

You Could Get Lost In There & That's The Point

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In the tradition of New York's Strand Bookstore and Powell's in Portland, BMV Books is designed for serendipitous finds, owner **Patrick Hempelmann** tells Sarah B. Hood.

Q Is BMV a used bookstore?

A We started out as a strictly used bookstore, but we found that we couldn't get enough used books. Sad as it sounds, the best collections we get are when people die or move out of the country, because that's the only time somebody will let go of their entire library. Now, the remaindered part of the business is actually taking over the used part.

Q How are the three stores different?

A On Edward Street, we get a lot of business people, tourists and Ryerson students, so it's a fairly young crowd. We've got a large film section and a lot of DVDs and music books. At Yonge and Eglinton, our clientele is very female-based for some strange reason, so we do very well with chick lit, cookbooks, good self-help books, good New Age books.

We opened on Bloor Street in December, 2006. We always thought it would be a good idea to have a place like that in Toronto and we spent a long time looking for a place in the Annex. It was a Hungarian restaurant, the Hungarian Castle; the building had been empty for 10 years and was in terrible shape. It took a long time to renovate it. Now it's got three floors and we're planning on opening a fourth.

Q Who's buying books on Bloor after 10 p. m.?

A Because it's close to U of T, we get a lot of customers who are looking for unusual books; they will buy that book by the Turkish literary author that nobody else has ever heard of. Our selection of art books is something we cultivate. The basement is basically CDs and comics.

Q Aren't CDs over?

A A sizable part of the population is still buying CDs -- sure, nobody under 40. But we're still selling VHS; if you have a title that's unusual enough, people will buy it. Vinyl is another segment that's started to do quite well for us. It's a more outdated form of technology, but young people are buying them for the nostalgia.

Q Unlike Chapters, you don't have computers for your customers.

A We've never computerized the store. We kind of think of the secondhand bookstore as a good place for browsers; not just coming in for that Hemingway or Grisham, but maybe finding

something you didn't expect. Each day you get hundreds of new items; even we-- the staff-- every day we see something we've never seen before. That makes it kind of interesting.

BMV Books is located at 471 Bloor St. W., 416-967-5757; 2289 Yonge St., 416-482-6002, and 10 Edward St., 416-977-3087.