

Special issue
Sydney's most
influential people

the
(sydney)
magazine



Bright lights, big city
Our annual list of Sydney's most
creative, provocative and inspiring people

the
(top 100)
2011

Whether they're challenging the status quo or fighting to be seen or heard, these Sydneysiders are experts at getting a reaction.

PROVOCATEUR

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Photographed at Speakers Corner, The Domain

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Peter Newman
television-documentary producer

Six Australians, one leaky boat, one Kenyan refugee camp, three bullet-proof jackets, one US armed forces Hercules transport plane, one excursion in an armoured vehicle through Baghdad's notorious Red Zone – just some of the elements that made SBS's *Go Back to Where You Came From* one of the most compelling documentaries ever on Australian television. "It's very rare that you get to make something that can impact on a really important national debate," says English-born Peter Newman, 36, SBS's former production and development boss, who commissioned the bold, strongly rating series. "I'm not sure shows like this come along in your career very often, where it kind of transcends television."

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Jacinta Green
anti-coal-seam-gas-mining activist

In less than a year, marine ecologist Jacinta Green has become the face of Sydney's anti-coal-seam-gas-mining campaign. In November 2010, Green was one of three dozen or so anxious St Peters residents who met at the Town & Country pub after a town hall meeting about a mining company's plans for exploratory drilling in their neighbourhood. "The more I found out about it, the more horrified I became," says Green, 41, a University of NSW research assistant. The pub gathering spawned Stop CSG Sydney. As the movement's spokesperson and the vice-president of the Lock the Gate Alliance, Green is proud that both groups have made a huge impact on the debate. Dart Energy has postponed drilling in the area while it examines options elsewhere. "This is bigger than St Peters; it's bigger than 'not in my backyard' ... and someone has to stop it."

From left to right:
Peter Newman; Jacinta Green;
Tony Abbott; Mark Robinson;
Fiona Byrne; Anna Funder.



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Tony Abbott
Leader of the Opposition

When Tony Abbott, 54, packs his Speedos for his Christmas break, he's likely to look back on 2011 with some sense of achievement – while drawing up a to-do list. The Coalition can still boast about its election-winning lead over Labor in the polls but the Opposition Leader may be nervous; with royal and presidential visitors, Julia Gillard has looked distinctly prime ministerial and is now more popular than her rival as preferred prime minister. There are also rumblings of dissent in Coalition ranks about Abbott's pledge to abolish the mining tax if elected. And some are saying that his boover-boot style is wearing thin. Abbott remains unrepentant. "Our task," he has said, "is to ... establish political ownership over moves towards lower taxes, fairer welfare, better services and stronger borders."

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Mark Robinson SC
barrister

Gripped by the 1960s television courtroom dramatisation *Consider Your Verdict*, a 12-year-old Mark Robinson determined that he would become a barrister. His enthusiasm for the law, and particularly administrative law (he is the author of a definitive two-volume work on the subject) has never waned. Robinson, who was admitted as a senior counsel in October, won one of the largest administrative law class actions in history in the High Court in 2002 when he acted for thousands of refugees found to have been denied natural justice in their dealings with the Refugee Review Tribunal. In June, the 52-year-old advocate convinced a full bench of the High Court to overturn NSW state government anti-bikie laws on the basis that they could impinge individual freedoms. "I've protected people from unlawful practices, I've assisted in having legislation stop its operation in NSW; it doesn't get a lot better than that," says Robinson.

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Fiona Byrne
Marrickville councillor

When Greens-led Marrickville Council expressed in-principle support for a global boycott against Israel, senior federal government minister Anthony Albanese accused the council of self-indulgence. But Mayor Fiona Byrne, the public face of the move to highlight the plight of Palestinian people, has no regrets. "People are actually discussing some pretty key issues that maybe wouldn't have got on the agenda apart from the fact that there was ... intense media scrutiny around those issues," says Byrne, 39, who did not recontest the mayoralty in September. The single mother of three girls – aged eight, six and three – is now working in the electorate office of Balmain Greens MP Jamie Parker. "It's that engagement with the community and trying to drive outcomes and resolutions for the local community – that's where my passion is."

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Anna Funder
author

Anna Funder, a writer driven to illuminate people and their motivations, heroic or horrifying, is no stranger to success. Her first book, the best-selling *Stasiland*, was translated into 16 languages and won the UK's most prestigious award for non-fiction, the Samuel Johnson Prize. And since the former international human rights lawyer's second book, the novel *All That I Am*, was released in September, it has also grabbed a spot on best-seller lists. Focusing on a group of exiled left-wing German activists opposing Hitler's rise, the novel is also a story about Sydney – character Ruth Becker recalls her past from her flat in Rose Bay. "I wanted to write about Sydney because I love Sydney," says Glebe-based Funder, 45, who has been moved by the reader response to her books. "I must have got something right to tap into things that other people recognise so deeply."

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