

## PHOTOGRAPHY

# Streetscapes capture changing times

*New exhibit documents Vancouver in transition*

■ **Main + Hastings:** Photographs by Ross den Otter, until Sept. 6 at Seymour Art Gallery, 4360 Gallant Ave., North Vancouver. More info at [seymourartgallery.com](http://seymourartgallery.com).

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If you want to get your car repaired, try on wedding gowns and enjoy a waffle brunch, all without walking more than a few metres, then look no further than the 2600 block of East Hastings Street.

Or perhaps you'd like to enroll your child in ballet lessons, purchase a vintage Wurlitzer jukebox, then catch a live band play at an X-rated movie theatre turned nightclub. The 2300 block of Main Street is your one stop shop for all of this.

These two city blocks are among those featured in Ross den Otter's latest photography exhibit, *Main + Hastings*, which documents the eclectic mix of businesses and residential properties along two of Vancouver's oldest corridors. Sixteen of den Otter's panoramic streetscapes are on display until Sept. 13 at Seymour Art Gallery in North Vancouver.

Den Otter has worked near the corner of Hastings and Richards streets for 25 years and came up with the concept for his current exhibit while chatting with a friend outside Harbour Centre.

"It was just interesting reflecting on how the neighbourhood had changed in those 25 years and I thought I probably should record the buildings that are changing," he says.

"We have an image when



Ross den Otter's street level views of Main and Hastings streets offer a microcosm of the larger changes shaping the current and future developments of Vancouver and beyond. PHOTO SUPPLIED ROSS DEN OTTER

we say 'Main and Hastings' of a particularly nasty intersection, so it's more about showing what runs along both Main Street and Hastings Street. They have the greatest sort of contrast of use along the lengths of them."

Gallery visitors won't see any shots of the notorious Carnegie Centre corner, but they will see plenty of other images that range from the 900 block of West Hastings all the way out towards Burnaby, and from the northern tip of Main Street down to about 38th Avenue. These two thoroughfares are home to many older buildings which "seem to have the most eclectic banding of uses" when compared with newer developments, den Otter says. The use of these buildings has also changed over time, he noticed. For example, South Main Street, once known as "Antique

Row," is now home to a blend of antique stores plus clothing boutiques, coffee shops and restaurants.

A Port Alberni native, den Otter has lived steps away from either Hastings or Main street since he moved to Vancouver in 1989 to study photography at

Langara College.

"It's a couple of streets that I have a fondness for," says the Strathcona resident, who teaches photography and runs a commercial photo studio with his wife in addition to his personal artistic pursuits.

For his *Main + Hastings*

series, rather than taking long horizontal photos, den Otter instead shot several portrait-oriented slices of

each block and overlapped the edges to assemble a panorama. This technique allowed him to overcome his camera's technical limitations, and also meant he could exclude passing cars and pedestrians giving the images an almost timeless quality.

"The photos don't necessarily reveal a period," he explains.

The changing face of the Downtown Eastside is a topic surrounded by controversy, but den Otter says his exhibit is not meant as social or political commentary. In fact, that's part of the reason he's exhibiting his work at Seymour Art Gallery.

"I think that the advantage of showing (the photos) in Deep Cove was to provide a venue that was outside of the context of the images. It sort of removed some of the perhaps political nature of the changes that are going on there. I didn't really want the show to be about that, I wanted it to be more about the interrelationship between the mix of uses of buildings and I didn't want it to be about gentrification," he says. "It just makes people focus on the content of the photos a little more I think."