

Culture crawlers tour through the East Side's burgeoning creative community

BY JANET SMITH

The heat is on again in the oven room of Strathcona's former Montreal Bakery, but this time Arnt Arntzen is using it to shape airplane propellers into seat backs and scrap metal into decorative rocket ships. On the other side of the wall, in what was once the kitchen, Richard Tetrault is putting the final touches of paint to a canvas depicting a crow perched against a skyline inspired by the urban landscape a few blocks away. And in the front part of the one-time bakery, Sean Newton is working on the animation for a new television commercial, pencil-drawing tiny figures into a giant flip book.

"There's a warmth here that's partially left over from the bakery," says Newton, who's taken a break with his neighbours in the Paneficio Studios at 800 Keefer Street.

"The vibe is still here—it's in the walls," agrees Tetrault, and then he adds with a laugh: "It's just that we're turning out art instead of loaves."

Eight hundred Keefer Street, like its surrounding neighbourhood, is thriving again. The artists who converted this salmon-coloured lowrise into studios are relative old-timers in the area: they came together to buy and convert the then-boarded-up space seven years ago. But in the last few years, others have been following their lead, turning former warehouses, factories, and machine shops into hubs for everything from sculpture and pottery to painting and glass blowing. The most dramatic illustration of how much this artists' community has grown is this weekend's annual Eastside Culture Crawl (Friday to Sunday [November 24 to 26]): whereas the event started five years ago with 45 artists in three studios, this year it's grown to include 140 artists in 17 studios—all within walking distance of each other, and all with such intriguing names as the Mergatroid Building, Antimatter, and Naughty Pine. The Glass Onion gallery regularly holds exhibitions, and the neighbourhood has become home to Joe Blow Glassworks (in the Mergatroid Building at 1191 Parker Street), which has the largest glory hole—that's the red-hot chamber used to reheat glass as an artist blows it—in B.C. and the only glass-blowing studio on the East Side.

The Culture Crawl has grown so large, in fact, that it's had to turn down requests from artists in other neighbourhoods to take part. To keep things at a manageable level, says Valerie Arntzen, Crawl organizer and wife of Arnt, the event has had to set geographical boundaries—Main Street to Commercial Drive and 1st Avenue to the waterfront. It's so expansive, her team is using yellow balloons and maps to help people wend their way through the maze of studios hidden amid the warehouses and historic residential streets of the area.

"The energy is being localized, so that draws people," says Diana Kemble, a mixed-media artist and painter at Pan-



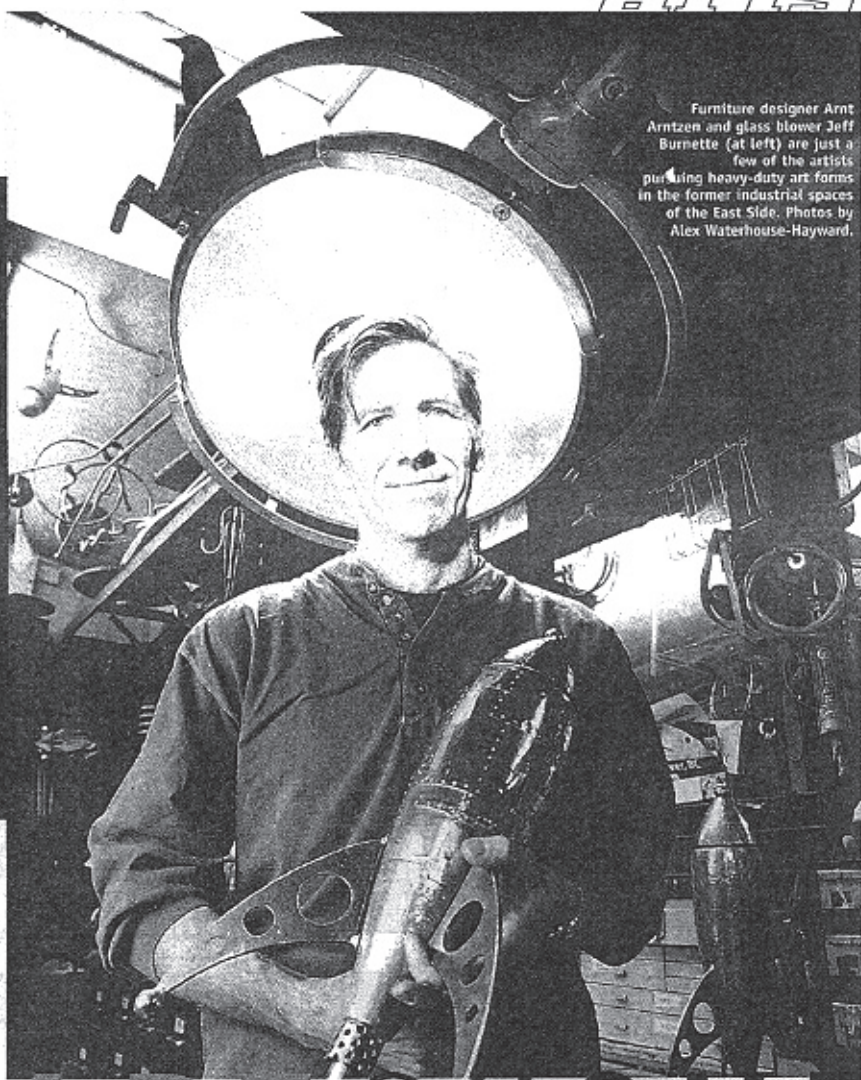
WHAT: Eastside Culture Crawl

WHERE: 17 studios bounded by Main Street, 1st Avenue, Commercial Drive, and the waterfront

WHEN: Friday through Sunday (November 24 to 26)

ADMISSION: Free

INFO: 878-8434 or www.culturecrawl.bc.ca/; maps at 1000 Parker Street during event



Furniture designer Arnt Arntzen and glass blower Jeff Burnette (at left) are just a few of the artists pursuing heavy-duty art forms in the former industrial spaces of the East Side. Photos by Alex Waterhouse-Hayward.

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eficio. "People know where to come now every November." "It has the critical mass now," says Tetrault. "It's become a community, and that comes with age."

New York has its Soho and Toronto has its Queen Street West, but Vancouver's burgeoning artists' district seems to have a character all its own. Instead of loading docks, for instance, Arntzen's huge rolling studio door opens onto MacLean Park. "I love being in this neighbourhood, and being around all these artists," he enthuses, standing over a sprawling oval elm table with legs made out of helicopter blades, which he's custom-making for a software-company boardroom. "It's better than being stuck out in the middle of nowhere."

"I used to be over on Powell Street, and with the trains going by and the grain elevators going, it was so loud," says Newton, an artist

who has not only animated characters for everything from video games to movies like *The Wall*, but does figures in oils, watercolours, and pastels.

Tetrault chips in with: "We're very involved in the community: it's not like everybody's just involved in their own space."

Artists regularly collaborate in the neighbourhood, as well. Paneficio artists are always trading artwork, and Newton and Tetrault make frequent journeys to sketch together at the nearby docks and on Chinatown streets. Tetrault paints vessels and tiles for potter Kathleen Murphy, who works out of Kamu Klayworks at nearby 858 Union Street, while the Glass Onion's Eric Montgomery often etches artwork onto glass pieces by Jeff Burnette at Joe Blow. And the artists here are always bringing in creative types from the outside: Burnette periodically invites glass artists from around North America to do demonstrations, while Newton teaches life-drawing classes at Paneficio every Thursday night, for instance.

So why has this neighbourhood become such an artistic hub? It seems to have the right mix of funky heritage buildings in Strathcona, urban hangouts on the Drive, and vacated industrial buildings that are well-suited to some of

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Woodcock fund could use a bit of the Booker

Organizers of a fund commemorating the late Vancouver writer George Woodcock expressed pleasant surprise upon hearing that author Margaret Atwood had pledged to donate a third of her recent \$45,000 Booker Prize winnings to its program. After Woodcock died in 1995, Alan Twigg and the Westcoast Book Prizes Society began raising money to set up a foundation in Woodcock's honour and a centre devoted to encouraging young writers. When it became obvious their plan was too ambitious to fulfill, they instead put their funds into starting the George Woodcock Literary and Intellectual Freedom Endowment.

Fund, administered by the special-collections department of the UBC library. It in turn set up a permanent exhibit in honour of the poet, dramatist, author, critic, and political commentator in the main library in 1997. (Woodcock joined UBC's department of English in the mid-'50s and continued working there until his retirement in 1977.)

Special collections Brenda Peterson told the Straight she hadn't heard about Atwood's plan to donate to the low-profile fund (along with the David Suzuki Foundation and the World Wildlife Fund, according to the November 9 *Globe and Mail*). But she said the endowment fund could use the investment to revive a George Woodcock lecture series. It's only had enough money to hold one so far, in September 1999. "Everyone had always hoped we'd set up a lecture series, and we're hopeful we'll be able to hold more," said Peterson.

PUBLIC ART PURGATORY Elizabeth Roy's Spoon public artwork at Richmond City Hall remains suspended in political limbo. On November 16, Richmond City council voted 6-3 to send a report on moving the sculpture back to staff for further study. Staff had recommended not moving Spoon from its main plaza, mostly because the estimated cost to relocate the 3,600-kilogram structure would be \$55,000 to \$80,000. But city councillors questioned whether or not it would really cost so much to move the piece; several have argued it impedes the flow of people in the plaza. At the meeting, a few councillors also criticized the artwork itself.

"We'll have to wait till staff come back, and I hope they'll keep their recommendation," Roy told the

Straight. "I expected a lot of Bak over this piece, but I didn't think they would take it to this limit and push this hard. They've really dug in their heels. Imagine the money they must have spent internally studying this, and still they're no closer than they were to a solution."

Staff are expected to return with a report within a week or two, Roy said she can't imagine them finding a creaser way to move the sculpture, when a special crane was needed to install it after the artist was commissioned to design it for the plaza. "Many of the councillors said it is in the wrong place, but they can't separate the placement from the piece," she argued.

ARCHITECTURE'S ENFANTS TERRIBLES An architectural lecture series is kicking off this year by bringing in two of the most provocative young architects in the world today. The Weyerhaeuser Lecture Series, put on by the Vancouver League for Studies in Architecture and the Environment, begins its new season this Thursday night (November 23) with a talk by Dublin architect Tom de Paor. At just 33, he became the first representative of Ireland at the Venice Biennale in Architecture this past summer; for the occasion, he drew attention by building a multichambered pavilion out of 4,741 peat briquettes.

Next up, on Monday (November 27), immigrant Dutch artist-architect John Kämmerling makes an appearance. Kämmerling will talk about his off-the-wall projects, including dog suits, a Ferris wheel, for cars, and a park with faux clouds and sunshine.

Lectures are free and take place at Simon Fraser University Harbour Centre at 6:30 p.m. Info is at 291-5100 and www.lecturesonarchitecture.net/.

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