but I worked hard, I got by and I raised a family.

**Are you a spender or a saver?** I'm a spender but the good news was I never had much money when I was younger to spend. If I'd had a lot of money when I was young, I wouldn't have a lot now – I'd have spent it. But I don't spend on small things like clothes or shoes because I only wear two types of shoes – work boots and thongs.

**Have you made money missteps?**

I invested in shares when I didn't really understand the stock market and I lost that money. The areas I don't know anything about are where I've lost

money. The things I know well – housing and building – are where I make money. Stick to what you know.

**Do you have any tips for Aussies renovating their homes?** Know your limitations and get a good idea of the budget before you start. And stick to the plan. The main thing that hurts people is “variations”. If you decide you should add a door or put a roof on an area that wasn't on the plans, they're called variations and they quickly add up. That's where people come unstuck – by not sticking to the plan.

**What's your trick to maintaining a good relationship with money?**

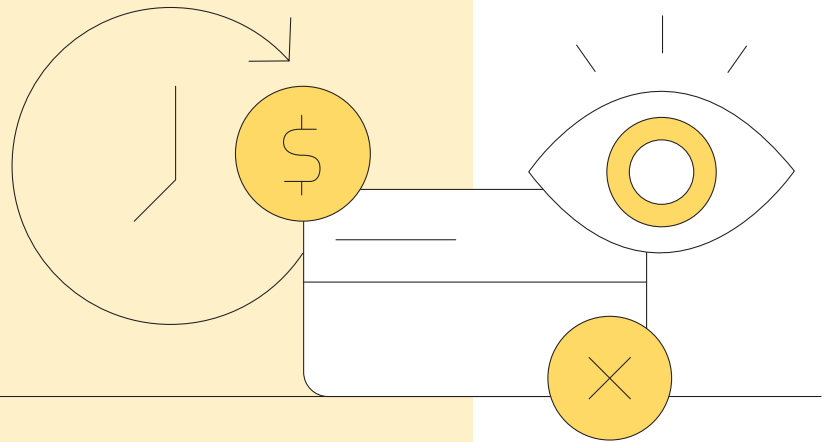
I've always lived by this rule: I've dug a thousand holes in my life and back in the day I'd quote \$10 per hole. Then, every time I passed \$10 over a counter, I'd equate that to digging a hole. That almost stopped me from spending money – I knew exactly how hard it was to make that 10 bucks so I wasn't going to hand it over lightly.

Watch *The Block* on Channel 9 and 9Now Sunday 7pm and from Monday to Wednesday at 7:30pm. ♦

## Next Chapter

# Spot the signs of financial abuse

STORY BY BROOKE LE POER TRENCH



It can be difficult to identify such a subtle form of abuse – here’s what to look for and where to find support.

You’ve likely heard the term and may know someone impacted by it. Research commissioned by CommBank indicates that more than 40 per cent of Australian adults have experienced or know someone who has experienced financial abuse. It occurs when money is used to gain control over a partner and according to Angela MacMillan, CommBank group customer advocate, it’s an insidious way to keep someone trapped in an abusive relationship. “Financial abuse often begins in subtle ways and can worsen over time,” says MacMillan. It’s tough to recognise and easy to hide but we can all help put an end to it, first by understanding what it looks like and then speaking up when we see it.

### Make sense of what you see

When you think you’ve noticed some of the signs (see box, right), it’s helpful to then consider how much agency or choice your friend or family member has over their financial situation. “There are some healthy relationships with a clear delineation around money roles, which could

mean one partner handles all utility bills and another has responsibility for the groceries,” says MacMillan. “In those instances, when there’s choice, not coercion, that’s fine.” The problem is when someone’s choice is taken away and a partner is exerting control over them. “Trust your instincts when you see those red flags,” says MacMillan. “You know when something doesn’t seem right.”

### Have a conversation

If you are worried about a loved one, raising it for the first time can be tough – but it’s the right kind of uncomfortable. “One thing that often holds people back is that they’re either unsure about how to start the conversation or they fear they’ll make matters worse,” says MacMillan. But experts agree: the more we talk about financial abuse with our friends and family, the faster we can help end it altogether. The first thing to do is ask openly and gently about any obvious signs of distress or changes in their behaviour that you’ve noticed. Then really listen. “Let your friend tell their story in their own words and try not to jump to conclusions on their behalf,” says MacMillan,

noting these exchanges might happen many times, as they open up and share their situation with you. Finally, make them aware of the support that’s available.

### Getting the right support

CommBank Next Chapter was launched in 2020 as a bank-wide commitment to helping end financial abuse and supporting victim-survivors on the road to long-term financial independence. If you or anyone you know is experiencing financial abuse, the CommBank Next Chapter team can provide free, confidential support, no matter who you bank with. The team can assess someone’s needs and help them access the right support. This might include opening safe accounts, ordering new cards and removing unauthorised access.

Call 1800 222 387, Monday to Friday, 8am–6pm (Sydney/Melbourne time), excluding public holidays. An interpreter can be arranged if needed. If it’s difficult to chat over the phone, CommBank customers can contact the Next Chapter team through online chat (Ceba) in the CommBank app. ♦



## Spot the signs

There are several telltale signs you can watch out for in friends and family. Someone you care about might be...

Forced to show receipts and to justify spending.

Denied access to their own or joint accounts or credit cards.

Prevented from working or have their hours controlled by a partner.

Refused access to money that they’re earning.

Paid an allowance and show stress about spending it.

Forced to spend all earnings on household expenses while a partner saves.

Withheld information about their financial situation.

Pressured into taking out debts.

Visit [commbank.com.au/nextchapter](https://commbank.com.au/nextchapter) for more information.





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*Think Big*

# Brighter horizons

STORY BY BEK DAY

PHOTOGRAPHY BY KIRSTY FIKKERS

Aye Min Kawkuhtoo has crafted a new life for his family in Coffs Harbour, a world away from his upbringing in a Karenni refugee camp in Thailand.

When Aye Min Kawkuhtoo was born in 1992, his parents faced an impossible choice as their peaceful village life became untenable. The Burmese military were razing Karenni villages (the ethnic group to which Ayemin and his family belong) and displacing residents. “The army forced all Karenni people who lived in the countryside to move to a town in a Burmese government-controlled area,” says Ayemin. There was no way for them to fight back or hold onto their homes without endangering their own lives or their children. “The military killed people without question if they stayed where they were.”

His parents had no choice but to flee to the Thai border. “After a ceasefire broke down between the Burmese military and the Karenni Army, we became refugees in Thailand.” While Ayemin found pockets of joy in the camp, life was always laced with danger. “On the weekend, we would go to the forest around the refugee camp and forage for food,” he recalls. “In summer we would go to the local river to swim and forage for vegetables but we always had to be careful to not venture too far as it wasn’t safe.”

UNICEF delivered basic food each month – rice, beans and cooking oil – and a number of NGOs provided other

services, including schooling, but life was far from easy. “Many people would risk their lives leaving the camp to find work to support their families,” says Ayemin. His family knew there was no future in the refugee camp and so they began to look for opportunities for resettlement in another country. “We felt very lucky to be accepted by the Australian government and in 2011 we left the refugee camp.”

Landing in Coffs Harbour/Garlambirla as an 18-year-old, Ayemin dreamed of studying English at university but almost immediately discovered how difficult that would be. “Even though I’d learnt some basic English in the camp, I realised I didn’t actually understand much at all,” he says. “I was always guessing what people were saying to me.”

At the same time, he noticed the challenges other Karenni families were having settling into a new area. “Most Karenni parents in our community have never studied and Karenni is their only language,” says Ayemin. “Many people in Coffs Harbour assume those in my community speak Burmese and





“Many people in Coffs Harbour assume those in my community speak Burmese.”



this is a constant challenge, as often Burmese interpreters are booked. Karenni people are usually too polite to let organisations know that they do not understand Burmese.”

Housing is also a challenge. Rents are high and employment is limited, with farm work often the only option. “Farm work is seasonal. It’s hard to find work that’s offered all year.”

Determined to carve his own path, Ayemin left Coffs Harbour temporarily to complete a Certificate II in English at TAFE in Brisbane, before returning to build a life in the coastal town. For a while, loneliness sank its teeth in. “In the refugee camp, even though it was difficult for my parents, I used to have a lot of fun,” he says. “I had lots of friends, I played soccer, I sang, danced in festivals and went to church. It was difficult when I arrived in Australia. I became very lonely so I was always listening to music and rode my bike every weekend. I focused on studying but was still lonely.”

All that changed when Ayemin met his girlfriend – now wife – in Perth. After long-distance courtship,

she agreed to move to Coffs Harbour and brought her entire family over as well. “From this time, life really improved for me,” says Ayemin. “I had my own family, more Karenni people moved here, my English improved and I gained employment as an interpreter helping other families settle here.”

After saving diligently, Ayemin has been able to purchase his own home – something he’s passionate about helping other immigrants with. “Buying a home has given me and my family great security,” he says. “I encourage Karenni families to listen to my story and to save to buy a home so that they, too, can feel that sense of security.”

Ayemin has also found endless ways to help people in the town he loves. He’s now an interpreter for the local Humanitarian Settlement Service provider, TAFE and Centrelink to help newly arrived refugees and was recognised for his tireless contribution to the community with the CommBank-sponsored 2024 Regional Unity Medal. For Ayemin, the award renewed his sense of purpose and he’s currently hoping to be accepted into a language

services scholarship to further improve his English.

Ayemin also continues to build the kind of meaningful connections that make his work possible. “While interpreting for newly arrived families, I met Robin Ashley, a support worker,” says Ayemin. “She’s passionate about helping the Karenni community settle well and we spend a lot of time together understanding local issues.” They’ve been able to meet with local politicians and organisations to enable Karenni celebrations to happen. “With every meeting I attend, my English improves and I enhance my confidence – it’s an exciting time for me.” ♦



## Behind the Scenes

# Support crew

STORY BY SARAH MARINOS  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRIS JONES

For executive manager of small business banking Jennifer Wood, a great day at the office is being out in the community supporting her team.

**What does a typical week look like?** It's quite varied with my team spread around Sydney's CBD and Eastern Suburbs. I spend part of my week coaching them and working on their development planning. We discuss what they have in the pipeline from a lending perspective – they can lend up to \$1 million – and any development opportunities and challenges they have. Networking with small business owners is also important. Last week, I was in Bondi, talking to local businesses to see how we could support them.

**What's the best part of your job?** Collaboration. We all help each other and remember that customers

are the focus of everything we do. I also love helping the team individually and collectively to grow and develop so they can achieve their career goals.

### What are the biggest problems for small businesses right now?

The main issues are rent increases and rising supply costs. Small businesses have to pass those costs on to customers, which they don't like doing. Cash flow and working capital are also particularly important at the moment. Many owners are finding they're not getting paid as quickly but they still need to pay their staff and costs. We can help them bridge that gap with overdrafts.

### How big an issue are scams and frauds?

Scams evolve almost daily and the risk of them to small businesses – plus ways to keep safe – is at the forefront of conversations with our customers. We educate customers via seminars and make sure they're across innovations like our NameCheck technology to reduce false billing and CallerCheck, which lets customers know if a caller claiming to be from CommBank is legitimate.

**What other support is available?** The small business banking team work out of local branches, supporting the community with loans for vehicles, equipment or a move to bigger premises. We can also talk through cash-flow solutions and direct business owners to tools like Benefits finder, the Cost of Living hub and the Financial Hardship Service.

### CommBank supported the City Suburbs Local Business Awards in June. Why are they important?

The awards recognise inspiring small businesses – I attended the night with my team and heard so many stories of people from my local community who faced challenges and put their neck on the line for their business. They were so happy to be acknowledged for their hard work and to see how CommBank is showing up for them.

### What keeps you in the small business sector?

You can have an impact on people's lives and dreams. Small businesses are often mum-and-dad or family-run and they're very real. You see how hard people work – the time and energy that they spend on their business is unbelievable. It's very rewarding to be able to help them and it's also very humbling. ♦

## YOUR BUSINESS BANKING TOOLBOX



### Sustainability Action Tool

Looking to make your business more sustainable? Search "SAT" in the CommBank app, answer a few simple questions and the tool will suggest resources and actions you can take that make sense for your business.



### Business Cash Flow view

If you're struggling to stay on top of your ins and outs, this tool can help. Eligible account holders can go to the CommBank app for a snapshot of money in and money out, as well as comparisons and trends. Just search "Business Cash Flow".



### BizEnquiry Tool

Need help finding the right solutions for your business? Just answer a few simple questions and you'll be able to explore products and services that could help with the specific needs of your business. Visit [commbank.com.au/smallbusiness](http://commbank.com.au/smallbusiness) to use the tool.

# Living independently with Vision Australia

## Joy's heartwarming story

Meet Joy, a Vision Australia client living with low vision. She embodies the spirit of independence and resilience, enjoying a fulfilling and active life thanks to the support of Gift in Wills donors and innovative technology provided by Vision Australia.

Every morning, Joy starts her day with a cup of tea and the daily newspaper, made enjoyable and accessible through her large-screen CCTV. This innovative device magnifies text to a size that Joy finds comfortable to read, ensuring she stays informed and connected with the world around her while maintaining her autonomy and keeping her mind sharp.

In the kitchen, Joy's love for cooking and baking flourishes with the help of specialised devices. Her talking microwave becomes her culinary companion, offering clear audio instructions that guide her through meal preparation with ease and safety. And her talking kitchen scales are just as valuable, ensuring Joy can measure ingredients without the strain of relying solely on her eyesight.

It's with the help of assistive technologies like these that Joy can



*“So far, my journey with Vision Australia has been absolutely wonderful... Vision Australia knows and understands exactly what I need.”*

Joy, Vision Australia client

continue to manage the day-to-day tasks around the home that can be taken for granted. Sometimes a simple change can make a world of difference.

Joy's story serves as a beautiful reminder of the impact that the right resources can have on transforming lives. Her experience highlights the importance of assistive technology and personalised care, ensuring that people living with vision loss can not only thrive but also maintain a sense of fulfilment and autonomy in their lives.

Vision Australia is committed to empowering people like Joy to live independently and pursue their passions by providing them with the tools they need. We offer a wide range of services and supports, each thoughtfully designed to enhance the lives of our clients.

These include orientation and mobility training to help clients navigate their surroundings with confidence, social support to foster community connections and combat isolation, and counselling to provide emotional guidance and support.

Including a gift in your Will to Vision Australia will help our wide range of services to continue into the future. We're committed to empowering people like Joy to live independently and pursue their passions by providing them with the tools they need. These include orientation and mobility training to help clients navigate their surroundings with confidence, social support to foster community connections and combat isolation, and counselling to provide emotional guidance and support.

## Including a gift in your Will to Vision Australia

In Australia, almost half a million people are blind or have low vision. By leaving a gift in your Will today, you are creating a legacy for future generations and helping people like Joy continue to do the things they love.

For a FREE copy of our Wills information booklet, email [giw@visionaustralia.org](mailto:giw@visionaustralia.org) or complete and send this coupon to Vision Australia.

Mail to (no stamp required):  
Vision Australia, GIFT IN WILLS  
Reply Paid 92038, KOOYONG VIC 3144

I am interested in leaving a gift in my Will to Vision Australia. Send me your "Brighter Future" Wills information booklet.

I have already included a gift in my Will to Vision Australia.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

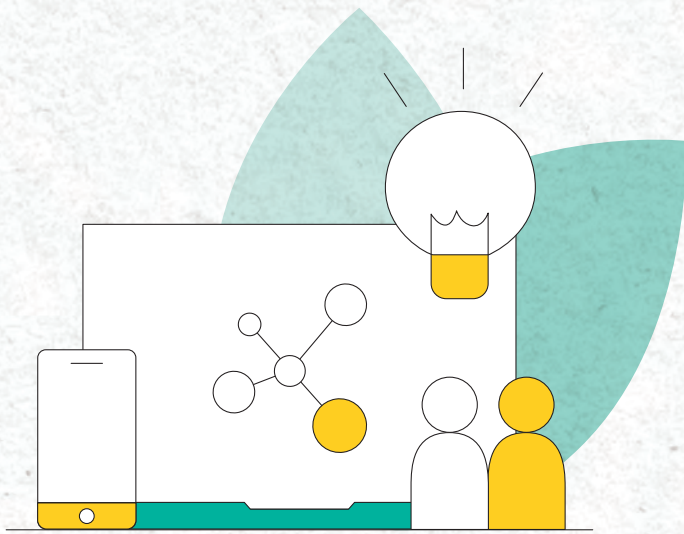
State \_\_\_\_\_

Postcode \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Tel \_\_\_\_\_

Support people like Joy. Support Vision Australia.  
[visionaustralia.org/wills](http://visionaustralia.org/wills)



*Tech Time*

# Back to the future

STORY BY BROOKE LE POER TRENCH

The harbour city is buzzing with anticipation as SXSW Sydney returns. Here's a snapshot of some of the tech trends that will be dissected.

The problem with being a futurist like Catherine Ball is that you're always waiting for everyone else to catch up. And while you might think that would make someone quite grumpy, Ball describes herself as a pragmatic optimist. We sat down with her to discuss the big trends likely to dominate the conversation at SXSW Sydney, a hotspot for innovation where cutting-edge technology and groundbreaking ideas are showcased.



## Digital doppelgangers

"In the next few years, it's highly likely that you'll meet your digital twin – a virtual version of you that lives online, on data servers and in cyberspace," says Ball. They're being created for buildings and cities but the next iteration will be accurate digital twins of humans. "The purposes are broad and diverse, including helping with medical interventions as well as improving our understanding of public health issues, such as possible pandemics." The future is a really personalised space.

## *Visit CommBank at SXSW Sydney*

Don't miss the CommBank installation in Tumbalong Park during SXSW Sydney, 14-20 October. Through interactive challenges designed to put your scams and fraud knowledge to the test, you'll learn ways to stay ahead in the digital age and, more importantly, how to be CommBank Safe.



### A mind of one's own

Have you ever bought something recommended to you on social media? Or lost time watching suggested videos in your feed because they appeal so much? We live in a world filled with technology – and highly sophisticated algorithms – that knows us almost as well as we know ourselves. And we spend our time on apps designed to deliver feel-good dopamine hits that keep us hooked. “That’s why when you misplace your phone, you feel very anxious about where it can be,” says Ball. Thought leaders will increasingly be exploring what we need to be aware of in a world of machine drift, mood-altering algorithms and computers making yes-or-no decisions, to claw back some control of our own minds.



### The future of work

As one might expect, futurists are obsessed with what’s ahead for work. “Expectations around work-life balance are being challenged in our post-pandemic world, and there are some radical changes coming to our standard working week,” says Ball. In the past, overtime – and the inevitable burnout – was almost standardised for many companies. “It seems now the tide may be turning and the notion of unpaid overtime is now seen as toxic in many workplace cultures.”



### Little data is big data

When Ball wants to explain the future of personal data to someone, she starts with some simple questions: have you ever had a relationship with someone who seemed to know you better than you know yourself? Maybe a parent, lover or therapist? “Well, now robots, sensors, cameras and apps on your phone are that someone,” she says. “They collect a huge amount of data and micro-information about your quirks and idiosyncrasies – including the way you walk through a shopping centre and even how you type into keyboards.” The truth is that we know very little about the data that’s collected about us and how it’s used, says Ball. That’s why it’s crucial we know how to protect ourselves from being scammed and hacked. Turning on two-factor authentication for social media and email accounts is a simple first step. ♦



Doctor Catherine Ball, author of *Converge* (Major Street), is a leading scientific futurist and associate professor at The Australian National University.

## SXSW SYDNEY

CommBank is a proud Super Sponsor of SXSW Sydney®, a world-leading festival for creativity, progressive thinking, technology and innovation. The event has been running in Texas since 1987 and moved to Sydney for the first time in 2023 with a week-long schedule packed with activations and events. Now back for a second exciting year, the festival showcases the best of Asia-Pacific and global creative industries, bringing together tech, innovation, games, music and screen industries with unexpected discoveries and disruptive inventions.

## Trend watch: Gen AI

If anyone knows how generative AI (gen AI) – or AI that creates new content rather than working with existing data – is set to change our lives, it’s Vicky Ledda, CommBank’s executive general manager of retail technology. Here are three reasons why she believes gen AI will create opportunities for all.



“Gen AI is one of the biggest tech disrupters in recent times, allowing us to improve banking for our customers by delivering more personalised, relevant and enhanced experiences.”



“The pace of change in gen AI is unprecedented and it can help people and communities. I see gen AI as a superpower that can make our personal and work lives more efficient so we can focus more on the things that matter most.”



“We’re already seeing changes in our day-to-day lives. Anyone using AI in their personal or work life is getting a taste of how quickly we can now access information and execute tasks that used to take a long time with little value add. This will only get better with gen AI.”



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Get ahead

# Save

CHILD'S PLAY

## Money smarts

Not sure how to talk to your kids about finances? Kit can help.



*Child's Play*

# Money smarts

It's never too early to teach your kids how to handle their finances. We meet a couple hoping to set their kids up for success – and get top tips for helping them save.

STORY BY BROOKE LE POER TRENCH + PHOTOGRAPHY BY BEATA DYSZKANT



Megan and Christian Schirk's 10-year-old twins, Kobe and Elkie, have some big money dreams: a dog, a snow trip to Japan and cool new bedrooms. The parents also have pretty big goals – including teaching their kids about money. "I want them to be secure," says Megan. "We'd really like the kids to value what goes into earning money and what you can get for it."

For Christian, it's about knowing their kids will be able to handle freedom when the time comes. "The world is big; anything that would enable our children to be financially stable in the future would make us feel better." For now, the Jindabyne, NSW-based couple are trying to share good money advice with their twins. Here's what they're doing.

### Recognising bad habits

When it comes to spending, Christian admits to being more frivolous with money than Megan. "I'm the handbrake," she says. "We balance each other." With Megan owing her more conservative financial approach to her upbringing, the couple understand that parents can influence their kids'

attitudes towards money so their focus is on passing on their best habits. "I'm the daughter of a bank manager so I was always given good and sensible money advice," says Megan. "I'd like to hopefully give some sensible lessons to my kids as well."

### Showing that hard work brings reward

Christian and Megan run a busy local business and that helps with setting a good example for the kids about how rewards come from sacrifice. "When the kids ask why we can't just stay home during the day, we explain that we need to work so we can afford things," says Christian. And when that sacrifice leads to savings, it's also important to let kids spend their money – to both show them the benefits of working hard and saving as well as the value of money. "We had an experience where the kids had birthday and Christmas money plus their savings and we went on a bit of a shopping spree," says Megan. "It was really interesting to see the kids' hesitation and pulling back when it came to spending their own money."



# Kit Quiz

Not sure how to approach talking to your kids about how to grow and protect their money? Kit can help! Here's a few questions to get you started.

1. What is the name of the place where coins are made?

- a The oregano
- b The mint
- c The parsley
- d The thyme



2. One clue that an email is a scam might be...

- a It doesn't use my name
- b It's well written
- c It uses my name
- d It doesn't have links

3.

A hot chocolate might cost more at a café because...

- a The café owner is greedy
- b They pay for extra things, like staff and rent
- c Their milk is fancier
- d Their hot chocolate is hotter



4. Why is waiting a night to buy something you haven't saved for a good idea?

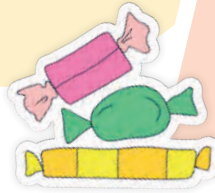
- a You might be tired
- b You could ask an adult
- c It will probably go on sale
- d You'll have time to think



5.

Kit gets an email from the post office. It has lots of spelling mistakes and strange links. What should they do?

- a It sounds like a scam. Delete it
- b It could be important. Click the link
- c Reply to ask if the link is correct
- d Don't lose that package. Click the link



6. What were the names of Australia's first official coins?

- a The dump and the holey
- b The rough and the smooth
- c The penny and the pound
- d The cent and the dollar



7.

Kit has been saving their pocket money for three weeks to buy a new board game. At the shops they see a cool robot they've never seen before and they'd really like to buy it. What should they do?

- a Buy it now – why wait?
- b Sleep on it – give it at least one night
- c Pester power – ask an adult for it
- d Treat yourself – you deserve it

8.

Kit is running a lemonade stand. The price of lemons goes up. What does that mean for Kit?

- a Nothing, they shouldn't worry
- b They should stop selling lemonade
- c They should charge less for lemonade
- d It costs more to make the lemonade

9. What is income?

- a Money you earn
- b Money you put in the bank
- c A type of tax
- d Money you pay to enter a country



10.

Your friend asks you how imagining yourself achieving your saving goal can help you stick to it. What do you say?

- a You experience how good it will feel
- b It reminds you of the steps you need to take to achieve your goal
- c It gives you time to think
- d It's fun to do

## Rethinking pocket money

The idea of having a reward for hard work extends to pocket money, with Megan and Christian only giving it to their twins when they do extra chores. "I used to give them pocket money for doing the dishes and cleaning their room but then I thought, 'They're members of the household just like us and we should all do things to help.' But if they want extra money towards a goal, we give them extra jobs and we do pay for that - like washing the car."

They avoid giving the pocket money in cash because they noticed the kids would immediately spend it at the canteen or on stickers. "It was easy come, easy go," says Christian. Now, it goes straight into a savings account, which the kids love checking to make sure it's growing. ♦

*(From left) Jess Irvine with Kobe, Elkie, Megan and Christian Schirk on the set of The Brighter Side. Head to 10 Play to watch the show.*



## What every kid should know about money



### Money is exciting

"If you bring an attitude of fear or anxiety about money, kids will replicate it," says CommBank personal finance expert Jess Irvine. "Let them know that money is how we get the things we want - it's exciting to earn money, to spend it and to invest it and watch it grow. Even if you don't feel that way, fake it!"



### It's your money, it's your choice

Try to bite your tongue if they blow it all on lollies or toys. "Kids need money that's theirs so they can feel the sting of running out of it while they're in a safe environment," says Jess. Instead of reprimanding them, a better tact may be to ask if they think their purchase was worth it.



### Spend less than you earn

"I want kids to hear you say, 'Spend less than you earn and save or invest the rest,'" says Jess. "And make sure they know that money saved is what they spend later on, whether it's on a skateboard or their first car."



### Monitor your money

Jess and her son use the Kit app built by CommBank. "You can set pocket money to be paid into their account with a linked card they can use to spend their money and they can set savings goals," she says. "You can set up extra jobs, such as mowing the lawn, to give them the chance to earn extra money." And for ease of mind, you can access it any time and customise parental controls.

*Kit Quiz answers:* 1. b 2. a 3. b 4. d 5. a 6. a 7. b 8. d 9. a 10. a

# Empowering kids with finance skills

Kit, the pocket-money app with a mission, is making waves in Australia by turning financial learning into an adventure and immersing kids in gamified, teaching-moments that make mastering money a blast.

## Dedicated & diverse team

Kit's success is driven by a team of specialists, including a learning designer, game director and engineers. "We all work together to make sure each adventure strikes a balance between education, meaningful challenges and appropriate rewards," says Yish Koh, Kit's managing director.



## Immersive storytelling

Money Quests are an innovative approach to financial education, blending storytelling and gamification to make learning fun. "Kit provides a safe space for kids to actually make their own decisions – and even make mistakes – so they learn these lessons themselves," says Yish. "It's so empowering."

## Playful games

Once kids are immersed in the Moneyverse, engaging in mini games, quizzes and explainer videos, they will have interactive conversations with Kit, the smart money sidekick. Being in a world where their avatars have adventures with Kit is (of course) by design. "Our environment is really kid friendly," says Yish. "In life, parents do so much for kids, which is why they love the autonomy they get from Kit."



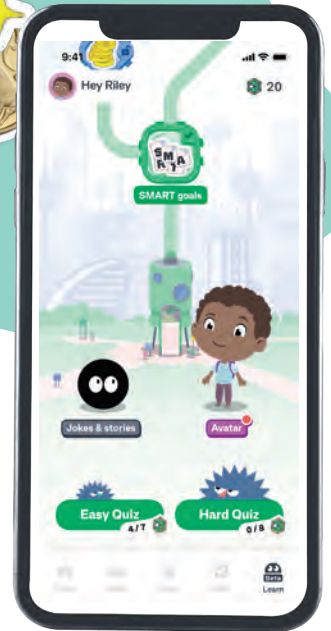
## Everyone's happy

The creators of Kit have been thoughtful when it comes to gamification. "Most parents will have experienced the stress of their kids playing games with in-game purchases," says Yish. "We didn't ever want to create a game that causes anxiety." That's why kids earn rewards (called Winkits) that keep them motivated to learn and interact regularly but only exist within the Kit world.



## Tailored learning

"We have a dedicated learning designer – with more than a decade of experience as a teacher – who developed Kit's learning framework and baked in all the assessments that ensure our games are driving the right outcomes," says Yish. The content is focused on kids aged 8–10, with 20 Money Quests on topics like spotting scams, understanding interest and knowing consumer rights.



Send your kids on an adventure that teaches them money skills.

Money Quests take place in the Moneyverse, with exciting storytelling as Kit's world is unveiled.

Your kids can play mini games, take quizzes, earn rewards and get nudges to promote real-world behaviours, like setting up a savings goal.

Scan the QR Code to download Kit.



*Cheat Sheet*

# How to save on your car

From petrol to insurance, owning a car can be expensive. Here's how to drive down costs.

STORY BY LAURA CULBERT

Whether you're a seasoned driver or just got your licence, figuring out how to keep your car running smoothly without draining your wallet is a skill worth mastering. According to the Australian Automobile Association's latest Transport Affordability Index, transport costs are rising at a higher rate than general inflation, with the average household spending \$454.41 per week on expenses such as registration, tolls and fuel. "Not only have vehicle prices increased but so have the costs to operate them," says Jeff Ames, general manager of motoring at RACV. Fortunately, help is at hand – here are our top tips to save money on all things auto so you can have your car and drive it, too.

## Fuel for thought

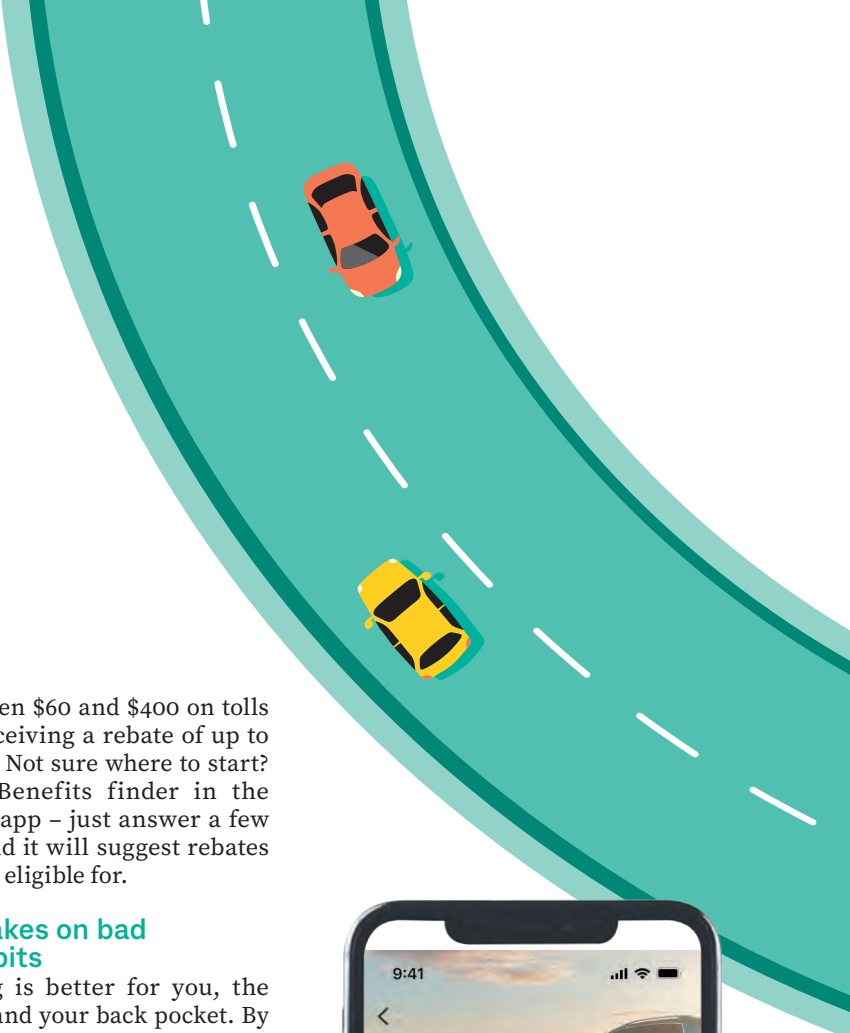
It will come as no surprise to drivers that petrol is one of their biggest costs. Data from the NRMA shows that in 2020, drivers could fill a 55-litre tank with regular unleaded fuel for an average of less than \$70, while today that same tank will cost more than \$100 to fill. There are apps and services to help you locate the cheapest and closest petrol stations including the state government-run FuelWatch in Western Australia and FuelCheck in Tasmania. And everyone can take advantage of supermarket docketts, which offer four cents off your petrol at participating service stations when you spend \$30 or more at participating supermarkets.

## Lighten the load

Using your car boot as extra storage? It may be taking a toll on your finances. That extra weight means your engine has to work harder, using up more fuel. Similarly, it's best to remove car accessories like roof racks and camping awnings when you're not using them. These create an aerodynamic drag on the vehicle, which ups your fuel use.

## Keep up maintenance

It can be tempting to skip a car service to cut costs but that could actually lead to more extensive (and expensive) problems. "You might save \$300 to \$400 on the service but by not having that vehicle running at its optimum, you could be using more fuel than necessary – costing you more money in the long run," explains Andrew Kirk, principal technical researcher at RACQ.



Get the wheel alignment checked regularly, as well. Poorly aligned wheels will cause premature wear to your tyres, meaning you need to replace them more often. And keep an eye on your tyre pressure: “Keeping the tyres inflated to the right level will utilise less fuel and help keep you safe on the roads,” says Ames.

### Play the insurance field

Insurance is a necessity at times but that doesn’t make forking out for it any easier. Resist the urge to set and forget; instead, shop around when you need to renew your policies. Price comparison websites, like Canstar and Finder, do the hard work for you – and they’re free. Look out for special discounts for paying annually or bundling multiple policies. And eligible customers can unlock benefits by taking out Car Insurance provided by Hollard^.

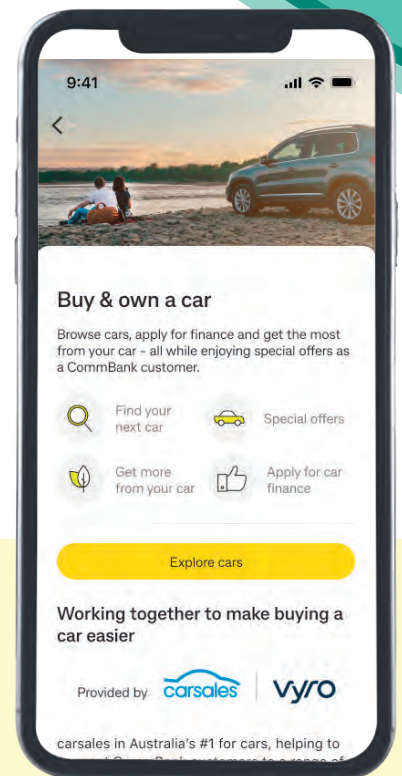
### Rake in the rebates

It’s worth looking into the discounts available in your area, especially when it comes to registering your car and renewing your licence. For example, in Western Australia, certain pensioners are entitled to a complete exemption from licence fees. Regular toll users in NSW don’t miss out on the savings either, with eligible motorists who

spend between \$60 and \$400 on tolls per week receiving a rebate of up to \$340 a week. Not sure where to start? Check out Benefits finder in the CommBank app – just answer a few questions and it will suggest rebates you might be eligible for.

### Hit the brakes on bad driving habits

Safe driving is better for you, the community and your back pocket. By keeping your speed in check and driving smoothly, you’ll help reduce premature wear on your brakes and tyres and won’t use up unnecessary fuel. If you can, try to avoid peak hour – the stop-start traffic is just adding to your fuel consumption. “Make your fuel last longer by turning off your car if waiting for long periods of time,” adds Ames. ♦



*Try this:*

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- Helpful tools include an EV costs calculator and estimated repayments for the car you want to buy.
- Get access to EV charging offers\*.
- Sell your car. Tap “Looking to sell” and follow the prompts.
- Organise insurance for new or existing cars^.



Scan the QR Code to find out more.

\*Terms, conditions and eligibility criteria apply. ^Car Insurance provided by Hollard. Conditions apply. Read the PDS for more information at commbank.com.au/importantdocs. QR codes are provided for your convenience and the location you are taken to will not ask you for your banking information like your NetBank Client ID, password or NetCode. Visit commbank.com.au/hoax for more information.

*How To...*

# Spring clean your finances

STORY BY JESS IRVINE

Is your budget feeling tight but you're not sure what to change? Breaking it down into bite-sized steps can help you take charge.

September marks not only a changing of the seasons but also an opportunity for a fresh start when it comes to your relationship with money. It's the ideal time to identify the small steps you can take to become more informed about your finances. Here are 10 to get you started – even if you only pick one to do today, taking action will help you feel more in control.

## 1. Log in to your super account

Taking care of future you is vital and when it comes to money, nurturing your superannuation is key. The earlier you start, the better off you'll be. Most super funds have online portals where you can easily check your balance and see how your money is being invested. It's worth finding your details so you can log in and check. Take a look at how your money is invested – generally it will be a balanced, growth or high-growth account – and consider what is best for your age. The younger you are, the more time you have to ride out potential market fluctuations.

### *Editor's note*

Staying on top of your super is easier when your finances can be found in one place. CommBank customers can manage an Essential Super account alongside their everyday banking in the CommBank app, with competitive fees and a range of investment options to suit your goals.





## 4.

### Shop around on an insurance policy

Insurance premiums have been rising rapidly so if you haven't reviewed your policies in a while, now's the perfect time. Start by choosing one policy to review, such as car, home or health insurance. Obtain competing quotes using online comparison sites or calling competitors directly. Just make sure you're comparing policies with similar features. And if you find a cheaper quote, see if your current insurer will match it. If not, consider switching.

## 2.

### Track your spending for a week

It can be a bit tedious but taking the time to dial into your spending habits can be life-changing. And you'll start to notice where your big money drains are – whether that's eating out or impulse shopping. Without even trying to cut back, commit to writing down every time money leaves your account for one week. You can use a spreadsheet or app but a pen and piece of paper will do just as well. At the end of the week, look back and reflect on what value you got out of each of those purchases.

## 3.

### Draw a vision of your "perfect life"

The main point of money is to secure enough of it to buy the things we want and need over our entire lifetime so what that looks like matters. Are you reading a book in a home that you own in retirement? Or sailing around the Bahamas? Envisioning your ideal future will help with setting good money goals. Grab some paper and set a timer for 10 minutes. Scribble down any words or pictures that represent your dream life and what your perfect day would look like, from dawn to dusk. See what comes up and use it as your North Star as you create the life you want.

## 5.

### Set one savings goal

Learning to set money goals is a big step on your financial journey. Once achieved, they can help build a sense of accomplishment. Whether you want to pay off a high-interest debt, set aside \$1000 for an emergency fund or save for a home deposit, the three key steps are to name your objective, put a price tag on it and set a deadline. You can then work out how much you need to save regularly to meet your goal. If you don't know where to start, why not use the rest of the year to set aside a certain amount each week for Christmas?

“Investing is a skill we’re generally not taught at school but it’s crucial if you want to make your money work for you.”

JESS IRVINE



## 6.

### Assess your passwords

With our financial lives becoming increasingly digitised, staying safe online is more essential than ever. One of the easiest things you can do is beef up your online security by choosing passwords or phrases that are hard to guess and consist of multiple words, numbers and symbols. Online password keepers can help remember these upgraded passwords for you. And turning on multi-factor authentication gives you an added level of security for your accounts.

## 7.

### Memorise this money-saving hack

How much you pay for anything is a function of just two things: the quantity you buy and the per-unit cost. It’s really that simple. So if you’re looking to save money on a purchase, ask yourself two questions: “Can I use less of it?” and “Can I pay a lower price?” Whether it’s shopping around for lower prices or trying to reduce your usage, this really is the ultimate money-saving hack to keep in mind. Write it in your notes app on your phone or stick it on the fridge and remember to ask the questions every time you shop.

## 8.

### Listen to a podcast about investing

Investing is a skill we’re generally not taught at school but it’s crucial if you want to make your money work for you – whether that’s through super or directly through shares or property. It’s important to learn about different asset classes, the trade-off between risk and return, and diversification. There are many podcasts out there, including *Equity Mates Investing*, but for beginners, I really like *CommSec Invest: The Share Market Simplified*, hosted by Jamila Rizvi.

## 9.

### Buy something second-hand

When it comes to lower prices, you can’t beat free. Online spaces like Gumtree, Facebook Marketplace and “pay it forward” or “buy, sell, swap” groups are a doorway to the wonderful world of the second-hand economy. Many people give things away for free on these sites but you can also find items at a significantly reduced price – it’s not just cars that depreciate rapidly in value once out of the store. Next time you’re looking to buy something, from furniture and décor to clothing, make it a habit to browse second-hand first – every saving counts!

## 10.

### Get in touch with your (finance) feelings

People think money is about maths but really it’s about behaviour. It’s what we do on a daily basis that really influences money outcomes. But what drives our actions? On a deep level, it’s emotions. Fear, for example, makes us turn away from something and not engage. If you aren’t sure what your stance is, search “feeling wheel” online for a resource that can help. Then ask yourself how the word “money” makes you feel. Answering that is the first step in reshaping your relationship with money. ♦

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**Future:** By avoiding multiple fees on your super, you may end up with more funds in your account at retirement.

## 5. Tax benefits<sup>3</sup>

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Explore Essential Super

Provided by **Colonial First State**

<sup>1</sup>Source: Super Ratings Fund Crediting Rate (FCRS) Survey 30 June 2024 and CFS Performance data. Whilst care has been taken to ensure that the data provided by SuperRatings is correct, CFS neither warrants, represents nor guarantees the contents of the information, nor does it accept any responsibility for errors, inaccuracies, omissions or any inconsistencies herein. The SuperRatings Fund Crediting Rate Survey is based on information provided to SuperRatings by third parties, that is believed to be accurate at the time of publication. Returns will change in the future which may affect the outcome of the comparison. SuperRatings may make adjustments for comparison purposes and therefore data may vary from other published materials. Net returns for CFS products are after deduction of investment fees, costs, tax and asset based (%) administration fee. Returns displayed may vary based on inclusion or exclusion of asset-based (%) administration fee.

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### Table Talk

# Quick & healthy work meals

STORY BY SARAH MARINOS

Making your own lunches is one simple way of helping to ease the cost-of-living crunch.

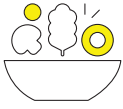
Buy a sandwich or smoothie here and a salad or takeaway pasta there and the cost of paying for lunch quickly adds up. At a time when utility bills and rents are rising, preparing lunch can potentially save a few hundred dollars each month. You don't have to tolerate soggy sandwiches or limp salads. Preparation and a little imagination can transform your lunch box from dull to delicious and lift its nutritional value, says Jemma O'Hanlon, dietitian, nutritionist and spokesperson for Dietitians Australia. "When you buy lunch, you don't know how much salt, sugar and fat it contains and bought lunches often tend to be higher in kilojoules," she says. Prepare lunch at home from scratch and you'll know exactly what you're eating.

### Get sorted and save time

Before grocery shopping, plan your lunch each day and add those ingredients to your list so you have the things you need in your fridge, freezer and pantry.

"Collect the recipes, list the ingredients and have a rough day-by-day plan so you won't get caught out and end up with nothing to take," says O'Hanlon.

Or save time by cooking once and eating twice – make extra dinner to eat for lunch the next day and stretch meals by adding lentils or vegetables. For example, add kidney beans to a spaghetti bolognese or add legumes, potatoes and chicken to chunky soup. You can also pack a stew with winter vegetables and reheat it the next day.



# Salads

## Easy caprese

Make a caprese salad with bocconcini, cherry tomatoes and fresh basil or mint. Drizzle with a simple homemade dressing of extra virgin olive oil and lemon juice. For a low-fat, creamy alternative, blend natural Greek yoghurt, tahini, lemon juice, salt and pepper.



## Batch cooking

One of *What Can I Bring?* author, Sophie Hansen's, favourite salads includes pearl barley and walnuts with roasted broccoli and cauliflower. Drizzle broccoli and cauliflower with olive oil, season with salt and pepper and roast at 200°C for 20 minutes. Toast the pearl barley with a little olive oil in a saucepan on medium-high heat for 10 minutes while stirring. Turn down to medium, add six cups of boiling water, cook for about 20 minutes and then drain.

Make a dressing with 60ml of extra virgin olive oil, half a teaspoon of ground cumin, a pinch of cayenne pepper, two finely chopped garlic cloves, the zest and juice of a lemon, two tablespoons of red wine vinegar and a teaspoon each of sea salt and black pepper. Tip the barley into a bowl, top with roasted vegetables and dressing, toss and then add crushed walnuts.

## Get roasting

O'Hanlon recommends roasting root vegetables, like pumpkin and beetroot, and adding goat's cheese, spinach and chickpeas for a cold or warm salad. For extra crunch, top with crushed nuts.

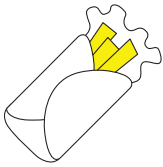


## Essential equipment

- Choose a thermos with stainless steel insulation to keep food hot.
- If you heat food at work, buy a container suitable for microwaving.
- Buy reusable containers of different sizes and with separate sections to keep ingredients separated.
- Wrap sandwiches in wax paper to keep them fresh.

## Tip:

If you take salad, keep the dressing separate and add it just before you eat to keep your lunch crisp.



## Sandwiches and wraps

### Fritter rolls

Try a salmon and corn fritter roll with a dash of herbed yoghurt, says Hansen. Make fritters with four cups of corn kernels, the white parts of two spring onions, three eggs, finely chopped dill, a dash of sea salt and black pepper, 1.5 cups of self-raising flour and a quarter cup of olive oil for frying. Mix all the ingredients – but only half the corn kernels and a small handful of dill – in a processor and blend to a lumpy mixture. Stir in the remaining corn.

Heat a little olive oil in a large frying pan over medium-high heat and drop in half a cup of the fritter mixture. Flatten and then cook for one to two minutes on each side until golden.

### It's a wrap

O'Hanlon suggests a wholegrain bread or wrap loaded with roasted pumpkin, sweet potato, eggplant, zucchini and capsicum. Add tuna, chicken or hummus for a protein hit.



### Tip:

Avoid wet ingredients in sandwiches or wraps, like sliced tomato and rinsed lettuce. Instead, store separately and add them when you're ready to eat.

### Creative combos

Halloumi, carrot and pesto make a great filling. Spread pesto over a wrap, add some baby spinach leaves and grated carrot and top with halloumi. Or make and fry the meatballs and toast the halloumi until golden. Spread a wrap with hummus and add tomato, onion, spinach, meatballs and halloumi. ♦

### Short on inspiration?

Sophie Hansen, author of *What can I bring?* (Murdoch Books, \$49.99), has some tasty ideas.





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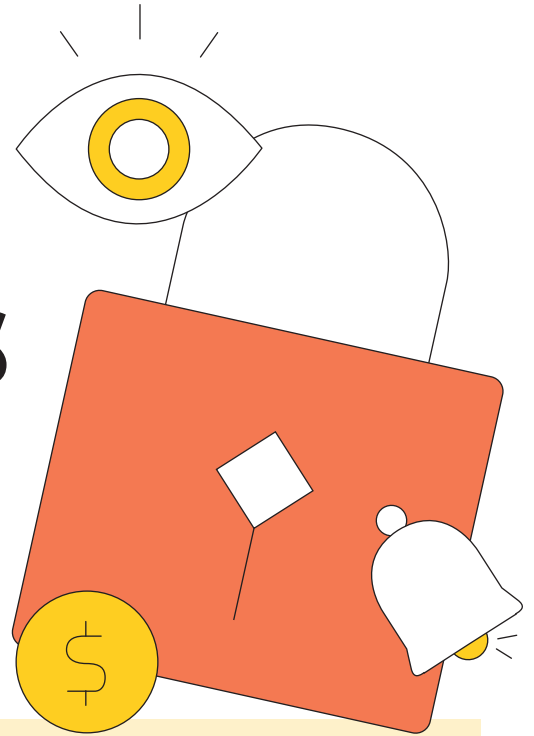


*Stay Safe*

# Simple ways to protect your small business

STORY BY BROOKE LE POER TRENCH

As SMEs find their digital edge, safety is more crucial than ever. Scammers are getting smarter and even a tiny breach can spell big trouble.



The good news? The best cybersecurity steps any small business can take are often simple and cost-free, says Andrew Pade, general manager of cyber defence operations and security integration at CommBank, a view echoed by the theme of October's Cybersecurity Awareness Month, "Secure our world".

The idea: there are simple ways to protect yourself and your business from online threats. "By following a few basic steps, small businesses can mitigate most security threats, significantly enhancing their resilience against cyberattacks," says Pade. Here's how.



## Understand the threat landscape

It's essential to get a handle on the scams out there. The common culprits? Phishing attacks, data breaches and insider threats, to name a few. Knowing these is the start of a solid cybersafety strategy but looking at what's going on in the world around you helps, too. "If there's something big happening in our country there will be a cyber crime pushing into that," says Pade. "Threat actors want to leverage how much we care to take advantage of us." Strong access controls as well as complex passwords and phrases are your best friends here. And for an extra layer of security, implement multi-factor authentication (MFA).



## Educate your employees

Here's a question that all small business owners should know the answer to: who has privileged access within your organisation? "Your employees can be the strongest defence or the weakest link in a company's cybersecurity," says Pade, noting that using free and reputable programs like Cyber Wardens ([cyberwardens.com.au](http://cyberwardens.com.au)) to teach staff to identify phishing attempts and other malicious activities is a no-brainer. Employees are your first line of defence against cyberthreats so keeping them prepared is key. And make sure you have policies on the acceptable use of company email, devices and internet.



## Never miss an update

"Keeping all your systems patched and updated is a must for small businesses wanting to stay safe from cyberthreats," says Pade, noting that this is free for many systems. Hackers love to exploit outdated software so by regularly updating your operating systems, apps and security software, you're closing gaps that they could sneak through. It's a bit like giving your digital defences a fresh coat of paint – keeping everything in top shape to fend off attacks. Plus, staying on top of updates helps protect your sensitive data. It's a straightforward but effective way for you to keep your business secure. ♦

Visit [cyber.gov.au](http://cyber.gov.au) to find out more about Cyber Security Awareness Month and other ways for small businesses to keep safe.





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# Grow

*Make it count*



SMALL BUSINESS

## Food for thought

Yaala Sparkling co-creator Tara Croker's authentic values help inspire loyal customers.

*Small Business*

# Food for thought

Many businesses are feeling the pinch right now and food entrepreneurs are no different, with rising expenses on everything from ingredients to gas and electricity. We asked a baker, a confectioner and a sparkling-water maker for advice on reducing operating costs while still keeping the doors open.



STORY BY JULIE LEE  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRIS CHEN,  
GUY BAILEY & KATE DYER



Rising rent, production and food costs have forced Brooklyn Boy Bagels owner Michael Shafran to proactively research ways to manage expenses.

As a native New Yorker, Michael Shafran missed one thing when he moved to Australia: bagels. “I tried so many bagel places and didn’t like any of them,” he says. “So I figured I could teach myself to make them.”

After 12 years of baking for friends, Michael bit the bullet with a pop-up store before expanding to farmers’ markets. “I realised there were enough people who cared about getting quality artisan bagels,” he says. It was only after signing up his first wholesale customer, though, that he knew he could make a go of it.

Michael, who has been running Brooklyn Boy Bagels since 2013 and has one bakery site and two cafés in Sydney, says he’s definitely seen the effects of the rising cost of living. “This has been one of the tougher years we’ve had – it’s been hard to grow,” says Michael, who sees customers struggling, too. “People are still buying but they’re buying less.”

Facing a rent increase of 50 per cent on the bakery site, Michael has swung into action, analysing where changes can be made. “We’re going to focus more on the wholesale part of the business – we’ve got someone to manage our farmers’ market business.”



## Michael's tips

### + Make use of tech

“We’re trying to use AI to save labour. I used it for my bathroom cleaning and maintenance schedules – it did them in about five minutes.”

### + Be brave with pricing

“It’s always stressful to raise prices but things cost what they cost and sometimes you just need to do it.”

### + Be open with staff

“When staff ask for a raise, we have honest conversations saying, ‘Revenue is here, the wage cost is this much so we have to work together to increase revenue or find ways to be more efficient.’ When you’re honest, it gives them some control.”

Michael is also looking for efficient ways to track his rapidly changing food costs. “We usually review our pricing quarterly; that’s been too slow for the way prices are rising now.” The team is looking into software that alerts you when an invoice has increased. “Then we can see if we need to raise prices or take something off the menu.”

Being proactive is how Michael stays positive: “There’s a lot of pressure in the industry right now and the best reliever of stress is action. I try to find ways to deal with the challenges.”



Maintaining supplier relationships is part of the selling proposition of Yaala Sparkling so rather than change suppliers, co-founder Tara Croker has had to look for other ways to reduce costs.



Yaala Sparkling co-creator Tara Croker, a proud Wiradjuri woman, has a passion for experimenting with flavours and native ingredients, creating kombucha and teas in her spare time. But it was the versatility of flavoured sparkling water that appealed the most. “You can have it at any time and it’s also a bit of a special-occasion drink,” she says.

Indigenous representation in business is a driving principle. “There’s less than two per cent Indigenous ownership across the entire [native food] supply chain, from farm to product,” says Tara, who has worked hard to establish relationships with suppliers since launching in 2022. “We work with Aunties who wild harvest in the old ways and some local farmers. And we have a network of First Nations suppliers across the country.”

Like a lot of food businesses, rising ingredient costs are having a negative impact on production. But unlike other businesses, changing suppliers is not an option for Yaala Sparkling. “We hold value in those relationships and we develop specific recipes for particular suppliers – native plants taste different depending on what point in the season you pick them,” says Tara.

Instead, the business is facing the obstacles by communicating more with suppliers. “We’re staying close to our

partners and what challenges they’re facing and if they’ll potentially be looking at raising prices.”

Rising packaging costs are also an issue. “I’ve had notifications from some of our printers and packaging suppliers that prices will be going up,” says Tara. “We’ve had to tackle this by being really forward thinking on our planning, knowing when productions are coming up, staying close to stock levels and purchasing in advance at times so we know what price we’ll be paying.” So how does she stay resilient when times are tough? “The key is patience – this isn’t a sprint, it’s a marathon.”

## Diary Date



Don’t miss your chance to support Indigenous Business Month, held every October, to celebrate the achievements of Indigenous entrepreneurs and businesses across the country. It’s a great opportunity to encourage the growth of Indigenous businesses and foster an environment where Indigenous entrepreneurship can thrive. Visit [indigenousbusinessmonth.com.au](http://indigenousbusinessmonth.com.au) to learn more.



## Tara’s tips

### + Stick to your goals

“We make decisions based on steady growth while sticking strongly to our vision and mission so we’re not sidetracked by the pressures on price cuts and volumes.”

### + Use technology

“We’ve done a system review to free up resources for admin tasks – like comparing shipping costs – that can be done by AI or other system platforms.”

### + Make your marketing authentic

“When you focus on real ingredients and authentic suppliers, there’s a cost but also value. We’ve been communicating what that value is for our brand a bit more.”



With core ingredients like sugar and chocolate soaring in price, May Pike has had to take a good hard look at her Cloud Theory range of marshmallows.

May Pike started Cloud Theory when she couldn't find the ideal marshmallow. "We live on a farm in the Adelaide Hills and during the cooler months, we have a fire pit," she says. "I wanted to roast marshmallows but the ones I bought were small and chalky."

Fast-forward to May's son's first birthday party. "I thought it would be a real treat to give the guests homemade marshmallows," she says. "That was when I made my first batch of raspberry flavoured ones using real purée." Soon, May had 12 flavours and booked a spot at the local farmers' market.

Two years later – 2020 – she was ready to turn her side hustle into a full-time business. But proving just how fickle business can be, COVID hit just a fortnight after May went all in. "It was actually a blessing in disguise because it forced me to go online."

That experience set May up to face current business pressures. "Online sales have dipped and six out of 10 purchases are made with Afterpay." She's also under pressure from retailers to reduce her prices. To combat this, May is improving production efficiency by scaling back her range. "When you're starting, you want as many options as possible," she says. "As you grow, you're able to take historical data and fine-tune your product range."

The increased costs of goods is another challenge. "Sugar has gone up 30 per cent in the past year. I've changed suppliers to get better pricing. It pains me because I love building relationships but you have to make rational decisions and not let it be emotional."

But May has never been tempted to walk away. "I'm so passionate about the brand. It's important to stay positive and not let self doubt take over." ♦

**"As you grow, you're able to take historical data and fine-tune your product range."**



### *May's tips*

#### **+ Grow your business**

"As volume rises, things become more efficient. For example, an increase in our output has made shipping costs lower."

#### **+ Get creative**

"Try sharing resources. I have a friend who does chocolate and he's got a packaging machine."

#### **+ Talk to your bank**

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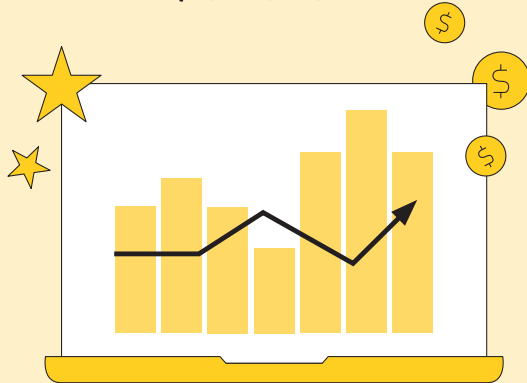
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Fair Shares



# Best in show

STORY BY EMMA FOSTER

Everyone wants to back a winner, especially when it comes to investing. Taking the time to look back and understand what performed well last year may help you be more informed in the future.

By the end of the 2024 financial year, investors were feeling pretty upbeat. Australian stocks had another strong year, with the ASX 200 – which tracks the top 200 companies in Australia – jumping 7.8 per cent. That’s much better than the average annual gain of about 4.8 per cent over the past decade.

Over in the US, things were even more exciting. S&P 500 stocks soared by 23 per cent, mainly because tech companies did really well. These tech giants make up almost a third of the top 500 US stocks, while in Australia, tech stocks are about six per cent of the ASX 200.

All of which begs the question, which stocks were the biggest winners? We asked CommSec market analyst Steven Daghlian for a run-down of the five best Aussie and US performers during the 2024 financial year. And the more you understand which stocks have done well – regardless of where you are on your investing journey – the more informed you’ll be when it comes to picking stocks in the future.

## Best FY24 Aussie shares

### 1. Pro Medicus

Healthcare software developer Pro Medicus was the best-performing ASX 200 stock in the year to June 30, delivering a 118 per cent share price lift. “Pro Medicus provides medical imaging software,” Daghlian says. “It won several new contracts, contributing to strong growth in its key market, the US. Its financial results were generally well received by investors and its shares have hit multiple record highs recently.”

### 2. Life360

The second-best performer was US-headquartered tech player Life360, up 115 per cent. “Parents might be familiar with Life360, a real-time location-sharing app,” he says. “Like many growth-focused tech stocks, it hasn’t yet reached profitability but losses are narrowing thanks to aggressive growth. Monthly users globally have gone up 30 per cent in the past year to more than 66 million.”

### 3. Red 5

Lifting its share price almost 90 per cent was third-placed Red 5, a Western Australian gold miner. “The strong performance has come as it’s merged with another miner, Silver Lake Resources, which has increased its scale and diversification,” Daghlian says. “It also benefited from a lift in the price of gold, which was up more than 20 per cent during the 12-month period.”



#### 4. West African Resources

The gold price also helped the next-best stock during the year – emerging mid-tier gold producer West African Resources. “Its share price surged by 86 per cent, with much of the rally coming in the last six months of the year on the back of promising updates provided by the company on prospective production at its Burkina Faso goldmine development.”

#### 5. Altium

Rounding out the top five was software company Altium, up 84 per cent. “Altium has had an interesting ride over the years with a lot of ups and downs. But this was its second continuous year of growth after a decline in 2022,” Daghlian says. “It’s currently being taken over by a Japanese firm, pending regulatory approvals, which has helped the share price lift.”

### Best FY24 US shares

#### 1. Super Micro Computer

Technology was the standout theme among the best five stock performers in the US, topped by Super Micro Computer. “It’s a much smaller company than the likes of market-darling chip-maker Nvidia but Super Micro’s share price more than tripled in the 12-month period, delivering a 229 per cent lift,” Daghlian says. “Super Micro makes servers equipped with Nvidia’s AI chips.”

#### 2. Vistra Corp

Coming in a very close second was Vistra Corp, up about 228 per cent. “Vistra owns power plants in the US,” he says. “A key value driver has been the projected growth of power-hungry data centres, spurred by the rise of generative AI, which is expected to increase electricity demand and power prices.”

#### 3. Nvidia

Computer chip maker Nvidia – the most talked about stock globally in the past year – came in third, with a 192 per cent lift in its share price. “It has grown into one of the world’s largest companies,” Daghlian says. “For context, it’s roughly 21 times the size of BHP, which is our largest company here in Australia. The key driver of Nvidia’s growth is its dominance in the AI chip industry.”

#### 4. CrowdStrike

Now a household name due to a Microsoft update malfunction in July, cybersecurity software company CrowdStrike gained about 161 per cent, placing it fourth. “Given the continuing rise in the world’s cybersecurity needs, operators in this industry are receiving plenty of attention,” says Daghlian.

#### 5. Constellation Energy

Fifth was Constellation Energy, which more than doubled its share price over the year to finish 119 per cent higher. “The largest US owner of nuclear power plants has had demand from data-centre clients like it has never seen in the past 20 years,” he says. “The company also flagged profit growth for the next few years.”

*Search CommSec to learn more.* ◆

*So what does it all mean?*



While these stocks were “hot” in the last financial year, Daghlian warns there’s never any guarantee they will be in the next. “In the absence of a crystal ball, any investment decision needs to be grounded in due diligence to understand the business, consider the risks and take your own financial circumstances and goals into account.” This performance does show plenty of reasons why it’s exciting to be an investor, though.



To research a stock, investors can explore the company’s online investor centre, the ASX or a share-trading platform. On CommSec you can see information about a company’s performance, including its sales, earnings, financial projections and performance ratios, along with analyst recommendations and watchlists to monitor stocks.

Past performance is not a reliable indication of future performance. Investing comes with risk.

## Property Ladder

# Hammer time

STORY BY BEK DAY  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY LOUISE ROCHE

Discover how Jess and Simon Boxtel turned a passion for property into a house-flipping side hustle, transforming homes and fortunes along the way.

Looking back, Jess Boxtel remembers everything changing for the better when she threw her hammer through a wall. “I guess it all stepped up a notch that day,” says the HR manager with a successful side hustle flipping houses with her FIFO-worker husband, Simon. “We’d already bought and sold a few houses by this stage but we had this little cottage in Brisbane and we were umming and ahing about whether we could do the renovation work required by ourselves.”

Simon is a tradie, says Jess, and he’s “really handy” but “he wasn’t so confident that we could

do the major works. But I knew he could do it so while we were debating about whether or not we should take down a wall, I settled the issue by throwing a claw hammer right through the gyprock. I said: ‘I guess now we have to take it down.’”

### Early doors

Jess and Simon’s property investment journey started – separately – when they were both teenagers. “Strangely, both of us bought off the plan in Perth when we were 19 years old,” she says. “I think for Simon, his parents had always encouraged him to put his money somewhere

smart. I’d spent periods of my childhood growing up without a lot of stability so creating that for myself was important to me.”

Both Jess and Simon took advantage of the First Home Owner grants in Western Australia at the time – which not only saved them stamp duty but also

supplied a large chunk towards their deposits. By the time they met for the first time when they were both 21, their new builds were complete. “We were living frugally,” says Jess. “I had about \$50 spare per week and I rented out each room in that house to try to help with the mortgage.”



AFTER



BEFORE



BEFORE



AFTER

### Moving away

After a few years, the couple got engaged and moved to Cairns, where they purchased a home with the intention of doing it up and selling it for financial gain. “What we did was largely cosmetic,” says Jess. “But we fixed it up, sold it on for a profit and when the time came to move again, we were hooked. We realised it was the perfect side hustle for our combined skill sets; I have an eye for design and Simon can figure out most of the construction side of things.”

Fast-forward a decade and the couple have flipped six houses, including their most recent project: a two-bedroom cottage on the Gold Coast, where they now live, that they’ve transformed into a three-bedroom haven. “We’ve learnt so much along the way,” says Jess, “including that you really have to live in a place for a while before you renovate it so you can get a feel for how things are going to work.”

The couple once made the mistake of moving into a house in Brisbane with the intention of doing a quick flip and selling it on. “We soon realised it wasn’t really salvageable and might be more of a tear-down,” says Jess. “We still own it but we’re planning to eventually put duplexes on the block. We didn’t realise how extensive the work would be but it’s all a learning experience.”

### Building blocks

Investing in property might be something the couple accidentally stumbled upon at first but these days there’s a distinct strategy to the process. “We have a great lender at CommBank – Sarnie – who crunches the worst-case scenario numbers for us when we’re considering a purchase,” says Jess. “Any money we make from flipping a house goes into a fund for the next one and we won’t make the purchase if we can’t make \$70,000 to \$100,000 in profit within 12 months.”

There’s been some luck involved, too, says Jess – the couple bought a house just prior to the pandemic, which they were able to sell a year later in the midst of the COVID property frenzy for a \$270,000 profit with very little work done.

“The big thing for us is to treat the side hustle like a long-term investment so we keep putting the profits back into the houses.” The couple leave themselves a buffer for big renovations if they ever want to do them or enough for an auction deposit if they find something they like. “That’s when we work with Sarnie – she’ll make sure we’re in a position to go to auctions and make decisions for the future.”

### Taking cues

When friends tell Jess they want to try property investments in this same way, her advice is to keep it simple and understand your budget. “It’s not easy work but it is rewarding. If you do it with someone else, clearly define and understand your roles in the relationship. Simon deals with all trades and building things and I make design, layout and product decisions. Trust me when I say these defined roles can save your relationship.”

And what of the cottage in Brisbane that copped a hammer to the wall from an impatient Jess? “Simon was mortified. I could tell he thought he’d married a crazy woman. But he says that was the pivot for him because it forced him to do the renovation.” Simon opened the wall and used a salvaged 1960s rail beam the couple picked up for \$120 as the focal point of the house – it made a big statement and the rest, as they say, is history. Everything grew from the confidence the couple got from that first reno. “Now, Simon never says no. He just says, ‘Yeah, we can do it – I just have to work out how.’” ♦

## Jess Boxel’s top tips:



Live in a place for a while before you renovate so you can get a feel for how things are going to work.



If you’re doing it with someone else, clearly define and understand your roles.



Have a firm grasp on your budget before you do anything.



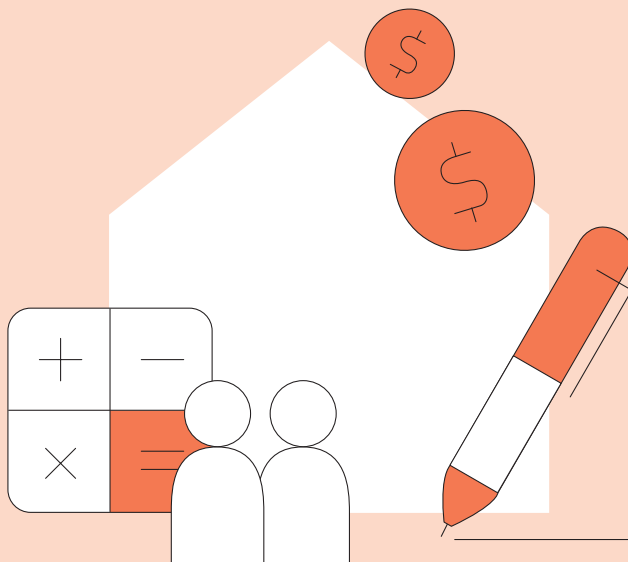
Have your CommBank lender crunch the numbers for a few different scenarios when you’re considering a purchase.



Search CommBank Home Loans to find out how a home lender can help you with your next purchase.

*Myth Buster*

# Estate planning



STORY BY SARAH MARINOS

Thinking about what life might look like for loved ones when you're no longer around isn't the easiest task to tackle. Still, it's something you need to tick off life's to-do list. Here's how.

## *Myth 1*

### **Estate planning is for wealthy people**

Estate planning may conjure an image of an ultra-rich couple working out how to divvy up their sprawling estate, luxury yacht and holiday homes between children and grandchildren. But it's a myth that organising what will happen to your assets is only an issue for the wealthy, says financial planner Andrew Saikal-Skea. "People often have more assets than they realise and a robust estate plan protects those assets and looks at your overall position and goals while you're alive and once you pass away."

## *Myth 2*

### **I'm too young to worry about a will**

When we're young, life is busy and we prioritise buying a home, paying bills, raising a family and keeping our career on track. But you're never too young to think about estate planning, says Peter Tanner, manager of advice, enablement and experience at AIA Financial Wellbeing. "Younger people think it's something to consider down the road. When you're young, it's hard to see the consequences of not having a will or power of attorney or binding nominations for your superannuation," he says. "But anyone over the age of 18 – especially when they start working, open a savings account, start building super and begin to take on debt – needs to put a plan in place."

“People often have more assets than they realise and a robust estate plan protects those assets.”

### Myth 3

#### Estate planning is just a will

Having a will is important but estate planning can include giving a trusted person the power to manage your finances if you become incapacitated. You can create a medical directorate that authorises someone to decide your medical care if you become seriously ill. “If you wouldn’t want to be resuscitated after a major heart attack or similar event, you can make your wishes known in advance,” says Tanner. For families with dependent children, estate planning spells out who you want to look after your children if you pass away. You can even determine who cares for pets.

### Myth 4

#### My family will be able to sort things out

Not leaving anything to chance brings peace of mind. This includes having life insurance so that if you pass away, there’s money to cover debts and care for your family. “Think about your superannuation and ensure there are binding nominations as to who gets it and how it’s shared,” suggests Tanner.

Consider how your family can access and navigate your accounts and assets: “Often in a couple, one person is more involved in the finances and if they pass away, their spouse has to manage.” Safely record the assets you own and keep a list of passwords and numbers for accounts in a safe place that only your family can access.

### Myth 5

#### If I die, everything will be shared fairly

Beneficiaries and inheritance can lead to fraught relationships. Without a will there’s no guarantee your assets will be shared equally or as you want them to be. “If you pass away without a will and you’re intestate, how your estate is divided varies from state to state,” says Saikal-Skea. “In the ACT, about \$200,000 goes to your spouse and everything else is split between your spouse and children.” If you don’t have a spouse, there’s an order of relatives who can inherit, says Jessica Pramana, private wealth director at Commonwealth Private. “Intestacy usually means only family members inherit so a will is vital if you want to leave gifts to friends or charities.”

### Myth 6

#### There’s no way to reduce estate taxes and expenses

Estate planning is an opportunity to think about how to arrange assets so that you meet financial and legal obligations, while saving beneficiaries from unnecessary taxes and penalties. “Leaving assets like art or jewellery to a beneficiary overseas may result in unintended tax consequences,” says Pramana. It’s worth checking whether a testamentary trust – where assets are put in a trust for your beneficiaries – is a good idea. Every person’s situation is different and a financial advisor can suggest relevant options for you. ♦



#### Good charity If you’d like to give back, here’s where to start:

Decide on the type of bequest, such as a specific amount of money, a percentage of your estate or particular assets.

Verify that the charity is registered with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC).

Discuss with a financial advisor how charitable gifts might impact your estate’s tax situation and overall planning.



If you’ve recently suffered the loss of a family member or friend, CommBank can help you at this difficult time. Call the Estate Settlement Services team on 1800 686 153 Mon–Fri, 8.30am–6.30pm (Sydney/ Melbourne time) or +61 2 8629 0143 if you’re calling from overseas.

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# Dream

HOUSE PROUD

**Kirsten Junor**

The Reverse Garbage  
CEO on how to  
renovate sustainably.

*House Proud*

# Sustainable makeover

STORY BY JULIE LEE + PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRIS JONES



When it came to their home renovation, Kirsten and Steve Junor focused on making environmentally friendly choices which can be cost-effective in the long term.





Bricks meant for landfill kept costs down.

## Steve and Kirsten's tips for a low-impact reno

### *Search for materials*

There are significant ways to reduce costs by hunting around for materials. We found our bricks at a liquidator for three per cent of the retail price. Prices for cedar cladding can vary by 100 per cent and recycled timber choices for finishes can make a huge saving.

### *Understand your time costs*

Finding great reuse materials takes time and you'll likely need to spend time finding high-quality bargain materials. Generally, builders won't have time to look for this stuff, let alone make quick choices on the fly on your behalf.

### *Build a collaborative team*

You do need a sympathetic builder. Ours was fantastic – we clicked on vision and what our goals were and we worked collaboratively to find solutions for our ideas. That's part of the fun and satisfaction of building something you can be proud of.

Kirsten and Steve Junor had one non-negotiable for their home renovation. They wanted it to be as sustainable as possible. "For me, it's not just about the look of the house," says Kirsten. "It's about reusing as much as you can and finding ways to reduce your impact on the environment." This approach can lead to some significant savings, both when it comes to sourcing materials and when living in the house, too.

### **Spotting the potential**

Their home is a freestanding, late-Victorian-style house with some "unfunctional" extensions – but when Kirsten and Steve were looking to buy, they saw potential. "There was a space that was two square metres and had six doors coming off it," says Kirsten. Some parts of the house were kept; others were rebuilt.

As the CEO of Reverse Garbage ([reversegarbage.org.au](http://reversegarbage.org.au)) in Sydney's Marrickville, Kirsten loves talking about practical ways to save money and live more sustainably. "People think that they have to be perfect 100 per cent of the time but if we

all just make a fabulous little effort, we can make a difference."

The starting point for their reno was building materials. They scoured the country to find exactly what they were looking for: "The feature wall bricks are very period to suit the style of the house but what we found were almost \$18 each and we needed 6000 of them," says Kirsten. "That was a quick 'no' but through a bit of research we ended up getting them for 50 cents each. We managed to find some old stock in Queensland – they were just sitting there, about to go to landfill."

### **Spending to save**

As well as focusing on reusing materials, Kirsten and Steve wanted the house to be as energy efficient as possible. The couple installed solar panels and a battery and have double glazing on the industrial-style windows. There's also a wide eave running along the back of the house that helps stop the sun from shining in and heating the rooms in summer.

Installing solar panels and batteries required a large upfront investment but the couple say they're already on their way to a financial return.



“We rarely put heating on. This, mixed with the solar, means the home is helping keep electricity costs down.”

“We’re currently on track to break even on the investment in year eight,” says Steve. “After that, it’s all savings from avoiding taking power out of the grid and then additional income from the feed-in tariffs.”

Kirsten says that monitoring their solar usage in an app helps the family watch their daily electricity use, too. “When you have the ability to see what’s going in and out, you’re a lot more conscious of what you’re using the power on.”

### Reducing energy costs

With power bills taking up a good chunk of most household spending, it makes sense to consider heating and cooling solutions when you’re doing a reno. The Junors used double glazing and a concrete floor to help with temperature control.

“There’s 50 square metres of double glazing – accounting for about 55 per cent of the external walls – and the rest is double-brick,” says Steve. “In summer that sustains about an 11-degree temperature difference from the outside.”

Having a concrete floor in your home can significantly improve heating and cooling efficiency. Concrete absorbs heat during the day and releases it at night, which can reduce energy costs. This, mixed with the solar, is helping keep electricity costs down. “We’re now 70 per cent self-sufficient in power consumption and aim to improve that number with additional batteries.”

### Staying on track

While the couple are seeing the cost benefits of their efforts, they say the top motivation with their renovation was to be more environmentally conscious. “Our choices are simply ethical ones for using sustainable raw or manufactured materials and for always considering quality and long-term durability,” says Steve. They also made the decision not to use any plastics, vinyls or MDF while remodelling the house. “The sustainably farmed timbers and reused timbers are a joy to look at every day.”

The reno, which has been going for about two years, is now and the point where it is almost finished. “We absolutely love it,” says Steve. “There’s always something to do. We’ve suffered from reno fatigue but sometimes you just need to stop for a month and then you get the energy and passion to get back on it.” ♦

## Solar battery myths

Solar batteries are transforming how we store and use energy, says Phil Krok, battery channel manager at Amber. Here, he debunks three misconceptions.

1

### They can be expensive

“Costs have come down over the past five years, with competition putting downward pressure on prices. Since the cost of electricity has risen, battery owners can save more by not buying energy from the grid.”

2

### They don’t last long

“Modern batteries can last 15 years with good usable life left in them. Cell chemistry is always improving and is safer and more stable than ever, which can give families more confidence in their investment.”

3

### They aren’t necessary with a grid connection

“Batteries can complement a grid connection. They make it possible for you to reduce the electricity you purchase when prices are high, which can benefit the grid by reducing demand during heavy usage times like when cooking dinner.”

For more information on financing options for home energy-efficiency improvements, search CommBank Sustainable living.



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*Bucket List*

# Japan

Does it feel like everyone you know is heading to Japan? You're not alone. Thanks to the best exchange rate in more than a decade, you'll find great shopping, loads of culture and the best food you'll ever eat.

STORY BY REBECCA VILLIS & BROOKE LE POER TRENCH

It used to be super-pricey but Japan is now a surprisingly affordable destination for travellers. Yes, there's the very friendly exchange rate but there's also the budget-friendly train system and myriad local dining spots that won't burn a hole in your back pocket. And you don't need to blow all your yen on expensive galleries and museums; there are plenty of free attractions, from ancient shrines and serene temples to expansive parks and bustling department stores. Here's what to see and eat and where to stay in three of Japan's most popular cities.





## Tokyo

Tokyo's population may be nearly 40 million but the first thing you'll notice is that this chaotic, neon-lit city runs like clockwork. Hit one distinct district at a time to get the most out of your visit.

### + EAT

If you don't mind waiting for a table, Tamawarai in the Harajuku district serves Michelin-starred soba noodles for under \$30. For a lively atmosphere, hit up a vibrant izakaya (Japanese-style pub) in Shibuya or Shinjuku. Omoide Yokocho (Memory Lane) is an alleyway a short stroll from Shinjuku Station that's jam-packed with tiny eateries slinging grilled meat skewers and cold beer. If you want something to go, most department stores – such as Mitsukoshi in Ginza – have a food hall where you can grab ready-to-eat meals and bentos.

### + SEE

You can enjoy the best of Tokyo without paying for tickets and entrance fees to overrun tourist spots – it just takes a little planning. Head to the colourful Harajuku district to experience the fashion culture before wandering to the serene Meiji Jingu Shinto shrine and the massive torii gate at its entrance. Walk south to get to to Shibuya and its bright lights, huge department stores, trendy teens and famous pedestrian crossing. To get a holiday snap worth framing, skip the Tokyo Skytree and take a lift 202 metres up to the Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building's free observation decks instead – you might even spot Mount Fuji in the distance. Travelling with kids? Nearby Disneyland blends the House of Mouse's charm with Japanese culture, immersive rides and fireworks shows.



### + STAY

**Lyf Ginza Tokyo:** A modern spot in Ginza with spacious communal areas, basic but comfortable rooms and a location ideal for exploring the upscale shopping and dining district.

**Granbell Hotel:** Located in the heart of Shinjuku, this hotel has a rooftop bar and a number of different room types to suit all groups.

**Hotel Indigo:** This boutique stay is all about thoughtful design – from rooms with record players and vinyls to the 11th-floor art gallery – and is close to luxury shops.



To book search "Travel Booking" in the CommBank app.



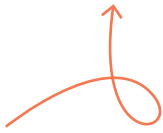
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## Kyoto



Brimming with temples, shrines and geishas – not to mention cherry blossoms and towering bamboo forests – Kyoto is a city where history and culture come alive.

### + EAT

You'll find all the favourites here – from ramen and tempura to sushi and soba – but it's worth focusing on the local specialties. Kyoto's traditional sweets, known as *kyogashi*, are intricately crafted confections best paired with matcha tea (arguably the best in Japan). You'll find the most beautifully designed iterations in Kameya Yoshinaga near the Nishiki Market or Kagizen Yoshifusa in Gion. Vegetarians are well looked after in Kyoto as tofu is a prolific part of local cuisine – hit any number of *shojin ryori* (Buddhist vegetarian cuisine) eateries serving hearty dishes of seasonal vegetables and tofu. Try Daitokuji Ikkyu in central Kyoto – this Zen temple restaurant is the oldest one of its kind in Kyoto.

### + SEE

While each district has plenty to do, there are some can't-miss highlights. In the city's south-east, Fushimi Inari Taisha Shrine is a trail of vibrant orange torii gates that offer memorable photo opportunities. On a sunny day, head for the stunning Kinkakuji Temple (Golden Pavilion), covered in sparkling gold leaf and situated beside a pristine pond. And for forest-bathing – a popular local hobby – walk the towering Arashiyama Bamboo Grove at dawn or dusk to avoid the crowds. Afternoons are best spent meandering along the shopping arcades and markets of downtown Kyoto. If the younger members of your group need a break from temples and shrines, day-tripping to Nara to feed the famous deer will mix things up.

### + STAY

**Oakwood Hotel Oike Kyoto:** Comfortable and family friendly, this hotel has big rooms with kitchen and laundry facilities and is in a great location for exploring historic sites.

**Kaya Kyoto Nijo Castle:** This boutique hotel near Nijo Castle has elegant rooms, a serene garden and a restaurant that blends traditional and modern design.

**The Millennials:** This futuristic stay has well-designed sleeping pods with high ceilings, plenty of storage and large beds that turn into sofas at the touch of a button.



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## Osaka

It's not called Japan's kitchen for nothing. Osaka is rightly famous for some of the best food in the country, as well as neon-lined streets and a rich feudal history.

### + EAT

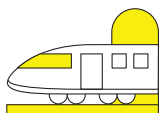
You'll need to master one word: okonomiyaki. The savoury pancake made with ingredients like pork, squid and cabbage is a local specialty and is as affordable as it is delicious – head to Okonomiyaki Mizuno in Dotonbori for some of the best. Nearby, stop under the giant octopus sign at the famous Takoyaka Dotonbori Kukururu stall for takoyaki (aka fried octopus balls). For a hearty bowl of udon, head to the north of the city to visit Byakuan, which serves up flat-edged sanuki noodles. At Kuromon Market, many stalls will grill the fresh seafood you've bought and let you eat it right there, while sushi lovers should grab a counter seat at Endo Sushi at Osaka Central Fish Market to watch masterful chefs work their magic.

### + SEE

Start with a stroll through the sprawling grounds of Osaka Castle, built by a famous samurai in 1583 and complete with a golden tearoom. Window-shop the underground malls of the Kita district, the city's northern downtown hub, and then head for the clouds at the Umeda Sky Building's observatory, which offers panoramic city views. Further south, the Minami district is home to Dotonbori Canal and the strip of teahouses, restaurants and theatres that runs beside it (where locals go for entertainment, shopping and food). For the kids, don't miss the CupNoodles Museum, where interactive exhibits entertain and they can even create their own unique instant-noodle flavour. ♦

### Travelling by bullet train?

Japan's rail stations offer a smorgasbord of exquisitely prepared bento boxes (known as ekiben) so you can BYO sushi, gyoza, yakisoba and all the treats.



### + STAY

#### Citadines Namba Osaka:

These spacious serviced apartments in Namba cater to families and long-term travellers, with many offering fully equipped kitchens.

#### Dormy Inn Premium Osaka Kitahama:

Comfortable accommodation in central Osaka with its own hot spring that's perfect for unwinding after a day out.

#### Osaka Excel Hotel Tokyu:

This stylish and modern spot near the Shinsaibashi-suji shopping arcade has spacious rooms with great views and a rooftop garden.



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*Health Matters*

# Searching for a cure

STORY BY SARAH MARINOS

Australia's leading cancer researchers are improving treatments and saving lives – and the breakthroughs keep on coming.

Many people who have supported a loved one dealing with cancer are left with a strong desire to make a difference. CommBank's Can4Cancer initiative, which has partnered with Tour de Cure, gives staffers the opportunity to do just that every year through the CommBank Staff Foundation charity. Employees can take part in fundraising walks, bike rides, runs and swims around Australia.

So far, through the initiative – now in its 10th year – CommBank staff have raised more than \$17 million and helped fund 145 different cancer projects that have achieved a huge 32 breakthroughs. For all those involved, the knowledge that their efforts are supporting scientists and researchers improving outcomes for everyone who experiences a cancer diagnosis brings hope and optimism. Here, three leading cancer researchers explain how their work is bringing us all closer to a cure.

Professor Richard Scolyer is co-medical director of the Melanoma Institute Australia and 2024 Australian of the Year – an award he shares with colleague Professor Georgina Long. Since 2022, Scolyer has received three Can4Cancer research grants, which have contributed to four breakthroughs in melanoma treatments.

Australia has the world's highest incidence of melanoma with one person diagnosed every 30 minutes. But in the past 12 years, lifesaving advances have been made in immunotherapy, a treatment that activates a patient's own immune system to fight the disease. "Ten years ago, most people diagnosed with stage-four melanoma died within a year," says Richard Scolyer. "Because of immunotherapy, more than 50 per cent of people are alive five years later."

Recent clinical trials have shown that immunotherapy is even more effective when given before surgery to remove the melanoma cancer cells. In 2023, Richard Scolyer was himself diagnosed with incurable glioblastoma (brain cancer) and under the guidance of Georgina Long became the first patient in the world to be given combination immunotherapy in this way. His most recent scan, in June 2024, showed no sign of cancer recurrence. "We needed a therapy that would recognise cancer cells but leave normal brain cells alone and that's what immunotherapy does," he says.

Immunotherapy is now being used to treat lung, kidney and a subset of breast cancers. But for melanoma, Scolyer says we need to remember the basics. "Follow the sun smart rules to try to prevent skin cancers. And early detection is important. Know the skin you're in and if you spot changes, see your doctor."



Professor Jeff Holst is a translational cancer researcher at the Lowy Cancer Research Centre at UNSW. Since 2020, he's received two Can4Cancer research grants that have contributed to three breakthroughs, specifically in prostate cancer.

When it comes to helping people understand his work on prostate cancer, Jeff Holst likens cancer cells to a growing teenager that eats you out of house and home. At first, Holst used a Can4Cancer grant to examine how prostate cancer cells absorb and use nutrients, such as amino acids, to grow. Now, he's working out how to starve those hungry cancer cells so they're unable to survive in our bodies.

Tests of cancer drugs don't necessarily take this metabolic process into account so Holst has developed models that replicate it to improve the accuracy of clinical trials. "We've developed a physiological model where we can grow cancer cells in an environment similar to the human body. We've got a blood-like nutrient supply that pumps through cancer cells within a special hood to control gases and temperature." This allows Holst to carry out clinical trials with a deeper understanding of how cancer cells use specific nutrients to grow. "We call it the EViCT [Ex-Vivo Clinical Trial] system, as we're trying to get rid of cancer cells."

Holst is researching how to "evict" melanoma, glioblastoma, prostate cancer and breast cancer cells and his commitment to his research is close to home. "Cancer is what my family members die from. During COVID, both my parents were diagnosed with cancer so it's deeply personal for me."

(From left) Professor Richard Scolyer, Doctor Jenny Wang and Professor Jeff Holst at a Can4Cancer event in July.



**“We’ve put a lot of effort into understanding the biology of cancer stem cells... to stop them.”**

Doctor Jenny Wang is head of the Cancer and Stem Cell Laboratory at The University of Sydney. She received her first Can4Cancer research grant in 2023 to further her work in improving the treatment of blood cancer.

Despite advances in treatment for some cancers, the prognosis for people with acute myeloid leukaemia is challenging. Only 27 per cent of patients survive more than five years after treatment. And blood cancers – which impact more than 135,000 Australians – are often aggressive and resistant to the current chemotherapy treatments. Jenny Wang believes stem cell-based treatments could be the key to developing powerful treatments.

“Blood cancer stem cells are very smart and can make themselves more resistant to therapy. They create a micro-environment – a home – where they hide,” she says. “Cancer stem cells can also learn from normal stem cells and hijack their features so we’ve put a lot of effort

into understanding their biology. We know they can adapt so we’re trying to find a way to stop those changes – it’s like trying to block the signal from a GPS so those cancer stem cells can’t find their way home.”

Wang’s research on acute myeloid leukaemia applies to other cancers that also rely on cancer stem cells to spread, such as brain and lung cancers. “These cancers all survive in a similar way and once we have a better understanding of their survival mechanism, we can develop new therapies to target that.” ♦

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## The best \$5 I ever spent...

For author and comedian Jean Kittson, an op shop offers great treasures.



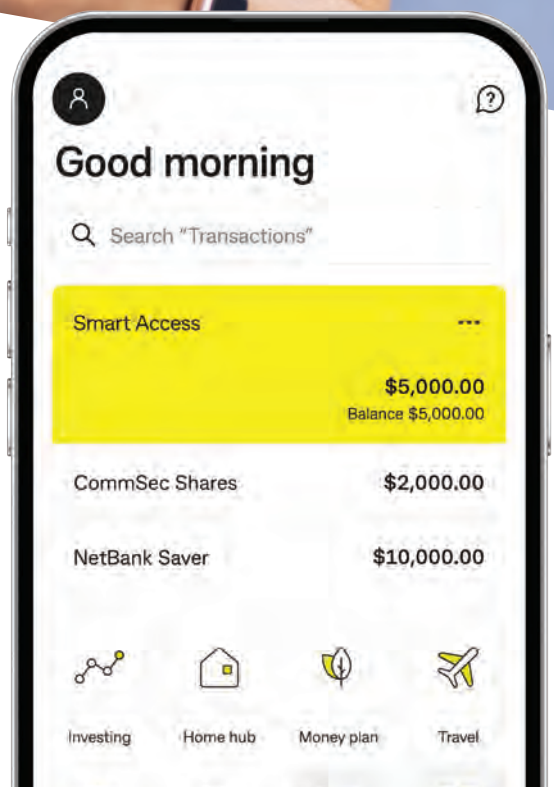
“Recently, I bought an ancient-looking oil lamp from an op shop for \$5. It felt old and it’s an odd-but-purposeful shape and I spent hours trying to discover its origin. It might have been made on the other side of the world 2000 years ago or last week at a local pottery class... but that’s of little consequence. I love it and it’s fascinating to reach out and (probably) touch history.” ♦



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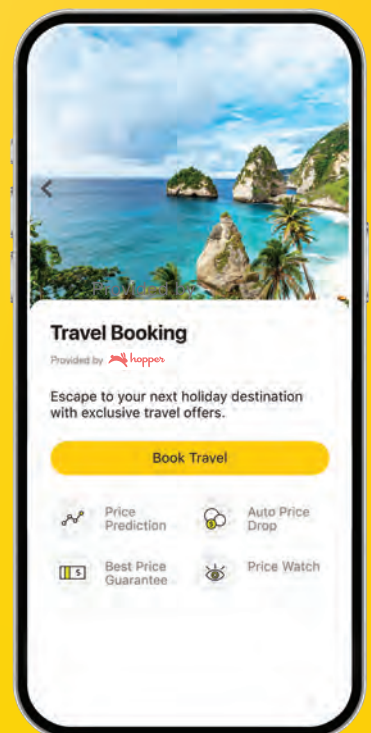




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