

Geoff Harris' new \$60m office gives 11 charities a home

The Flight Centre co-founder has developed an office building in East Melbourne that offers a floor of free space to charities his family supports.

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Many wealthy people give money to charities; Flight Centre co-founder Geoff Harris has given ten of them a home by housing them in a six-storey building he's just built in East Melbourne.

Harris, a former Rich Lister and a cricket tragic, also creates funding opportunities for charities he supports, but in an unusual way – by locating them in the very building where his own family office, Harris Capital, plots investment on its own and jointly with other high net worth individuals.



The first two generations: Geoff Harris and son Brad Harris at Gate 8, their newly completed office building and home of Harris Capital. **Eamon Gallagher**

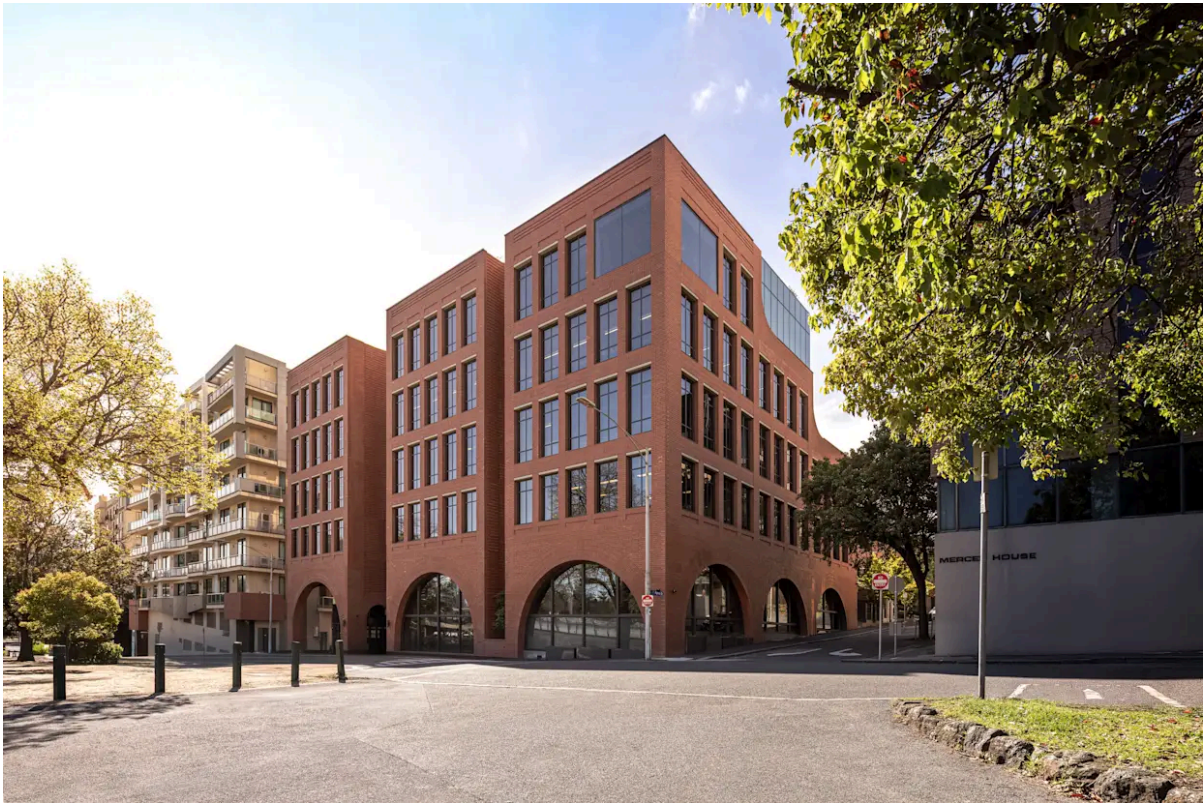
Investors putting capital into investment platform Mosaic Private's \$250 million mortgage credit fund, or ventures with Straight Bat Private Equity on the building's sixth floor, have the chance to mingle with fourth-floor tenants including social enterprise Streat and the Housing All Australians organisation.

It's not unusual for wealthy families to create a physical space, particularly if the first-generation wealth creator has sold the business asset or premises that provided a place for family members to gather.

But the unusual design of the Harris building at 88 Jolimont Street – a mix of the commercial, not-for-profit and personal – also sets out the purpose the family sees for itself in the longer term.

"There's no model," said Harris, who with Graeme "Skroo" Turner and Bill James founded Flight Centre, now an ASX-listed \$3 billion business, on Melbourne's Hardware Lane in the 1980s.

"It's a 50-year, five-generation mission. Part of that plan is to set affairs up for five generations, also to be a physical place for the family to come together."



Gate 8, at 88 Jolimont Street in Melbourne's city-fringe suburb of Jolimont, is the newly built six-floor home of Harris Capital, the family office of Flight Centre co-founder Geoff Harris.

Elsewhere around the country, Sydney's Hudson House at 131 Macquarie Street [<https://www.afr.com/property/commercial/hoteliers-lodge-at-hudson-house-headquarters-of-the-very-rich-20241031-p5kmrn>] is a 17-storey strata building housing family offices of the Fairfax family, Ramsay Health founding director Michael Siddle, and the Scheinberg family, an early Stockland backer.

In Double Bay, the office component of developer Fortis' under-construction Ruby House at 2-10 Bay Street was half presold to family offices, an industry source said.

In Perth's Cottesloe, AMB Holdings, the family office of Rich List mining heiress Angela Bennett, has begun construction on a \$20 million, three-storey mixed-use building [<https://www.afr.com/companies/mining/the-country-s-most-secretive-billionaires-are-about-to-get-much-richer-20240209-p5f3l4>] that includes a four-bedroom apartment on a corner site at 126 Railway Street.

Known as Gate 8 – the nearby MCG has seven public gates – the building on the site previously occupied by Cricket Victoria is certainly not a commercial development.



The 140-seat amphitheatre-style seating on the ground floor can be closed off with a moveable, 6-metre-high curtain.

The family acquired the site in 2018 for just over \$17 million. Contractor Cobild fixed the bricks lining the double-storey height arches at ground level into frames, which it then lifted into vertical position, to realise the New York-style industrial façade designed by architecture firm Rothelowman.

Geoff's son, Brad, chief executive and chairman of Harris Capital – which manages the family's investment activities – declines to say how much it cost, other than to say with a slight smile that developers “shake their heads” over the building.

“Cost was not the main consideration, neither was the rental income,” he said.

Brad's sisters Alicia Bresolin and Caitlin Harris are both directors of Harris Family Foundation, a private ancillary fund [<https://www.afr.com/politics/federal/treasury-s-charity-tax-plan-splits-wealthy-families-20250701-p5mbkm>] that is the family's charitable arm. Brad is also chairman of the foundation.

Visitors enter the building via the cavernous ground floor that includes a 140-seat amphitheatre-style bank of seats at one end – which can be screened off by a 6-metre-high curtain – a café operated by social enterprise Streat (a charity the

family supports) in the middle and a 30-seat meeting room at the other end made available for registered charities to use.



Commercial office space operated by Creative Cubes on level 3.

Geoff Harris named the seating space Speakers Corner, after the traditional site for speeches and debates in London's Hyde Park – as well as a similar site used for the same purpose in Melbourne until the 1960s, in nearby Birrarung Marr, close to the Yarra's edge.

The first floor comprises a gym, with space available for classes such as Pilates. The second and third floors are operated commercially by coworking company Creative Cubes – majority-owned by the family

[<https://www.afr.com/property/commercial/consolidation-coming-to-co-working-as-melbourne-rivals-merge-20240716-p5jtzs>] since last year.



The Jolimont Club hospitality area on Level 6.

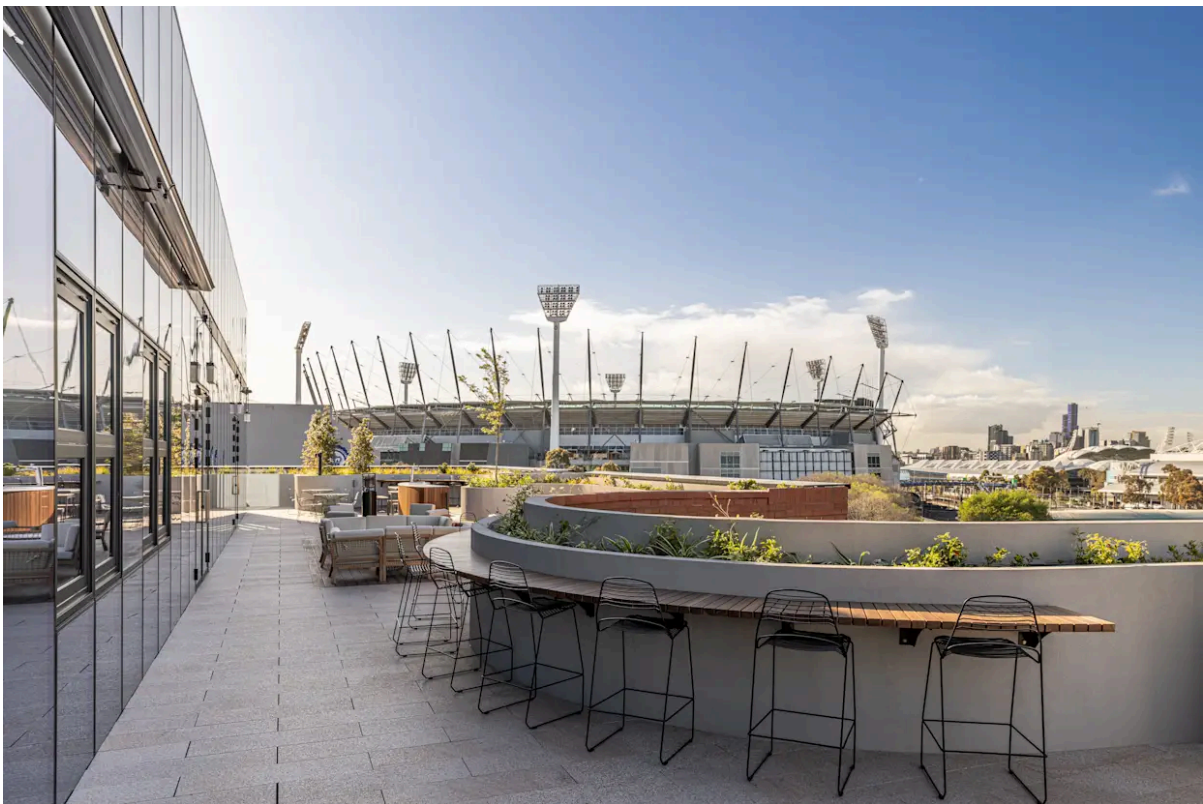
During a visit last month it was 50 per cent occupied and had tenants including law firm Legalite, investment & funds management company FinCap and Rickard Engineering.

But the fourth floor, which the family has christened the Dream Factory, is where a string of charities occupy office space for free and have the fit-out and overheads paid for by the family.

The list includes Streat, Murrup, which provides programs to support families and education in remote Indigenous communities, Consent Labs, an organisation focusing on respectful relationships and ending sexual violence, and Housing All Australians.



The sixth-level terrace offers views west to the Melbourne CBD.



It also offers views towards the MCG and Rod Laver Arena at Melbourne Park.

Others sharing the 750-square-metre floor plate, worth an annual rent of \$895,000, include REACH, Fara, Newsboys Foundation, StreetSmart, Dylan Alcott Foundation and Maddie Riewoldt's Vision.

It's not just freeing up a tight budget from rental payments and outgoings. What Harris calls "supercharged philanthropy" puts these organisations in close contact with a pool of potential supporters by sharing a building with them.

The next floor up, level 5, is where Harris Capital – with 35 staff – is based, along with Mosaic Private, a private family office investment platform. On a wall outside the main boardroom, named after legendary batter Sir Donald Bradman, sits a line of cricket bats, one for each portfolio company Harris Capital has invested in. There are 11 signed bats, with space for a further nine.

On the top level, level 6, are bar and hospitality facilities known as Jolimont House, a function area called The Conservatory, and outdoor terrace space with views to the nearby MCG and Rod Laver Arena, as well as to the CBD.

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