



Kyle Graham the window washer hanging out and enjoying the view
In Kew. Photos: Jason South

When the room is the view



John Elder

To the scantily clad woman who ran in panic to the bathroom last week - window cleaner Kyle Graham, hanging on a rope at the time, wasn't trying to grab a picture with his camera phone. He was just taking a call.

And by the way, there was a notice in your mailbox saying he'd be working that day... so, keep your eyes peeled next time.

"When we're doing apartment blocks we put up notices a few days before, but people don't notice that stuff," says Graham, who has been doing rope access work for three years - and has subsequently learnt a great deal about people.

"You sort of see into their lives: what books they're reading, what movies they're watching, how their bedrooms are super messy and piled with their junk, and the rest of the house is tidy, how they're sitting there in the morning in their underwear, that kind of stuff."

On one occasion, when Graham had long hair and a beard and



looked very much like Jesus, he descended to a window where a woman was kneeling in front of a cross and praying.

"I don't know if I gave her a religious experience, but I sure gave her a fright," he says.

The other people routinely startled into action by the sudden appearance of Graham are lazy office workers: "You see them on Facebook or the phone and it's obvious they're just slacking off. Once they see me, they immediately get back to work."

As a species, the window washer - much like the pool man and gardener - has been the source of much ribald humour for, like, ever. They are, of course, people just doing a job - more of them with the growth in the service industry, the cultural blow-out of middle-class brunch and outsourcing of old-fashioned weekend chores, and reality television's almost moral elevation of the home beautiful.

Cameron MacSween started cleaning windows 33 years ago as a teenager. Those were the days of the four-storey ladders (since banned) and anxiety when a ladder slipped a little or sunk in to grass and threatened to tilt backwards.

MacSween experienced the latter while cleaning at Xavier College one day, which may explain why he tried another line of work for a while, before founding Cam's Window Cleaning 17 years ago.

Safety guidelines have turned a bucket-and-squeegee game into more of a trade. "There are now maybe 15 high-rise companies, 20 or 30 general window washing companies, and maybe 10 of them are mainstream... then you've got your sole traders doing domestic work, down to your pensioners who get out and clean the local shops."

It's taken MacSween a long time to establish a reliable team who actually take an interest in their work - no-shows were once epidemic - and aren't prone to falling off ladders. He tells the story of an elderly Greek worker who resisted all gentle hints of retirement, no matter how many times he fell into swimming pools and crashing the company car three times in a month. "In the end, I had to say that was enough."

While new-world seriousness

has taken over a game that once suffered too many cowboys, a saucy side lives on. MacSween long ago put a slab of beer on offer to any of the workers who might get "picked up" on the job. However, an outbreak of professionalism has meant the slab has gone unclaimed.

Graham, the Jesus-like rope man who works for MacSween, was recently confronted with a woman holding a phone number against the pane. He wasn't sure if it was a joke, a referral to a girlfriend or what.

"I didn't follow it up," he says. There remains, however, the legend of a window cleaner called Peter Perfect.

"He was a very good-looking bloke, worked out, had a good physique, and he knew it," says MacSween. "He sort of dressed to show himself off. We got a lot of requests from the ladies for Peter Perfect. He's now in another line of work."

Guess who's paying for dinner? Yep, it's us

Heath Aston

They were ending the age of entitlement at home - but 17,000 kilometres away in London, Alexander Downer mustn't have got the memo.

Details of a sumptuous dinner hosted by Australia's high commissioner to the UK for then prime minister Tony Abbott and his chief of staff Peta Credlin have emerged.

They show Mr Downer spared no expense when hosting high-ranking visitors at his London residence, Stoke Lodge.

Dinner for Mr Abbott, Ms Credlin and their national security adviser Andrew Shearer cost more than \$350 a head, according to documents released under freedom of

*Dinner Hosted by
H.E. The Hon Alexander Downer AC
and Mrs Nicola Downer AM*

*Guests
The Hon Tony Abbott PM
Miss Peta Credlin
Mr Andrew Shearer*

*At
Stoke Lodge, London*

*Menu
Scallops 3 Ways, Crumb Benito,
Tart Tar, Chilled Velvet Chowder
Pan Roasted Lamb Loin,
Sun Dried Tomato and
Feta, Preserved Lemon
Selection of Farmhouse Cheeses with
Pickles and Chutneys
Coffee or Tea
Price \$2558*

information by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Along with Mr Downer and his wife, the former prime minister's party, which included two other unnamed guests, feasted on scallops "3 ways" followed by mains of pan-roasted lamb loin, according to a menu for the August 2014 soiree.

The total bill came to £1261 (\$2558 at current exchange rates).

A lunch for Justice Minister Michael Keenan three months later cost a more modest \$640 and featured "veal scaloppine marsala with honey-glazed salsisla and cavalo nero".

Unfortunately, Mr Keenan's flight into London was delayed due to bad weather and he never attended the

lunch, according to the documents. The minister's travelling companions - secretary of the attorney-general's department Chris Moraitis and Mr Keenan's chief of staff Peter Soros - also missed the lunch.

At a dinner for then treasurer Joe Hockey and his department head Martin Parkinson two months later, the menu also impressive, with guests enjoying entrees of "caramelised diver-caught scallops with Jerusalem artichokes and hazelnuts".

The main course was roast guinea fowl, braised pearl barley, lemon and thyme sauce and dessert of "rhubarb and duck-egg custard tart with clotted cream". The bill for 14 people was £452 (\$916, or \$65 a head).

It was reported in October that

Mr Downer had spent \$150,000 in a year on 65 official dinners and lunches as high commissioner, with about a third being official receptions at Australia House.

Mr Downer put on a \$2500 dinner for BHP boss Andrew McKenzie and his entourage.

DFAT declined to comment but it is understood hospitality budgets are set in Canberra and Mr Downer did not breach his annual budget.

Labor MP Pat Conroy said Mr Abbott and Mr Downer were close personal friends and there should be no reason that a dinner between them should cost more than \$350 a head.

"They certainly like the finer things in life, don't they," he said.