

Urban Profile #7: The People Who Make The City

So many visions, so little space

**Stephen Bulger
prepares to take
his gallery west**

Just half his business
comes from
Toronto sales

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For years now, the Stephen Bulger Gallery has been bursting at the seams.

Bulger, director and owner of the gallery, which specializes in Canadian photography, has more good pictures to show than he has time to show them.

So the opportunity to set up a new gallery space in a building bought jointly by director Atom Egoyan and his business partner Hussain Amarshi couldn't have come at a better time.

Bulger's new space will take up half the ground floor of what used to be a hardware store at 1026 Queen St. W., just west of Ossington Ave. "The idea is to create some sort of cultural hub," says Amarshi, president of film distribution company Mongrel Media.

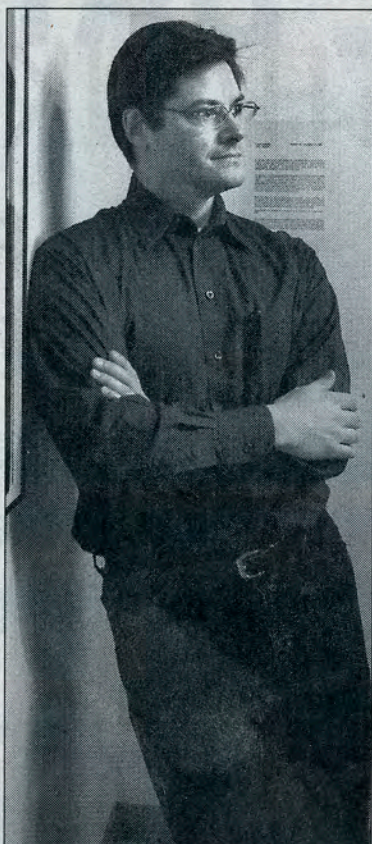
The move will put Bulger smack in the middle of an area exploding with galleries.

It's a scene he's watched develop since he opened up in 1995 at his current location, at 700 Queen St. W.

"Eight years ago, the majority of the people coming to the gallery meant to come here. When they left their house, this was their destination," says Bulger. "And now, with the area taking off so much, there are a lot of people that just happen to be strolling around. I think it's the greatest part of the city. They're just wandering in the gallery."

He says that a lack of space has been a concern for almost three years, and the new gallery, at 1026 Queen St. W., will give him almost 50 per cent more room to show.

In celebration of the gallery's near-decade on Queen St., they're launch-



ROBERT LANSDALE PHOTO

**Stephen Bulger's new gallery will be
in a booming area of Queen St. W.**

ing a final tribute to the thoroughfare, Queen Street, beginning Oct. 16. They make their move early next month.

This move is the latest in Bulger's career as a director and gallery owner, which began when he was studying photography at Ryerson University. During his four years there, he organized student and faculty exhibitions and eventually opened and ran the Ryerson Gallery, at 80 Spadina Ave.

Bulger says that, after a time, he realized the gallery wasn't serving the community as best it could. "We'd have an exhibition and there was no storage space," he says.

With no space to store art, pieces just

wouldn't be around when buyers came looking to purchase works they'd seen.

"We were constantly losing sales that way, which was frustrating," he says. So, after graduating, working and travelling, Bulger opened a gallery of his own.

Because he was still active as a picture maker, Bulger originally conceived the space as an entire house of photography. There would be dark rooms, a framing shop and studio space in the basement. The ground floor would be a gallery and bookstore. Upstairs there would be space to live.

But the financial acumen of his brother and sister prompted Bulger to write out a business plan and focus on just the gallery and bookshop, as it is today.

In starting up, he also had some good advice from a gallery owner in New York City, a town known for photography.

Laurence Miller, owner of a gallery specializing in contemporary and vintage photography, told Bulger the best thing to do was generate as much money as possible from sources outside his hometown.

Today, just half of the gallery's business comes from sales in Toronto.

But that doesn't mean that, as a gallery that shows mid-career and established artists, that sells to dealers, museums and private collectors in Europe and the United States, Bulger has ignored emerging talent.

Quite the opposite. He is a co-founder of the annual Contact photography festival, which showcases emerging artists and established photographers at galleries across the city. "That's where I put a lot of work in, so that emerging artists can get really good positive exposure for their work," Bulger says.

"It was really to raise the profile of photography in Toronto. Seeing that other cities had great success with their photo festivals, then looking at Toronto as almost being a city of festivals, I saw no reason why it shouldn't have a photography festival."