

Best of British Jamie First

A contemporary Australian artist has won over one of world's most prestigious galleries.

The Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) in London has snapped up a limited edition copy of Fairfield local John Hinds' handmade book, *The English Suite*.

The large format work, styled like a wallpaper catalogue, has 14 designs "for the Antipodes" and comments on Aussies' persistent nostalgia for the mother country.

"In 2007, I did a three-month trip to England and was driving around in a wicked campervan," Hinds said.

"This book is really a 'tongue-in-cheek' look ... so if you're feeling homesick for England, you can see a nice wallpaper to evoke (it)."

He created only 10 copies, which took a year to complete.

Each was hand stencilled and features more than 100 colours.

Hinds, who works out of the Firestation Print Studio in Armadale, said the drawings included cathedrals, country houses, London's underground map and other "typically English things".

"There's a version of a damask wallpaper, but instead of using traditional flowers or birds, I've used bones and skeletons, and armour and weapons for England's history of warfare."

The 64-year-old said like travel, when something doesn't go exactly to plan, *The English Suite* also had elements one wouldn't expect.

"In all the wallpapers there's something that's a little bit wrong. There's always a humourous touch.

"Like in the country house, there's a deathwatch beetle, which is quietly eating the house away."

Having sold six of the intricate works, two of which were acquired by the State Library of Victoria and the Geelong Gallery, Hinds said convincing the V&A to buy one was no easy task.

"I had been emailing them ... and then a friend who was from England was going back for a holiday ... so I was very cheeky and got him to take a copy with him and actually give it to them on appraisal.

"They were going to make a decision on seeing the book in the flesh. They eventually said 'yes', and here we are and I'm happy."

He said it was a big step to receive their acknowledgement.

“It’s confirmation of the artistic quality of the work.

“The museum’s area is decorative arts – anything from costumes, musical instruments, glass and ceramics to architectural things – so for the book to be English wallpaper, albeit from Australia, the fit is absolutely spot on.

“It’s the right place for it to be.”

Hinds said although this was the first time one of his pieces had made it overseas, he’d love to start a trend and was already planning his next creation.

“I always have quite a few projects on the go, like a man spinning all those plates.”