

# Bowling alley, cinema: things of the past

**From B1**

A few of us hearty non-Chinese Asia hands would come in for a bowl of congee at the old Aberdeen's high-value, high-variety food court, but seldom visited other shops there, largely because we could not read the signs or talk to merchants.

As well, Fung's new mall does away with the bowling alley and cinema in the previous version, much to the dismay of Richmond's bored youth. This Vancouver suburb leads the nation in three regards: Canada's lowest-altitude community; its flattest municipality (no wonder its kids are bored!); and the city with the highest ratio of visible-minority citizens.

Fung even changed his mall's Chinese characters in advertisements appearing in Vancouver's thriving Asian media to ideograms that translate as "Timely and Trendy Place," while maintaining "Aberdeen" for English-language use. By the way, Aberdeen refers to one of Hong Kong's toniest neighbourhoods, not that small city of scotch-swilling, golf-obsessed, cake-munching Caledonians.

We have many developer-collectors in Vancouver, but I am aware of no other developer-artist. Aberdeen's shops were curated, not leased. Fung is convinced his Aberdeen Mall is the template for a series of similarly ambitious ventures around the continent. He hopes to succeed with Aberdeen where rival Henderson Development's equally expensive, similarly bi-cultural International Village sits almost empty at Pender and Abbott.

Aberdeen Mall is Greater Vancouver's most visually dramatic retail operation, but more importantly, it represents the post-fusion culture now emerging here.

To illustrate this shift, a recent anecdote. A senior journalist recently arrived here from Ontario mentioned this newcomer's perception to me, as we drove around thinking about lunch: Diners in dim sum parlours and curry houses are so much more socially diverse here, than in Toronto. "People eat widely outside their ethnic origin here," he observed.

This is a pattern he saw much less often, even in the north-of-Toronto Asian suburbs equivalents to our Richmond. Similarly, when I asked my University of B.C. architecture students, one-third of them had been to Canada's largest city, but over half to



**The Aberdeen Centre is named after a tony district of Hong Kong, not the Scottish city.**

Bangkok, new hub of the cheap student holiday.

Aberdeen Centre's architecture has gone beyond the post-Chinatown clichés of scrolled cornices and mock-temple tilework to something entirely more original and dynamic. It comes as no surprise that the key design architect on Bing Thom's Aberdeen team is Chris Doray, whose family history might well make him Vancouverite of the year. A highly talented neo-modernist designer, Doray is an Ismaili Muslim raised in Singapore who studied architecture in London. Over dim sum, Bing Thom recently told me his 20 staff speak 18 different languages.

Much like the Aberdeen mall itself, this diversity is the future of our city. My full architectural review will follow in July, after retailers all move in, and assorted Liberal politicians cut ribbons.

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