

Mona's moody perch  
on the Derwent River.

A photograph of the Mona gallery building, a modern structure with a prominent triangular archway, situated on the banks of the Derwent River. The building is reflected in the water. The sky is filled with dramatic, colorful clouds, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The overall mood is atmospheric and artistic.

# M O N A

**This unconventional  
gallery brings the  
art off the walls**

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**Since opening just over a decade ago, Mona has completely changed the way tourists and art lovers look at Hobart. The headline-grabbing contemporary gallery was dubbed a “subversive adult Disneyland” by its founder, David Walsh, and has since become the city’s biggest attraction. Now it’s an essential part of any visit to Tasmania’s capital (even for people who would usually never set foot inside a gallery), and a big reason is that there’s so much more to do than simply look at art.**



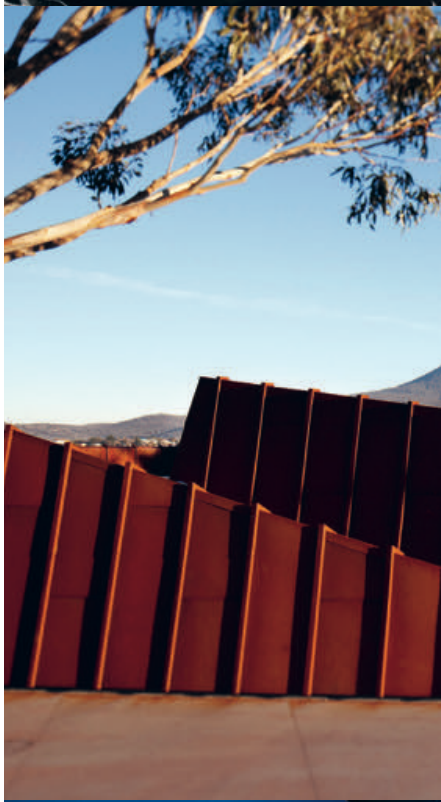
**START WITH A BOAT RIDE**  
 There's a buzz and a long queue at the ferry terminal at Hobart's historic Constitution Dock when I arrive. Fortunately, a Posh Pit VIP pass lets me skip the lines and I'm directed to the front of the boat where canapes and mimosas await. Soon we're zipping up the Derwent for a 25-minute trip to the museum.

**GET COMPLETELY LOST**  
 The museum itself is housed in a three-storey structure that resembles the lair of some forgotten Bond villain. Because it's mostly underground, visitors enter via a spiral staircase that descends deep into the earth before emerging in a vast hall lined by monumental walls of Triassic sandstone.

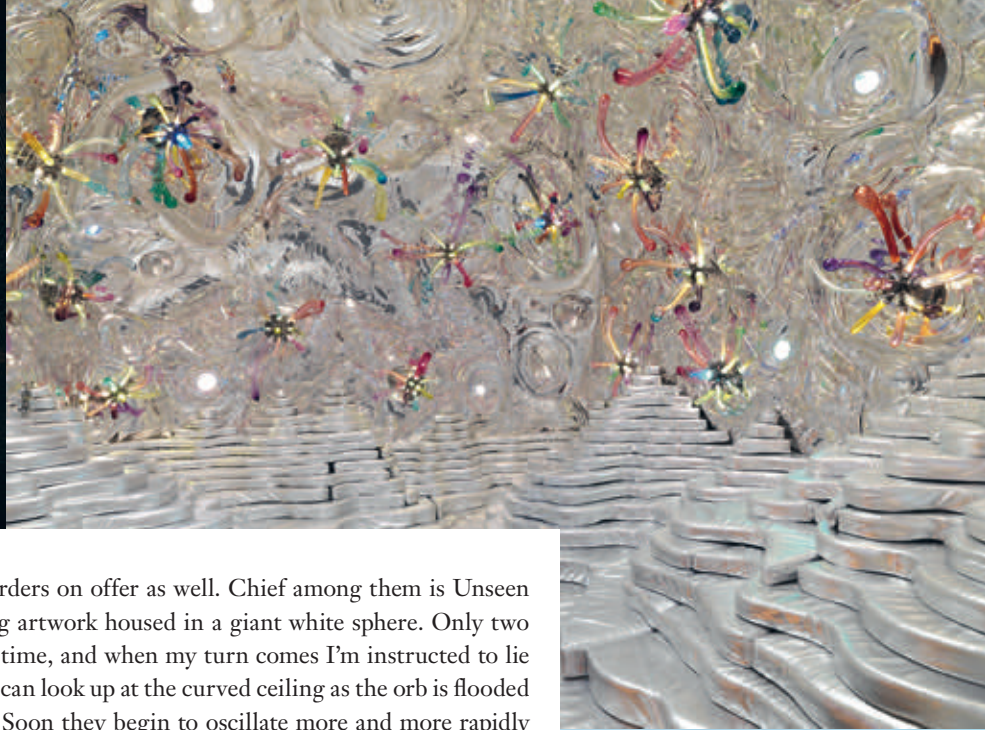
Mona is not meant to be experienced in a linear fashion and as I walk in, a helper tells me that the best way to take it all in is to "mooch around and get a bit lost". At times, walking through the museum feels like being inside an Escher drawing and as I wander through cavernous galleries connected by dimly lit tunnels, I lose my sense of direction so thoroughly that I'm startled when I eventually arrive back at my starting point.

**STOP FOR LUNCH AND A LIE-DOWN**  
 Stepping into the on-site restaurant Faro, I finally regain my bearings thanks to giant windows framing the Derwent below. It's billed as a "revolving" restaurant because the theme changes every few months, and the Tokyo Punk experience begins with an intense umami-driven miso, mushroom and whisky cocktail that leads into theatrical dishes like sashimi kingfish, smoked eel and sea urchin presented in a thurible. This being Mona, a costumed performing troupe pops up at various points throughout the meal to play punk in the style of Tokyo band 5.6.7.8's, lead meditations and stage mock battles.

Bookings are essential for the degustation-only restaurant (Tokyo Punk gave way to a Spanish theme, El Culto de Españã, until May), and there



Mona is a sensory overload from its Derwent River transport to cuisine, architecture and artworks.



are a few tasty side orders on offer as well. Chief among them is Unseen Seen, a mind-bending artwork housed in a giant white sphere. Only two people can enter at a time, and when my turn comes I'm instructed to lie on the bed inside so I can look up at the curved ceiling as the orb is flooded with coloured lights. Soon they begin to oscillate more and more rapidly until my brain can no longer keep up. That's when images start to emerge from this hallucinogenic strobe show, the light resolving into shapes and patterns that seem to move towards and away from me. It's easy to see why many visitors have likened it to an acid trip – when I emerge from the pulsating cocoon I simply sit in silence for a few minutes, contemplating the almost rapturous experience.

#### CHECK OUT SOME ART

Because the information about each work is accessed via a downloadable app rather than plaques on the walls, there's a pleasingly democratic air to the exhibits. Wandering around in a daze, I see pieces by modern masters like Botero and Sydney Nolan afforded equal status to a chrome-plated poo emoji and a 2500-year-old mummified Egyptian cat head.

As much a playground as a gallery, Mona is designed to bring the art off the walls. Some of the more memorable works include the infamous “poo machine” that replicates the human digestive process (and the accompanying smell) and a giant device that “prints” words in falling sheets of water, each legible for a fraction of a second before dissipating into a formless puddle. At both, I hear people pondering the “how” of these impressive machines as well as the “why”. Others simply watch in wonder.

I board the ferry back to Hobart (swapping the mimosa for a glass of wine) and eavesdropping on the groups around me, I'm struck by how different each person's experience of the day was. Some describe intensely cerebral interactions with the art while others didn't stop laughing all day. And before we reach the dock, I've already decided that I need to revisit this endlessly fascinating, utterly unique gallery. [mona.net.au](http://mona.net.au)

