



16 1/2

TRIPLE SPIRAL
BOOKS GARNETS
STRAWBERRY EMBROIDERY
THE WINE CRYSTALS

TURNTABLE

CREATIVE
MINDS

Bill Cowen and Kirsten Wright
are at the heart of Victoria's
emerging young art scene.

BY ANNA KEMP PHOTO BY GARY MCKINSTRY

Young gallery owners build a business and a community of emerging artists in Chinatown

DOWN FAN TAN ALLEY'S shadowy corridor, among the stacks of wicker baskets and mysterious doorways, a new art gallery has opened its doors. Boucherat, the latest venture by artist/entrepreneurs Bill Cowen and Kirsten Wright, exhibits and sells works by a range of emerging local artists.

Boucherat grew out of Studio 16½, Wright and Cowen's first Fan tan Alley gallery, opened in 2003. Studio 16½, which had for 17 years been the late Glen Howarth's studio, became a go-to place for young artists trying to break into the art scene. On top of running as a gallery, it hosted events and projects and for a time ran as a boutique selling works by local designers and artists. Last year, Wright launched Regalia Boutique to house the retail end of things.

In July, the old Dragon Song storefront became available. Wright and Cowen seized the opportunity to expand, reinventing their gallery and moving it down to street level. Boucherat, named for Marie Boucherat, the building's original 1912 owner, doesn't replace Studio 16½ but frees up the large second-floor studio for art classes, workshops, lecture series and screenings.

With three businesses on the go, and numerous other personal projects, Wright, 25, and Cowen, 35, make a

DESIGNERS OF FINE JEWELLERY

Exclusively
FOR YOU



This one-of-a-kind bracelet
was custom designed for
one of our loyal clients.

FRANCIS JEWELLERS LTD. EST.1921
GOLDSMITH • WATCHMAKER • CUSTOM DESIGN



All jewellery handcrafted on premises

Paul Groppe *Master Goldsmith*

Rafal Zebrowski *Gemmologist*

617 Broughton Street 250-384-7611 www.francisjewellers.ca

Only Canadian and conflict-free diamonds sold

dynamic team. Wright, self-possessed and articulate, is a painter, a performing musician and a focused business woman. Cowen, good humoured and overflowing with ideas, is a writer, filmmaker and web developer. Both are committed to Victoria's artistic community and to preserving the heritage of Chinatown.

Wright and Cowen have been at the heart of Victoria's emerging young art scene since they opened Studio 16½.

"We were involved with the art party scene back when Harley Smart and Luke Ramsey and all those guys were putting on these big installation art shows down in the

"If you are just starting out as an artist, you don't know how to approach a gallery and get a show," says Kirsten Wright.

Sunset Room behind Value Village," says Wright. "That sort of West Coast, graffiti-influenced, low-brow art culture was getting a lot of energy put into it by the young people of Victoria and we just kind of plopped ourselves into it at the right time and decided to open Studio 16½."

Though home to a wealth of young creative talent, Victoria lacked a commercial gallery catering to emerging artists, says Wright.

"They could either show in a restaurant, or put on a show at the Ministry of Casual Living or the Fifty Fifty, who are non-profit and sort of out of the way. Or there is Open Space or the Community Arts Council, but they are well-established and have people from all over the place pursuing them for shows."

Wright and Cowen provide young artists with more than a much-needed local venue. Artists themselves, they understand the challenges of turning creativity into an income and try to support artists to develop professionally.

"If you are just starting out, you don't know how to approach a gallery and get a show," says Wright. "We have always tried to build up that role-playing of gallery and artist so they know what to expect when they walk into another gallery. For example, they need a bio, they need a CV, they need a portfolio, they should have a website. All these things will, in the end, help you so much as an artist and you can grow from there."

Lyle Schultz, an up-and-coming local artist, says showing at Studio 16½ gave him valuable exposure in town and built his confidence in curating shows.

"Applying to galleries can be intimidating. . . . Bill and Kirsten take the time to educate artists, keeping it professional while still dealing with you on a human basis."

Wright and Cowen run a commercial gallery aiming not just to show great work, but to sell it. In Victoria, where

LE SPA SEREINE

We offer expert facials that give you results, massages to re-energize your body and a full hair salon to complete your polished look!




Enjoy the benefits of our new Infrared Sauna.

* Book three half hour sessions and receive your fourth visit free *

250 - 388 - 4419 * 1411 Government St.
www.LeSpaSereine.com

older collectors of established artists dominate the art market, Boucherat gives young buyers and new artists a chance to get in on the action.

“Everybody deserves to have something they love in their home,” says Wright. “We are trying to create an art market for a younger generation of people, people that don’t have a ton of money but do recognize the value of something that is culturally relevant to their age group and their lifestyle.”

Though committed to the business side, Wright and Cowen run their gallery as more than a commercial space. They host annual group projects like last year’s Premier Portrait Project, held during the election, for which they invited artists to contribute portraits of BC’s 34 premiers. In 2007, they hosted the Panorama Project, cutting a panoramic photo of the Victoria skyline into 20 chunks and giving each to a different artist to reinterpret, then joining the sections back together.

“A lot of artists are in their hobby holes doing their own thing,” says Wright. “These projects engage artists with each other and that’s really valuable. It makes the community that much more interconnected and more supportive.”

“People come in and ask if we are a commercial gallery or a collective,” says Cowen. “We like that because it proves our activity in the community is not solely commercially-based. We sell art to people but we also always get asked to be part of art crawls and community art projects and that sort of thing.”

Local artist and art writer Robert Amos likens Cowen and Wright to Victoria’s Fran Willis.

“Fran Willis’ gallery was set up as a commercial gallery but really, if there is any justice, she should have been given grants by the city and larger government bodies. . . . She did so many public events in her gallery which were not commercially successful but were valuable to the community. . . . It is a considerable advantage to this city, which has virtually no public support for art.”

Opening Boucherat allows Wright and Cowen to grow both the community-focused and business aspects of their projects. Within weeks of securing the new location, a year’s worth of public programming had been designed for Studio 16½. A new online catalogue helps to grow sales.

“It’s been a five-year joy ride of proving to ourselves the artists are worth it,” says Cowen. “And they are.”

ON THE WEB:

Boucherat Gallery: fantanstudios.com/index.php

List of programming for Studio 16½: fantanstudios.com/index.php?action=studio_archives&category=event

Regalia Boutique: regaliaboutique.com/ **VB**



New continuing education courses for 2010 – Register now!



Learning for life

Stay on life’s learning curve – continuing your education keeps you engaged and informed about all kinds of things happening in the world.

Learning for work

Diploma/certificate programs to enhance your career or to help you start a new one!

Learning for fun

Explore new things, meet new people and expand your horizons.

Find the new calendar on our website now or pick up a copy at Greater Victoria libraries!

www.continuingstudies.uvic.ca

250-472-4747