

# Ear to the ground ... medical marvel arboretum muse



A \$2 million sculpture planned for Canberra's National Arboretum takes its inspiration from Australia's groundbreaking bionic ear, the cochlear implant.

ACT Environment Minister Simon Corbell announced on Friday that Queensland firm Bligh Tanner had won the Freefall Experience design competition.

Structural engineer Rod Bligh led the winning team and was inspired by a surgeon he met in Tasmania who explained cochlear implants and the complexity of the human ear.

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**AMONG THE OAKS:** Artist's impressions of the 'Freefall' installation, which is designed to provide arboretum visitors with a sensory experience.

## Plans to raise \$2m for sculpture

By Ben Latham

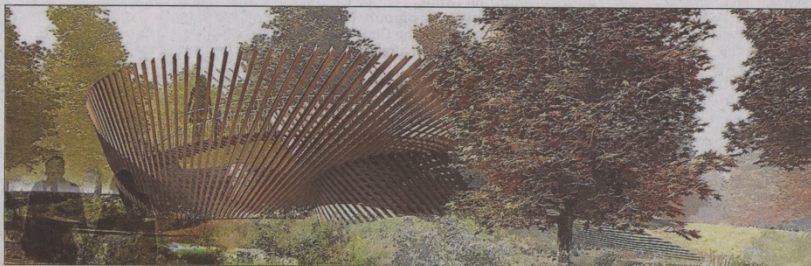
The cochlear implant will be transformed into a breathtaking stainless steel-sculpture at the heart of another great Australian design.

Fund-raising is set to start soon to build the showcase installation in the "Freefall" Pin Oak forest at the National Arboretum.

ACT Environment Minister Simon Corbell announced Queensland firm Bligh Tanner as the winner of the Freefall Experience design competition, which was sponsored by Engineers Australia.

The winning design was based on the cochlear implant and was described by the judging panel as a "superbly elegant" and "immersive" concept that "encourages people to explore the sensory experience of the forest".

Structural engineer Rod Bligh led the winning team and was inspired by a surgeon he met in Tasmania who explained cochlear implants and the complexity of the human ear.



**ELEGANT AND IMMERSIVE:** An artist's impression of the winning sculpture, above; and, above right, designer Rod Bligh with Simon Corbell. Photo: JAMILA TODERAS

"That was the inspiration for this idea of sensory enablement and enhancement of the forest experience with the sculpture," Mr Bligh said.

The engineer also said the team hoped Wi-Fi and other interactive aspects would be incorporated into the structure to further visitors' experience of the local environment.

Arboretum executive director Fay Steward said the design complemented the organisation's mission to provide visitors with an all-round viewing experience.

"The arboretum isn't just about trees, it's about experiences," Ms Steward said. "Like everything we create, the design's a work of art that provides the opportunity to learn

more about the site and interpret the elements and the sounds."

From the remaining 32 entries, two commendations were also awarded by the panel.

Woolacotts Consulting Engineers from NSW designed a hydraulic glass look-out, while ARUP from Queensland proposed a mesh canopy in the shape of a falling leaf.



Construction of the winning project will remain dependent on Engineers Australia, which has now begun searching for funds.

Mr Bligh has suggested raising money through the organisation's membership fees or by contacting implant maker Cochlear Ltd.

Engineers Australia is planning an opening date in 2019.