

Moving house in Venice Biennale

THE AGE, THURSDAY 1 MARCH 2007

A gutted replica of a childhood home will soon be under construction, writes **Megan Backhouse.**

RAW concrete bricks with red cedar windows and an all-white interior — it's modernist 1970s Toorak, only this house was built (and torched) in a workshop in Campbellfield for an overgrown soccer field in northern Italy.

Artist Callum Morton yesterday unveiled the work he will be taking to this year's Venice Biennale — a bombed-out, three-quarter-scale replica of his childhood family home.

At 15 metres long, 8.6 metres wide and 4.8 metres high, it's substantially larger than his previous biggest work — the craggy outcrop of an island he showed at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art in 2005.

But, like that piece with its endless hotel-corridor interior, viewers can walk inside his new "Valhalla" too, where they will encounter, not the dream home built by the Mortons in 1974 but something more clinical and corporate. It's all fluoro-lit marble, muzak and office-tower-strength air-conditioning. There are three stainless steel lifts (with buttons that lead only down) and from one you can hear voices and, possibly, screams and the sound of the place collapsing.

Morton says "possibly" because he hasn't got to the soundtrack yet; his focus has been on building the 80-panel steel and polystyrene structure that will this weekend be loaded on to a ship bound for Venice.

Morton is one of three artists representing Australia at this year's biennale — the others are



Artist Callum Morton inside the installation he will display at this year's Venice Biennale — a three-quarter-scale gutted replica of his childhood Toorak home in the 1970s.

PICTURE: SIMON SCHLUTER

Daniel von Sturmer and Susan Norrie. His first thoughts for the installation were around the idea of ruins; he has been collecting images of abandoned, destroyed buildings for years, particularly since September 11 and the Gulf War, but it was only when he drove up the street he lived in 30 years ago, that he settled on the installation's final form.

What's burnt, collapsing and

gutted by mortar fire here is the house idealistically designed by Morton's architect father in the early '70s. We don't get to see the thriving native garden Morton says his mother planted and nurtured, instead the place is surrounded by long grass and weeds grow out of the roof, and ripped-apart walls.

It doesn't just speak about the erasure and destruction of war,

says Morton, but also about the banality of property development, because what the 41-year-old artist actually saw when he drove past his childhood address was nothing more than a vacant block, the house having disappeared. Although the building, which he has reconstructed from photographs and his father's original drawings, obviously has more personal overtones

than his previous subject matter — think Captain Cook's Cottage, the Gas and Fuel buildings, Mies van der Rohe's Farnsworth House or Toys "R" Us — Morton says he doesn't want it to be viewed as full of longing or sentimentality.

"It's my biography as a fiction, as if I had been living under the Taliban," he says. "We live in this comfortable world, but fore-

boding is hovering behind you."

Morton, who is represented by Anna Schwartz Gallery, will begin rebuilding his installation on a soccer field in the grounds of a 17th century baroque palace in Venice from late April for the biennale, which opens to the public on June 10.

LINK

► www.labiennale.org/en