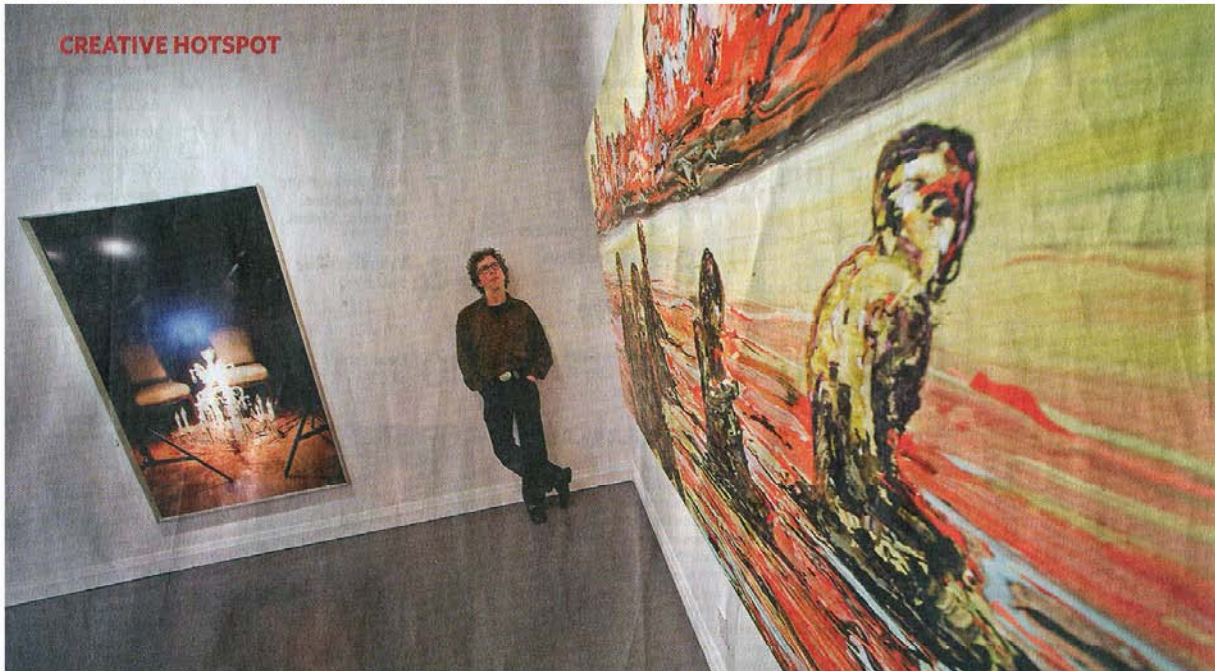




## LITTLE ADVICE

Hopefuls in \$25,000 comedy contest get some tips from Mark Little, an all-too-magnanimous winner, **E7**



CREATIVE HOTSPOT

RICK MADONIK PHOTOS/TORONTO STAR

Galleries are flourishing on Ossington, but will even they last amid city's restrictions on bars?

# ART has its place

SARAH BARMAK  
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

One year after a controversial moratorium on new bars on the street was passed, much on Ossington Ave. has seemed frozen in time, with no new eateries and few new shops.

Other than the growth in gallery space, that is. More than ever, the Ossington art hub is alive and vibrant.

Jamie Angell's Angell Gallery relocated to the foot of Ossington from 890 Queen St. W., moving from 700 square feet to a

cavernous 4,000. With its grand central space and satellite wings, it isn't hard to imagine Angell as a bustling bistro. Instead, it's now one of the bright lights of a booming creative nexus.

Further north on the strip, Meta Gallery is busily renovating their new space — formerly the eclectic art, market, concert, and event venue Rolly's Garage — for their grand opening on April 2.

The most impressive newcomer to the neighbourhood, the Artscape Shaw Street Centre, will add a mind-blowing 75,000

square feet of dedicated gallery and working space for artists to the area when it opens in 2012. A repurposing of the beautiful century-old Shaw Street School, which had been shuttered for a decade before Artscape bought it in January, the centre will be the largest project to date for the not-for-profit urban development organization behind the Wychwood Barns art community in the St. Clair and Christie neighbourhood.

OSSINGTON continued on E4



Steven Solomon of Angell Gallery, top and above, is framed by artwork in the gallery's spacious new location on Ossington Ave. just north of Queen St.

# Booming creative hub, for now

OSSINGTON from E1

Artscape's request for expressions of interest from artists — due Thursday — is helping them envision how the space will be used. The prospect of all that room, however it's used, seems likely to lure more artists and arts businesses to the area.

"Galleries could be a part of it," says Liz Kohn, director of communications for Artscape. "Also, music or performance or theatre. The options are endless, really."

The bar moratorium, put in place by ward councillor and now mayoral candidate Joe Pantalone, had split residents — who complained about late-night noise — and business owners, who said the ban penalized people who wanted to open daytime restaurants and bakeries.

Council since replaced that ban with more permanent rules: new bars, cafes, restaurants, bakeries and takeout places are limited to the ground floor and 175 square metres (1,800 square feet). Fears voiced by locals that the strip would wither under the restrictions, however, don't seem to have materialized — for galleries, in any case.

"It's like a village between Dundas and Queen," says Angell, whose gallery has its official launch April 3. "I personally think it is easier for galleries to grow on Ossington."

Angell more than quadrupled his floor space by moving to Ossington while only doubling his rent. He also moved to the area himself, with an apartment above his gallery.

"Much more space enables me to have three distinct galleries," he says — a dramatic main wing for group shows and up-and-coming artists, an east wing, and a project space where visitors see more inventory. The high-ceilinged white rooms elegantly show off the work of talented locals such as Geoffrey Pugen and Alex McLeod.

It isn't just the space, however. One of the most distinctive additions to the new Angell Gallery is a permanent video room. The mini-theatre, with a flat-screen video monitor, speakers and space comfortable for about four to six people, is unique among smaller galleries, which usually install screens temporarily for specific exhibits.

"It's a serious medium," says Angell. "But how many galleries have the space to dedicate to it?"

Jody Polishchuk, owner of Meta Gallery, says he's happy Ossington didn't become a club district. "People were worried it was going to turn into a kind of Richmond Street," he says. "It's such a gem and it would be a shame for it to go that



LUCAS OLENIUK/TORONTO STAR FILE PHOTO

Bars like the Dakota Tavern (seen hosting the band the Beauties) have changed the character of Ossington Ave. Yet how new rules affect the future of the street — bustling at night, much quieter in the day — remain to be seen.

way."

He agrees that galleries seem to have emerged from the moratorium unscathed. And he is happy to remind newcomers that the street is a long way from what it was when he bought the property in 2001.

"It was like a country road," he says. "I think there were tumbleweeds, honestly. It's got to be a 25-fold increase in foot traffic (since then)."

Many small business owners along the strip are far less sanguine about life since the ban, however. They say the moratorium didn't stop kids from drinking — and it hurt daytime retail.

**6** **As if Ossington really needed another bar**

JODY POLISHCHUK,  
META GALLERY OWNER

shoppers drank and socialized.

It has even hired Phil Terry, the same contractor who has worked on the Drake Hotel, W Burger Bar and Mercatto restaurants. Not that it will get a permanent liquor licence. "As if Ossington really needed another bar," says Polishchuk.

Architect Breck McFarlane owns the building at 9 Ossington, which houses electronic media arts centre InterAccess and Imperial Tattoo.

He says the gallery will "consider all its options" — including the idea of the Shaw Street Centre — when their lease expires in three years.

Others are already thinking about life after Ossington — west of it, that is. Next month will see the opening of Parts + Labour on Queen West near Sorara Ave., masterminded by owners from The Social and Oddfellows, two hectic hipster hubs within blocks of the Queen/Ossington axis. The group gutted a huge old building that housed a hardware store for decades and spent months creating a slick restaurant and live music venue. What results is sure to transform a forlorn stretch of street — and finally, perhaps, Parkdale.

While Ossington galleries continue to thrive, only time — mainly the summer and its crowds — will tell what the future of the strip holds.

"I'm the newest vintage store and I've been here for a year," says Lindsay Fernlund, who owns Silver Falls, across from Angell. She says without places to have lunch, shoppers simply don't linger on the street.

"Restaurants would get foot traffic going," says Tim Hanna, the owner of Ossington bookstore Frantic City. He says that when Pizzeria Libretto opened nearby, he stayed open late and benefited from more walk-ins.

Two daytime restaurants and a bakery have closed since Pantalone's moratorium was put in place — businesses that haven't been replaced. The councillor says eateries and bars are welcome if they comply with the new rules; what's wanted, is variety, not just a bar strip.

"Art galleries, clothing stores and

food stores are particularly needed in this area to add to the diversity, and their absence was actually creating a problem to both the business people and the residents," he told the *Star's* Bruce DeMara last week.

There is also a danger that the new rules and the drop in daytime traffic will make the art community also sour on the street.

"There is not another strip in the city that has so many restrictions," says Gary Hall, executive director of Gallery TPW, which relocated to 56 Ossington in 2006 after 20 years at 80 Spadina Ave.