

BEST OF THE CITY



Left: Jane and Steven Cox redefine the meaning of design. Below: At the Regional Assembly of Text, you can send letters. And drink tea. How quaint.

to-yuppies neighbourhood, cleverly rebranded as “Crosstown.” (No need to reference dirty words like Gastown, Chinatown, Victory Square or Pigeon Park, which are all within a few-blocks radius.) —R.P.

BEST FAIRY GODMOTHERS

Brenda Li and Tiffany Ho, the duo behind Third Floor lingerie, have opened a new store on Cambie Street, Shop Cocoon, and introduced a new retail concept in the process. “For new labels, the biggest problem is affording store space to help build their capital and gain exposure,” says Li. “The store is structured on an agreement that allows designers to essentially rent a rack for a four-month term [the industry standard is a three-year contract]. In return the designer must take one shift a week manning the store.” Even more attractive to an up-and-comer: Shop Cocoon takes no commission from any merchandise sold. High turnover, low commitment—music to the ears of any design student strapped for time and cash.

“It’s a great way to test out new ideas and get direct customer feedback—most designers don’t have that direct connection to their customers, which is amazingly helpful when you’re starting out,” says Li. “We were always talking about doing some kind of collective where local artists could support one another,” adds Ho. “When this space came about we knew we had to jump on it.

We opened shop within three weeks. Then it was a matter of approaching local schools, looking for young talent that wanted to start lines, or had a line that no one will pick it up. We’ve decided to take on that responsibility because we believe so strongly in the concept—Vancouver needs something like this to support the design community. When we started out we wished there was something like this.” There are currently eight designers exhibiting at the store, as well as exhibitions of neo-pop art by local graphic artist WR and raw street photography by Roger Allan. 3345 Cambie St., 604-537-8433. Shopcocoon.com —R.P.

BEST CHANCE OF STAYING COOL, MOM

To all the new parents of the oughties, we feel compelled to point something out: not all of you will raise Baby Einsteins. There, we said it. Furthermore, most of you will have completely average kids. And we’re all going to be just fine.

Is it just us, or does parenting



Regional Assembly of Text: Lucas Finlay. Black Mountain: Toby Bannister.

vided gratis (the next club meeting is January 12, 7 p.m.). Still, not everybody gets the store concept. “There’s some people who walk in who are so confused,” says Dolen. “They’re like, ‘What do you do here? Do you sell this stuff?’” 3934 Main St., 604-877-2247. Assemblyoftext.com —M.O’G.

BEST NEW FASHION MECCA

Earlier this year, Hudema Consulting, a Vancouver-based strategic development advising company, conducted a study for the City regarding the amount of retail space in the Downtown Eastside. The not-so surprising conclusion: there simply aren’t enough residents or destination-driven visitors to the area to match the amount of available retail space. Overhead is low, rent is cheap, and there’s just enough of a hipster scene to fuel the explosive growth of one-of-a-kind, locally driven boutiques,

galleries and cafés—all which have opened in the last two to 18 months. On Cordova Street: Gallery Gachet, Mintage and Goon Pack. On Cambie Street: Mooncruise Gallery. On Carrall Street: Interurban Gallery and Hunt and Gather. On Abbott Street: Complex, Livestock, Occupied, Bruce Eyewear and JDs Barbershop. On Water Street: Modern Kid, Alife and One of a Few. Nowhere has there been a more dramatic reshaping of the retail landscape than in Gastown and its eastern fringes.

But naturally, money and pesky gentrification are in hot pursuit. The latest example is the historic Bowman Building on Beatty Street (it shares the same block with Chambar, one of the city’s hottest restaurants) which is being converted into a group of modern—and very pricey—lofts. The developers have, of course, developed a specific moniker for this “new” and hopefully-desirable-

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culture seem at an all-time-frenzied high? That’s why we tip our hats to stores like Modern Kid (45 Water St., 604-662-3181) and Dandelion Kids (1206 Commercial Dr., 604-676-1862) who purvey smart, cleverly designed, edgy clothing and products that won’t make you feel like you’ve signed your good taste over to the little pabulum monster.

Vancouver-based label Twice Shy is also here to help. Best known for their graphic, organic cotton tees for adults, Twice Shy is launching a new line called Fig, and it’s all about organic sleepers, tees, hats, bibs and blankets for babies and kids. Each piece in the collection, due out in Fall 2006, will sporting their sassy trademark designs. Select pieces had a soft launch at Dandelion Kids last fall (more to come this Spring) and sold out almost immediately, proving there is a demand for quality organic kids wear. “We were in L.A. checking out kids boutiques on Third Avenue and couldn’t believe how few organic labels are out there for children,” says Michael Ziff, one half of the duo behind Twice Shy. “I don’t know, I guess we’re ahead of the curve. It’s hard to believe, but maybe people still have the mentality that organic fabric is a hippie thing.” —R.P.

BEST NEW SKIN

For years we’d silently prayed for that behemoth at the east end of Cornwall Avenue to heal itself. Because for decades it’s been painted a horrid shade of fleshy orange-pink, like a gigantic piece of cheese with a thermometer stuck on top. It stood out like a sore—well—brewery, and made for a rude view from blocks away. This year it did self-heal. The Molson’s Brewery is now painted in a pleasing palette of greens, with trim colours that gently contrast. Finally the building looks as though it belongs to Vancouver. And while it’s hard to hide

such a bulky, clearly industrial structure, it’s a much more fitting anchor to the end of the boulevard. It may even pacify motorists when the new Burrard Bridge cyclist-only lanes are installed as well. In tribute to a job well done, we purchased a case of Canadian and thanked the Molson’s decorating team

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precisely one dozen times. —J.M.

BEST SEATS

We learned a lesson at a Canucks game a while ago that was reinforced by a more recent, unexpected visit to the opera: the most impassioned and best informed audiences are usually found in the nosebleed section of any given stadium and/or theatre hall. In the corporate boxes of GM Place, the game isn’t always the thing—it’s often more about schmoozing and boozing. And even in the Queen Elizabeth’s refined quarters the best seats are often snapped up by society types there out of an impulse to see and be seen during the intermissions more than any deep-seated (sorry) love of opera. High up in the stands at the Canucks game—a not particularly thrilling one—there were serious, informed discussions about the niceties of each play. Couples interrupted canoodling to politely applaud a particularly fine piece of sportsmanship. While yahoos ruled the lower roosts, cheering when the big screen told them to, there was a sense of community up there in the cheap seats. The same thing at Vancouver Opera’s *Dialogues of the Carmelites* last fall: struggling opera newbies (the dialectics of Francis Poulenc’s doomed nuns are not the easiest entry to opera) mixed with serious devotees in ever-so-slightly shabby suits. Those who’d really had to work for their tickets, who’d had to scrape up the coins just to get in the door, really wanted to be

there. It was a pleasure to be in their company. —M.M.

BEST REASON TO SEE ART WHILE DRESSED SUGGESTIVELY

Several years ago we suggested that the city’s art openings were by far its best nights out. How ahead of the curve. Now the Vancouver Art Gallery, in part of an ongoing attempt to bring in a younger crowd, has established regular FUSE nights—a combination of cocktail party and evening of art and art-related experiences, from lecture to slide show to unconsciously funky soft shoe shuffle in the drinks line-up, on the last Friday of every month. Next one up is January 26. 604-662-4719, Vanart-

(929 Denman St., 604-633-2769), says his focus is on the portfolio that fits within his existing retail environment. “It’s all local,” says Ling of the artists he supports. “Anything from pop art to street driven—graffiti artists, and photography.” Ling features as many artists as he can fit on the walls, and showcases the work for up to a month. “It’s excellent because it’s exposure for the artists,” says Ling. “And a lot of people who go into clothing stores wouldn’t necessarily go to a gallery.” Meanwhile, Mo Salemy, co-owner of Main Street’s super-hot Dadabase (183 E. Broadway, 604-709-9934), says it’s not the local artists so much as contemporary art discourse he wants to offer customers. “We don’t show decorative art, and it doesn’t need to be sellable,” says Salemy, who along with partner



Stephen McBean, with beard, leads an East Van Boogie (and perhaps, style) revolution as leader of Black Mountain.

gallery.bc.ca.—M.M.

BEST RETAIL ART SPACES

Unlike token cheesy DJs spinning in the windows of generic clothing stores on Robson, or Portraits of Strippers I Have Known Carnally on the walls of your local boho coffee shop, the retail art gallery offers shoppers culture of substance while they browse the racks. Graham Ling, owner of properly funky and modern downtown clothing store, You And Whose Army

Ignacio Corral, seeks out committed artists with fine art degrees. This bit of attitude hasn’t hurt business. “Customers love it,” he says. “It helps them understand where we come from.” —E.K.

BEST USE OF FACIAL HAIR

Do you resemble a hard-living dumpster diver? Can crops indigenous to the Lower Mainland be harvested from your facial hair? And, most impor-