Magazines Canada

DEALER PROFILE

BC STORES

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By Alyssa Hirose

When it comes to puzzling through the 48-year-long legacy of McNews, Jim Diana and Richard Choi are the perfect historians for the job. The store is virtually the last of its kind in the province: 1450 square feet of magazines, with over 2000 titles squarely stacked on shelves. Diana has been employed by the North Vancouver retailer since it first opened in 1976—he came on board after meeting the store's original owners working at a taxi dispatcher just up the street. Choi is McNews's third owner, but by no means a newbie; he took over the store in 1996. The two fact-check each other on specific dates and details while leaning casually on against a shelf containing a few hundred publications.

"There's something here for everybody," says Diana. Readers thumb through titles ranging from classic fashion mags (including the American, British, Italian, French, and German *Vogues*) to homegrown Canadian publications (*Geist, Briarpatch, Western Living*) to delightfully hyper-specific niche categories (you can't help picking up a magazine solely devoted to chickens or cross-stitching). Choi notes that the store's customers come from the neighbourhood and beyond—think Langley, Squamish, Sechelt, and Powell River. When asked if there's lots of regular customers, Diana confirms: "Big time—you see the same people just about every day." Even the speediest reader could likely visit McNews daily and never run out of fresh, shiny pages to flip through: it's a mecca of magazines.

Across the harbour in East Vancouver, Spartacus Books has a cozier magazine selection, but they are just as devoted a community—and a rollercoaster history full of rebels to boot. Alexander Daughtry has been involved in the volunteer-run political bookstore since it began in 1976 (yes, the same year as McNews). Back then, it was a book table at Simon Fraser University. "I was excited about the possibility to work for social change without getting drawn into sectarian minutiae," says Daughtry. "Our focus has always been on subjects like political theory, history, feminism, race studies, and Indigenous studies."

Even the corporatest of corporate bookstores include some of these topics, now, but Spartacus was doing it decades ago—Daughtry recalls when they were one of the only places in the city that stocked books on gay liberation.

Now, the Commercial Drive storefront bursts with thought-provoking titles in categories like animal rights, migration, fat activism, surveillance, labour, and anarchism. "We've never belonged or been affiliated with any particular group or party, and we carry the whole range of all points of view," Daughtry explains. Canadian magazines like *Room, Subterrain, Border Crossings,* and *The Walrus* sit alongside zines submitted by community members and sold on consignment. Spartacus is powered by 20 or so volunteers and has a waitlist that's just as long—despite being built on a foundation of different opinions, it seems everyone agrees that the store is a special place. In fact, when the business was destroyed by a fire in 2004 and $100,000 in stock was lost, it was donations that built it back up. "It was tremendous, the community coming together to get us going again," Daughtry recalls.

In return, Spartacus makes its books and magazines as accessible as possible—membership rates haven't gone up in almost 50 years (the pay-what-you-can sliding scale starts at $3 monthly, and members get 10% off all purchases) and the store also has a "library" section with free borrowable titles. All the

Image by Munro's Books

shelves in the centre are on wheels, and move easily to make room for readings, launches, and meetings. It's a gathering place as well as a retailer; a place that somehow treads the increasingly tricky line between radicalism and respect.

McNews and Spartacus serve as examples of how different BC's 16 Magazines Canada magazine dealers are: there's university haunts like the Vancouver Island University Bookstore and Subtext at the University of Victoria, interior indie spots like Pages Book Emporium in Cranbrook and Prince George's Books & Company, and art gallery shops in the Vancouver, Kamloops, and Greater Victoria galleries.

Munro's Books, also in Victoria, lives inside a turn-of-the-century bank building with 24-foot ceilings and stained-glass windows—and controller Megan Ames says, "just walking in and smelling 10,000 books or more is always a treat." On theme with other BC dealers, many of Munro's Books employees have been working at the store for decades. Since opening in 1964, the downtown store has amassed a collection of passionate section curators. If you're looking for poetry, ask for Doug, he's been running that section for 40 years. Fantasy/sci fi lovers should seek out Ellen, who has curated those tomes for just as long ("She is like the wizard, she knows all," says Ames). The magazine section focuses primarily on literary journals, art, and design. "If you can get it in every grocery store, I don't want it," Ames quips. Visitors can browse Canadian mags like *Prism International* and *Pulp Literature* while trying to decode the literary banners sewn by store founder Jim Munro's wife, Carole Saviston. Hint: look for a *wonder*-full reference to another Carroll.

There's plenty to look at on the walls of Whistler's Armchair Books, too… namely, rolling ladders. "That's the one thing everyone who comes in seems to get the most excited about," says owner and manager Sarah Temporale. She bought the store in spring 2023 after working for the previous owner for over a decade (Armchair Books is one of the oldest stores in Whistler village, and has been in the same space since its doors first opened in 1982). Due to its alpine location, Armchair's magazine selects lean local and outdoorsy: think *Canadian Cycling, Ski Canada*, and *Canadian Geographic*.

It's telling that Temporale, with more than ten years at her store, somehow has the shortest tenure out of all of the dealers interviewed for this story: proof that sellers of magazines and books in BC are in it for the long haul. The titles, locations and selections are unique, but Temporale sums up the dedication that feels present in every store: "We're proud to still be independently owned and operated, and to be a pillar of the community."

MORE MAGAZINES CANADA INDEPENDENT DEALERS IN BC

Armchair Books, 4205 Village Square, Whistler
Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, 1040 Moss Street Victoria
Bolen Books, 111 - 1644 Hillside Avenue, Victoria
Books & Company, 1685 3rd Avenue, Prince George
Ivy's Bookshop, 2188 Oak Bay Avenue, Victoria
Kamloops Art Gallery, 101 - 465 Victoria Street, Kamloops
McNews, 1460 Lonsdale Avenue, North Vancouver
Misty River Books, 103-4710 Lazelle Avenue, Terrace
Munro's Bookstore Ltd, 1108 Government St., Victoria
Pages Book Emporium, 1011 Baker Street South East, Cranbrook
Salt Spring Books, 104 McPhillips Avenue, Salt Spring Island
Spartacus Books, 1983 Commercial Drive, Vancouver
Subtext, 3800 Finnerty Rd., Victoria
Tanner's Books, 2436 Beacon Avenue, Sidney
Vancouver Art Gallery Shop, 750 Hornby Street, Vancouver
Vancouver Island Uni Bookstore, 900 5th Street, Nanaimo

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alyssa Hirose is a freelance writer, editor and illustrator based in Vancouver, BC. You can find her work in *Vancouver, Western Living, BCBusiness, Nuvo, Avenue Calgary* and other local publications. Her portfolio ranges from lifestyle articles to travel journalism to restaurant reviews to technical writing to editing annual reports for non-profits—she wears a lot of hats (metaphorically…in real life, she rarely wears hats).

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