

NORTHWEST news

A NOVEL CONCEPT

Bookstore collects alternative comics, muscle mags and vintage erotica—just don't call it a porn shop

by Tom Stevenson

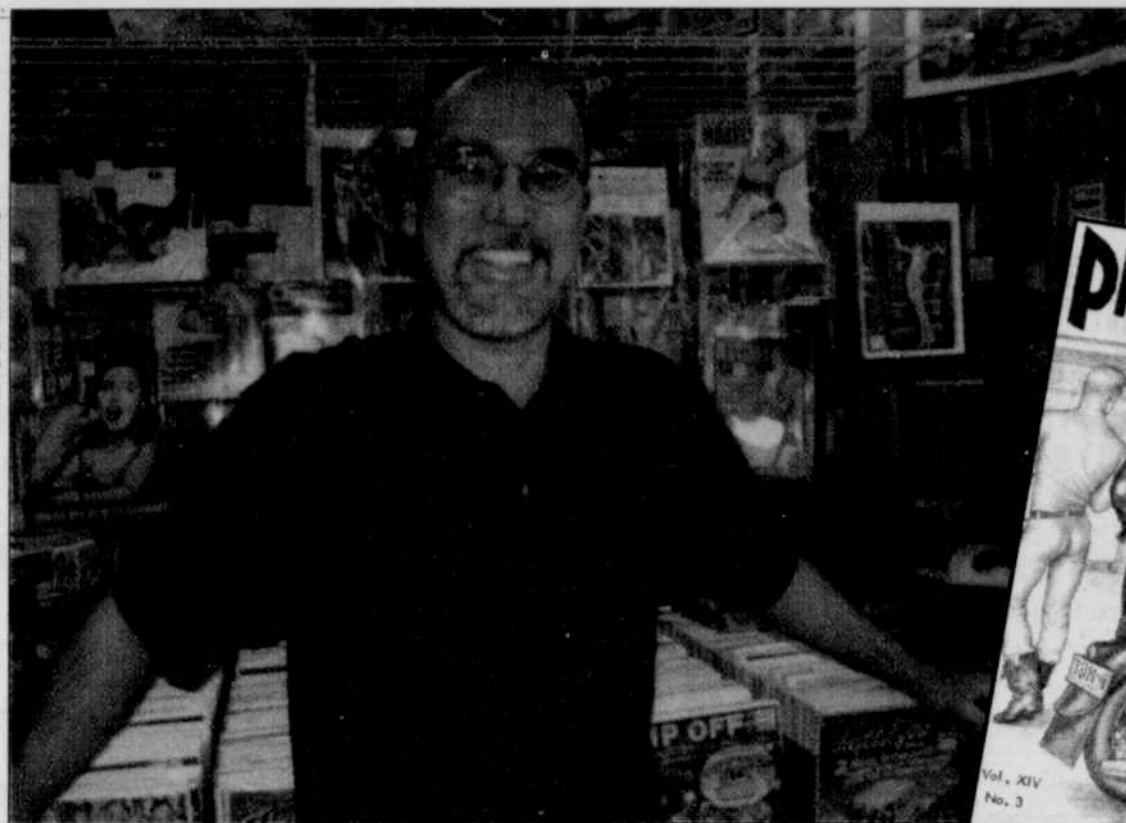
Sometimes a little bit of luck can go a long way in changing a person's career path. Such is the case of Charles Boucher.

He is the owner of CounterMedia, located at 927 S.W. Oak St. in downtown Portland. The store is a classic example of diversity, featuring magazines, alternative comics and a variety of other items: anthologies, stunning coffee table photo books and fiction that truly runs the gamut of expressions from smutty to first class.

Do not get the wrong impression, however. CounterMedia is not a porn shop.

Nor is it only geared toward just queers. Although Boucher carries all current books of erotic art and fiction for the gay, lesbian, bisexual and trans communities, CounterMedia offers much, much, more.

To understand just how diverse it is, one only has to look at the signs throughout the store. There are sections for Transsexuals, Lesbians, Vintage Erotica, Gay Men's Fiction, Anthologies, Freak Out, Weirdness, Satan, Foreign Comics—and that is just a sampling.



Charles Boucher, archivist of the freaky and the fleshly

Boucher, who has a witty and wonderful sense of humor, specializes in vintage erotic material. Among the rarest items he owns are photographs taken in the 1950s and '60s, long before mainstream gay magazines became a staple throughout the country. These were images shot by friends of "friends" and literally passed from person to person until they became available to Boucher.

He also has a wide variety of the early muscle magazines that were popular for gay men prior to the advent of today's media forms. "They said they were printed to help convince youth to become physically fit," Boucher says with a chuckle, "but they knew who was buying them."

And yes, he also collects and sells vintage magazines for women.

How does Boucher get the endless hodgepodge of material, not to mention the vintage stuff? That's where the luck comes in.

It seems he once found two bags full of vin-

tage erotic magazines at a now-defunct Southeast Portland bookstore. And they were cheap.

He then got hooked on collecting similar items. Soon enough, he was in the bookstore business.

Every year, Boucher attends a book show where he finds out which print releases in the next 12 months will be geared toward his customers. As for the vintage stuff, he says that he also buys it from people who come in off the street and that he always is looking for more.

"We pay the best prices," says Boucher, who quickly notes he does not carry longtime traditional erotic magazines such as *Playboy* and *Playgirl*. "There are way too many of them out there."

Boucher has a penchant for the unusual. He says much of the early gay material is simply not available because it was "thrown out."



"There were a lot of people who got rid of a lot of stuff so no one would ever know they had it," Boucher notes. He says that it's an absolute shame but that he understands why they had to discard the material, considering the atmosphere at the time.

Boucher also lucked out with CounterMedia's high-traffic location. Not only is he just a block from Powell's, which is certainly a magnet for book lovers, he gets plenty of downtown tourists as well.

Another bonus is that the store is at the east end of the Burnside Triangle. Boucher says that he gets customers from every walk of life and that there is always a constant flow of people.

Although today CounterMedia is cramped in a small location, expansion is on the horizon. "We will be doubling our space at the end of the month," says Boucher, who opened the store in June 1996.

So if you're interested in the latest lesbian novel, if magnificent photography of the male body is what fascinates you or if material on any number of fringe fetishes is what you might be looking for, chances are CounterMedia has it. You will have to visit the store in person, however, if you want to check out the books.

Those who might be interested in making a purchase via the Internet are out of luck. In keeping with the vintage atmosphere at CounterMedia, you will not find a Web site for the store. "It's a personal prejudice," Boucher says. [E]

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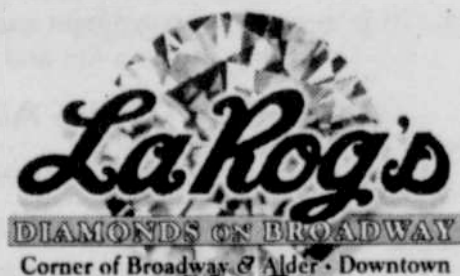


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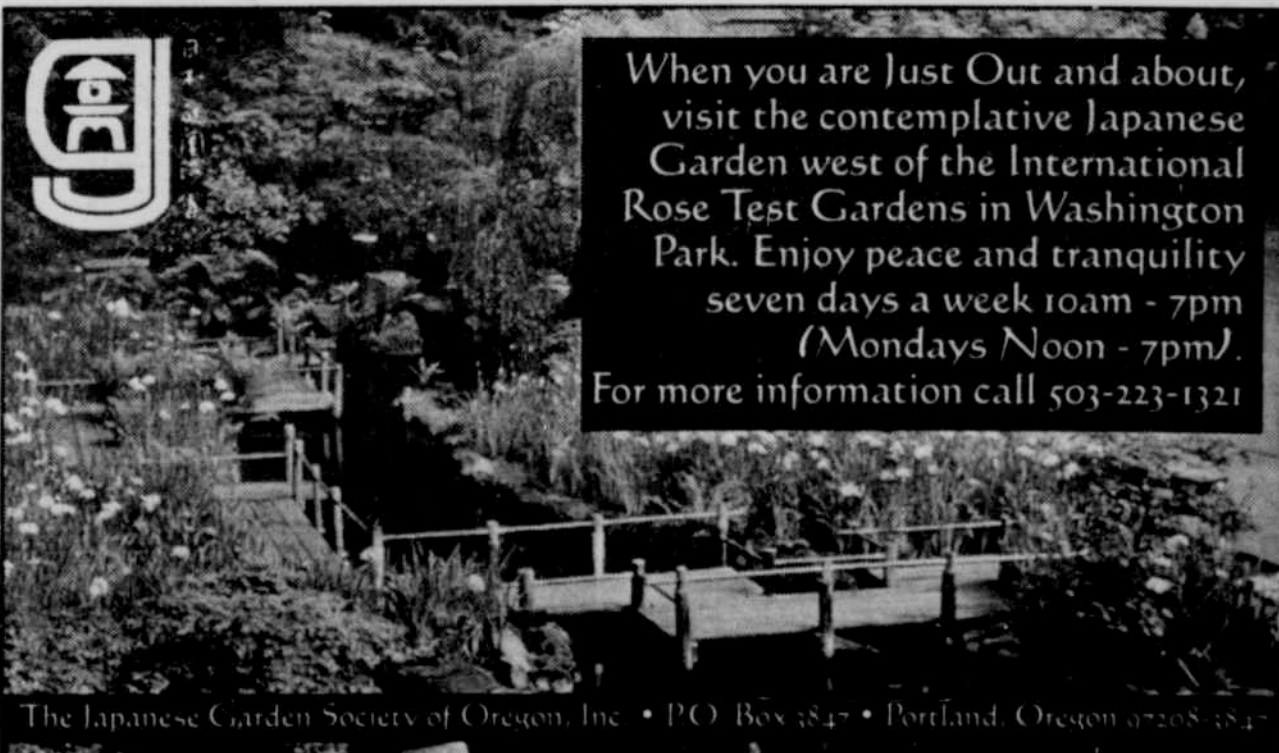
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