



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR  
VICTORIA

**MELBOURNE DESIGN WEEK**  
**PANEL DISCUSSION**  
**Friday 22 May 2026**

**Acknowledgments**

**Professor James Angus**, Lieutenant-Governor of  
Victoria and **Helen Angus**

**The Honourable Ted Baillieu**, Former Premier of  
Victoria and **Robyn Baillieu**

**Amy Muir**, Moderator of tonight's panel discussion and  
panellists **Professor Philip Goad**, Associate Professor  
**Ursula de Jong** and **Dr Soon-Tzu Speechley**

**Distinguished guests**

I begin by acknowledging the Traditional Owners of the  
lands on which this House stands – the Wurundjeri and  
Bunurong people of the Eastern Kulin Nation – and pay  
my respects to their Elders, past and present.

I am looking forward to hearing the insights of tonight's panel, who will be able to speak expertly about the architectural significance of this building.

I would like to begin, however, by reflecting from the personal perspective of someone who has spent time in this place.

The Governorship is not a role you plan for, and therefore this House is not the kind of place I envisioned myself coming to know so intimately.

There are a number of responsibilities associated with the role of Governor – many of which are undertaken in this building.

They are a privilege to exercise on behalf of the people of Victoria.

But one of the great (and unexpected) joys of this role has been discovering what I did not know about the life and times of this noteworthy Victorian place.

For 150 years, it has been a symbolic centre for ceremony and community – the rhythms of which echo throughout this building and its grounds.

Let us start at the garden entrance gate on Government House drive – which all of you would have entered through tonight.

Passing the Royal Coat of Arms carved into the sandstone, you can imagine the countless people who have done the same over the decades – including myself on a crisp winter day in August 2023 when I commenced my term as Governor.

As you venture up the driveway, clumps of shrubbery and broad sweeping lawns dance in your periphery, still reflecting the original garden design from the 1870s.

Rounding the curve, you are treated to the slow reveal of the magnificent exterior of the House – with the Governor’s Standard atop the tower – a tower which was once one of the tallest structures in colonial Melbourne.

That tight curve on the drive was inserted by William Guilfoyle, curator of the Botanical Gardens, into the original design of the drive.

Let us continue through the State Entrance and into the State Hall.

Looking up you see the spectacular cross-vaulted ceiling – reminiscent of the many cathedrals that William Wardell designed in London before becoming Chief Architect of the Public Works Department in Victoria.

To the left is the Billiard Room that has hosted world champion players, including the legendary Walter Lindrum, and to the right is the State Drawing Room which has hosted performances from the likes of Dame Nellie Melba.

Ahead lies the State Dining Room, with its telescopic table of Australian red cedar and Spanish mahogany, built for the House around 1875, which has hosted many State banquets for visiting Royals and Heads of State from across the world, as well as welcoming new State Cabinets.

And now we find ourselves in this glorious State Ballroom.

It has inspired awe ever since people gathered here for the Queen's Birthday Ball in 1876 – the first official function marking the opening of Government House – although it was painted white at that time.

One hundred and fifty years later, this is still a working House.

It continues to provide the spaces for important ceremonial functions of our constitutional democracy...

... to impress the international dignitaries and their delegations who come to visit Victoria...

...and to offer an environment befitting celebration of the achievements of the citizens who call this State home.

In this building, you get a real sense of the ambition of 'Marvellous Melbourne' that inspired its construction.

And you feel the weight of the countless events and conversations that have taken place within these walls, shaping our modern State.

Those feelings never wane – no matter how often you tread these boards and carpets.

It is an honour to contribute to the history of this special place and all the stories it holds.

And on the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its opening, there is no better time to reflect on its enduring legacy.

In that spirit, I look forward to hearing from our panel.

Thank you.