

Lively Queen St. W. a 'creative hotbed'

With its unusual shops and regular influx of raw, young artistic talent, this old Toronto neighborhood is the place to express yourself

By Dana Flavelle Toronto Star

On Queen St. W. you can be outrageous and no one will notice.

In fact, being a little bit different is almost a prerequisite to membership in the unusual club that attracts struggling musicians, clothing designers, painters and photographers.

Signs of the community's artistic-intellectual bent are everywhere.

At the Rivoli Club, the week's eclectic lineup of entertainment includes Czech New Wave films, a Chicago blues singer and live theatre by Ryerson students.

In a clothing store called Plash, chicken-wire mannequins display attire splattered in paint.

Even the graffiti is unusual. The phrase *poetry is poeency* is sprayed across several walls throughout this tightly knit artistic community.

"It's a creative hotbed," says Marc Glassman, who opened Pages Book Store here five years ago. Its shelves, stocked with European fashion magazines, the New York Times and small press publications, reflect the area's unusual reading habits.

40% immigrants

The influx of raw, young talent to one of Toronto's oldest neighborhoods over the past decade is consistent with its long history as a starting point for newcomers.

"Ever since the time of the Indians, it's been a transitional area," says long-time resident Kay Parsons, a community worker at the University Settlement House.

Since Queen St. W. was first carved up into large estate lots for the city's elite in the early 1800s (the Grange is the best remaining example), it has been home to successive waves of immigrants — Irish, Jews, Italians, Portuguese and, most recently, Chinese.

In the 1970s, immigrants made up 40 per cent of the area's population, according to the City of Toronto's official plan.

Southeast Spadina — the residential neighborhood that supports Queen St. W. — is one of the most varied in the city, Toronto planner John Dunn says. Bounded by Queen St. W., College St., University Ave. and Spadina Ave, the maze of short streets and alleys contains everything from subsidized housing to luxury condominiums, from factories to institutions.

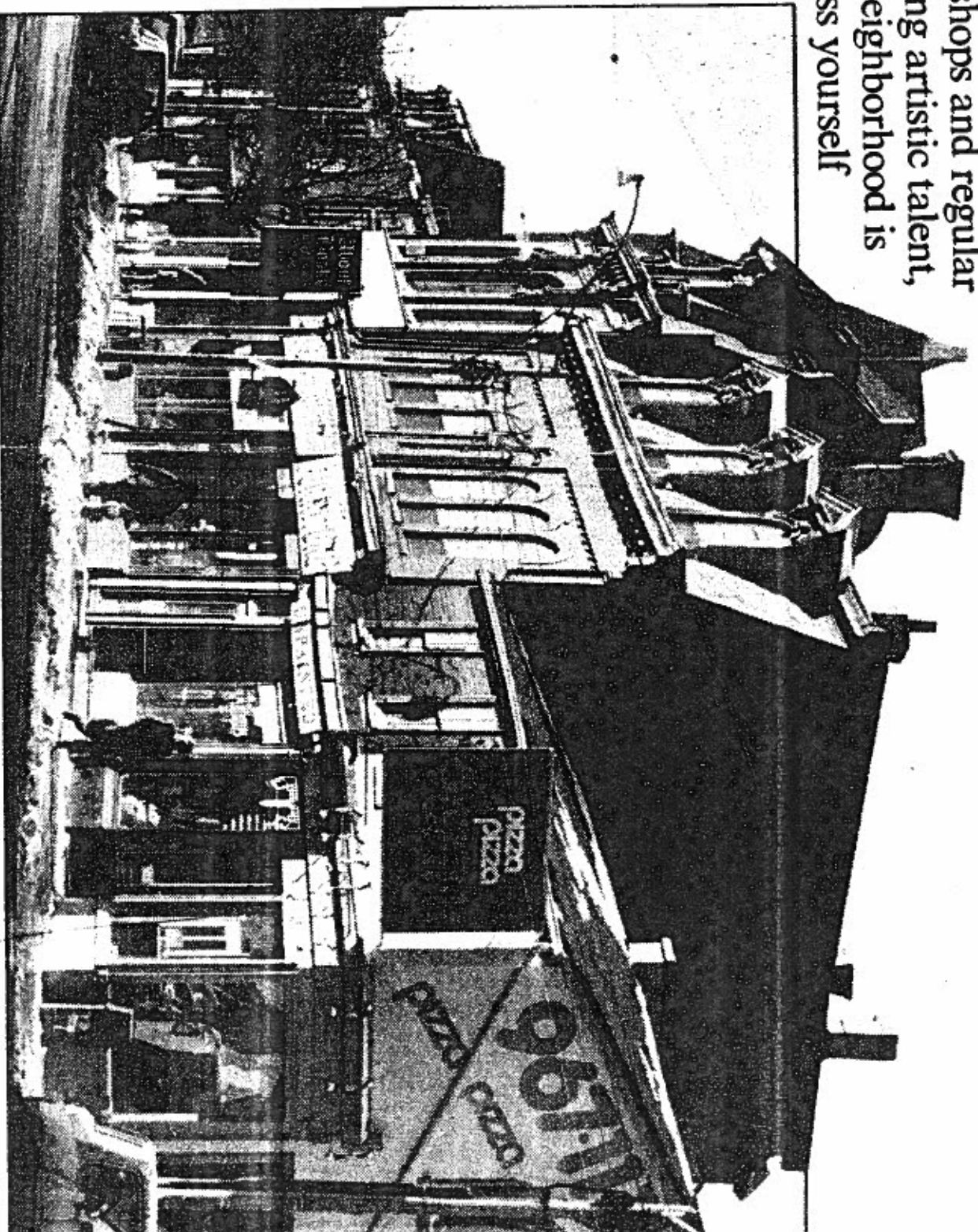
The diversity is one of the strongest attractions for creative people.

"The area has always allowed anyone to express themselves," says Celia Ramkhalawansingh, a sociologist who lives in one of the original Victorian townhouses on Beverley St. "You can find any kind of individual here from (author) Margaret Atwood to (painter) Charlie Pachter, from vice-presidents of banks to the guys who sleep on the benches in Grange Park. The green hair and purple clothing is just a continuation of that."

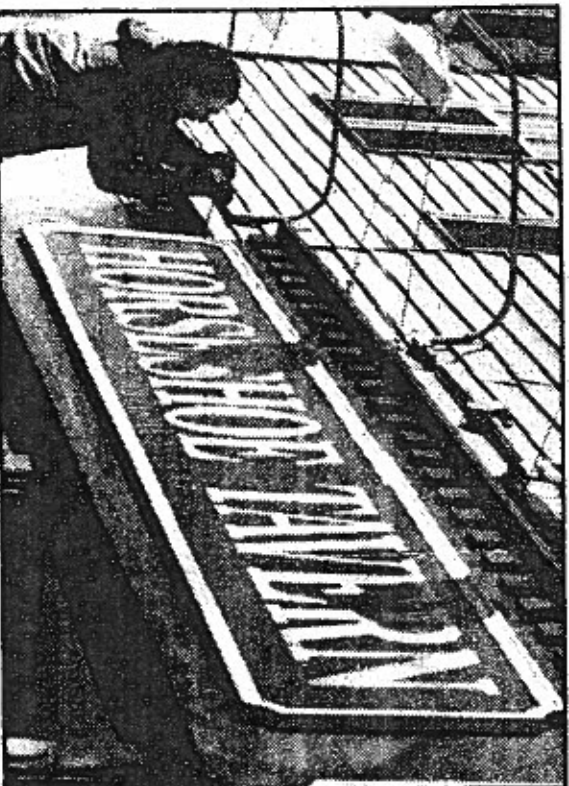
Great projects

Although the artistic community is just one of many facets of this varied neighborhood, it is the one that makes Queen St. W. unlike any other street in the city.

Cheap rents, vacant warehouse space for studios, the nearby Ontario College of Art and the garment industry on Spadina Ave. are what drew many of the



Changing facade: Cheap rents, the art college and garment industry drew artists and fashion designers to Queen St. W. The street's facade changes as entrepreneurs congregate and go.



Local pub: Jerry Kardash adjusts the neon lighting outside the Horseshoe Tavern. Many artistic projects have developed over a couple of beers, a local tavern owner says.

more wins in the street."

Low commercial rents allowed the artists to set up shop on shoestring budgets. The result has been a street whose facade is always changing as fashion designers and restaurateurs go in and out of business.

Behind that facade is a group of people whose lives are the very opposite of the suburban dream. For many artists, the working day begins at noon and late night parties are an opportunity to share creative visions.

"It's not like living in Don Mills where you go home from work every night at 5," says Steve Potovski, an artist who supports himself by working as a chef. "We have no structured lifestyle at all."

In this sea of change, the Cameron Public House has become an anchor. The aging tavern has been transformed into a visual feast of the satirical and bizarre. It is still frequented by local pensioners in the afternoon but at night it becomes a forum for experimental music and art. "Some great projects have de-

the back room, he says.

Success, however, is proving to be a mixed blessing for Queen St. W. The very elements that attracted the artists in the first place are disappearing as the community becomes increasingly attractive to developers.

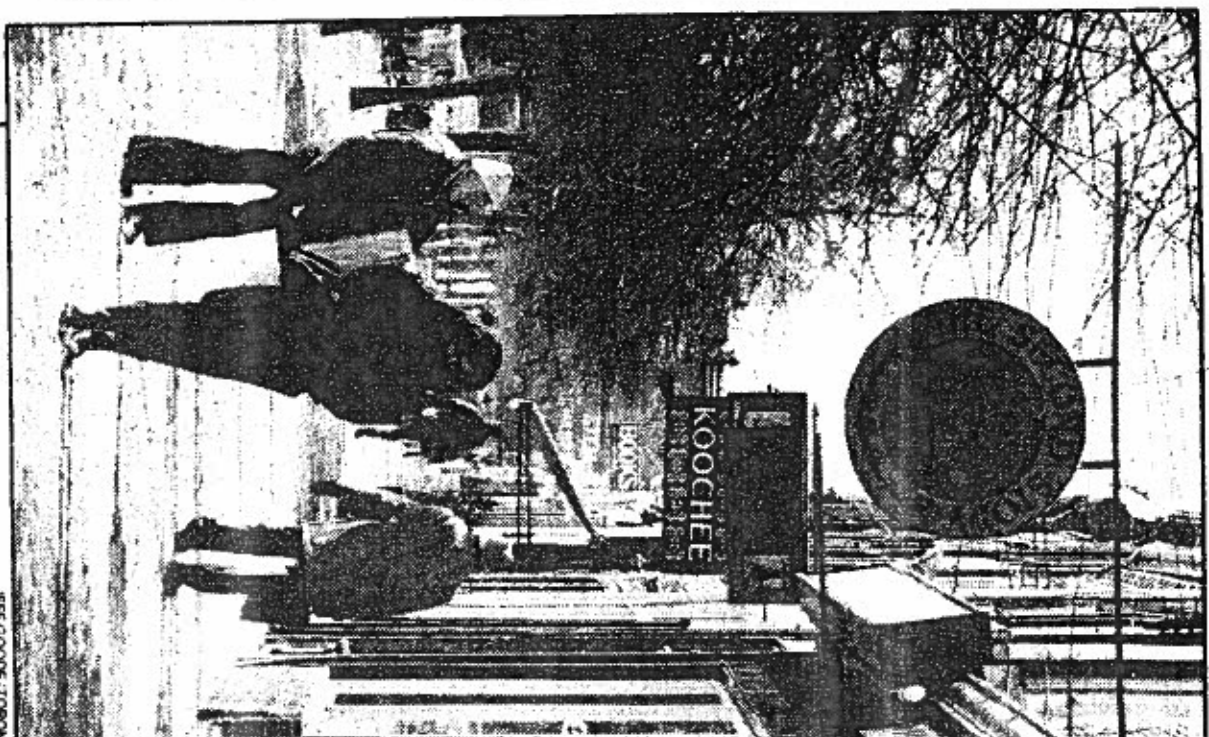
As rents escalate, the artists are forced to move further west. "It's a place the artists have made interesting and now it's becoming gentrified," the Rivoli's Rosenbaum says. "It's becoming a prestige address."

"People are investing in the area," the city's Dunn says.

Moving studio

CITY-TV is moving its studios to Queen St. W. Zeidler Roberts Partnership Architects, the firm that designed Toronto's Eaton Centre has its offices here. Plans to build the headquarters for CBC's English television network near here and develop the rail-way lands at the foot of the CN Tower will also create redevelopment pressures throughout the neighborhood.

Restaurants such as Zaidy's and Grandstanders around the



Potpouri: Shopowners and artists live over the many stores. Developments such as Village By The Grange and Lane have recently brought in more upper-income profes-

sionals. People worked in factories, restaurants, laundries," says Parsons, one of a core group of residents who have pushed for more affordable housing. "If it hadn't been for the efforts of people in this area, it would have all gone like Cabagetown, all upper-middle income."

Developments such as Village By The Grange and I Park Lane have brought in more upper-income professionals but the area

the member of The Hu Sisters cabaret act and a time Queen St. W. resident. Area Alderman Dale 1 agrees: "The arts community to organize to fight city's what it wants."

"The whole area has tremendous potential," Martin says one of the most exciting projects in the city. "But change is occurring. Despite the rising rent

JEFF GOODRICH/TORONTO STAR