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Deco Goes Kitsch

Whether Rita Deco is a movie star or world traveler, her name evokes the glamour of the 1930s and '40s. Automatically your mind is tuned to all things Rita Hayworth and art deco. And this is as it should be when you head out to shop for unique vintage gift and home décor items.

William Spencer, a gay native Oregonian, opened Rita Deco at 7817 N.E. Prescott St. in February. Spencer combined his 20 years of experience in gifts and retail with his set design experience at local theaters to create a fun and vibrant store. You'll find mid-century ware and movie memorabilia as well as new novelties.

is affiliated with the leather and bears communities, said Rita Deco is a great place for collectors and people with an eye for vintage items.

"It's a wonderful place to browse," he adds. "And I have very affordable prices—I try to keep prices at a level I would like to pay."

business watch

Familiar Spot Evolves

There's nothing new about Wild Abandon's eclectic American cuisine, its cozy, romantic lounge and its hoppin' happy hour. Or is there?

There's something familiar about the way Wild Abandon has grown in the past 12 years at 2411 S.E. Belmont St.

While its happy hour has always been a destination, it now offers the best outdoor patio this side of the river.

And while the murals and warm interior haven't changed much, the restaurant has begun boasting a Red Velvet Lounge, which is more of a concept than an actual space.

"We want to be a good neighborhood stop, where someone can just come and have a really good burger. Or a date space, where you can order a more expensive entree," said owner Michael



William Spencer sells vintage gifts and collectibles at Rita Deco.

Cox, an Oregonian since 1992. Another aspect to Rita Deco is the artist space. Every month, Spencer will show the two-dimensional art of an emerging artist on his gallery wall. Spencer said he enjoys giving space to artists who might not be established enough for a formal gallery setting. Next month, the acrylic florals of Colleen Williams will be on display. "This is very appropriate for the season with everything blooming," said Spencer.

A Cully neighborhood resident, Spencer said he chose to open his store in the up-and-coming neighborhood because it has a lot of positive energy. "It's another area that's taken a little time to catch on, like St. Johns and Alberta," he said. "I didn't want to open clear across town in an area I'm not familiar with."

He said he believes people will make Rita Deco a destination because he brings in new goods almost every day and the shop is a wonderful place to find a gift. Spencer, who was active in the Imperial Sovereign Rose Court for many years and

Cox, an Oregonian since 1992.

Cox began his career in the restaurant industry washing dishes at 13 years old. His first job in Portland was waiting tables at Zell's Cafe, just a few blocks from Wild Abandon. At his restaurant for five nights a week, Cox is found behind the bar, greeting diners as the host, filling in for the pastry chef and, sometimes still, washing dishes. Cox, who describes himself as the gay Bob Villa, also upholstered all of the booths and built the restaurant's glittered tables.

The Wild Abandon Web site has been a 21st century addition to the restaurant—like the patio, which Cox says came to him as a revelation: "Sometimes it takes me 10 to 12 years to get a clue."

The detailed Web site tells the history of the joint and its mission and posts a detailed menu.

According to Cox, every chef from the restaurant's past has left fingerprints on its menu. He describes the style of the restaurant's newest chef, Jonathan Taulbee, as "subtly inventive, with a restrained, creative signature."

To celebrate its 12th year in business, Cox is hosting a "no donor left behind" celebration April 24 in which 60 percent of all proceeds will be donated to Our House of Portland. "This is a way for people to have dinner as they would on any other night, and whatever your price point is, it's a donation," he said.

Cox says he rarely says no to charitable opportunities and has been an active contributor to Cascade AIDS Project and Basic Rights Oregon's Bite for Rights.

For more information visit www.wildabandonrestaurant.com.



Michael Cox celebrates 12 years with Wild Abandon.

By JAYMEE R. CUTI and MALKA GEFFEN