

THE MISSION: On board with Gordon Campbell and BC's Biotech Honchos as they storm San Francisco

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MALL-IN-ONE:  
Thomas Fung explores the outer reaches of retail space

## Where The Aisles Run East-West

In 1990 Thomas Fung built North America's first Asian mall – Richmond's Aberdeen Centre. It got off to a shaky start with not a single merchant stepping forward to sign on. In fact, Fung says he couldn't even convince a leasing agency to wrangle tenants for him, so concerned were they about being connected to this apparently daring retail experiment. The developer had to fill the building himself with *his* restaurant, *his* bowling alley, *his* movie theatre, *etcetera*. Luckily for Fung he had the deep pockets to do so – he is the heir to one of Hong Kong's wealthiest family fortunes. (His father, Fung King Hey rose from poverty to found Sun Hung Kai & Co. – a real estate and securities powerhouse that, in the mid-'70s, became the

largest Chinese-owned brokerage in Asia.)

Aberdeen was a hit with the Lower Mainland's Asian community and many wondered if Fung would head home, having proven himself on the slopes of Gold Mountain. But today the 53-year-old scion still lives in Point Grey, is still energetically commanding the company he founded here in 1984 – the Fairchild Group – and has bulldozed the old Aberdeen to make way for a much larger, much brighter \$130-million mall, which opened in July. This time, though, he's attempting to up the bar once again.

"My goal for the new project is to have a place where East meets West in a true fashion," says Fung, "the first Asian-Western

centre of its kind in the world."

On paper, it's a great idea: an up-market, Hong Kong-style mall where white shoppers put in more than just a token visit to gawk at the octopus in the food fair. "The centre has regulations forcing merchants to have 70 per cent of their signage in English and we encourage retailers to schedule at least one English-speaking staff member per shift."

Based on the massive turnout of the 90-per-cent Asian clientele at the grand opening, the new Aberdeen is once again an ethnic hit, but will the Smiths and Singhs out there brave the busy parkade to browse the mall's Japanese toonie store, Daiso?

If Fung is worried, he doesn't show it. He's been through this

before. With soft-spoken delivery, he rattles off Fairchild's divisions: the real estate development arm, the St. Germain's bakery chain, the media group with its Chinese language TV stations, radio stations and magazine publisher. He even speaks readily about one of his few hobbies – film production.

His family helped finance the 1978 Richard Burton mercenary flick *The Wild Geese* and various Hong Kong productions, but the \$1.5-million *Paper Moon Affair* will be Fairchild Films International's first. Fung co-wrote the B.C. script about a Japanese woman abandoned by her husband in a West Coast village. He hopes the mall will go blockbuster this Christmas and the film find distribution in the spring. □