

The Forbidden Shop

CROSS-POLLINATION IN THE WHITEAKER by Molly Templeton

If you're a woman of a certain age — say, between old enough to vote and old enough to drink — you may remember Delphina as the store where your mother wouldn't let you shop.

That's the first story I hear when I walk into the long, low building that is Delphina's Whiteaker location. When Delphina reopened on the day of the Whiteaker Block Party, the staff heard from more than one woman who remembered its previous incarnation (in the Ram's Head building on 13th and High, and then next to the Bijou) as the forbidden place to shop. Not that Delphina is just for rebellious teens; the Block Party brought 2,000 people through the doors, from kids up to grandmas. Half those people, PR guy/"right-hand man" Brad Smithart says, remembered Delphina from back in the day. "Everyone since then has come to the store just off of name recognition and the experience they had."

Delphina never went away, not really; long before the previous storefront closed in 2003, owner Stephan Andresen started Slash 'N Burn, an online clothing store carrying the same styles Delphina specializes in (the online and physical stores are run from the same building). Pinning down just what sort of style that is, though, is a little complicated. "We're not fashion or lifestyle snobs and we don't want to be pigeonholed either," says the Slash 'N Burn website (www.findcoolclothing.com).

Andresen acknowledges that there's some stylistic overlap with Hot Topic, but notes that Delphina's audience is a bit older (I don't see a single *Twilight*-related garment anywhere). The store carries brands like Lip Service, Switchblade Stiletto and Iron Fist; studded belts and cuffs (locally made) line the wall behind the counter; tees sport zombies, evil kittens, B-movie logos; a handful of steampunk-inspired pieces are tucked into the racks; plaid, snaps, straps, zippers and vinyl abound. It's a little bit punk, a little bit goth and more than a little bit rock 'n' roll. And it's extraordinarily welcoming.

"We don't judge," Smithart says simply. "No one who comes through that door judges." This isn't the kind of store where a clerk is going to look down her nose at your shorts and plain T-shirt and go back to painting her glossy black nails while you slink out the door, cowed. You may not wake up and lace yourself into a plaid

minidress every day (or you might!), but you might want one for a night out — and Delphina's staff can help you find one.

One theme that repeats while talking to Andresen, Smithart and buyer April Smithart-Unruh is the idea of cross-pollination and lack of strict genre or subculture boundaries. "We know that most people who are interested in these different genres of music and fashion and life tend to mix and match," Andresen says. "It all blends together ... If you're playful and colorful and creative, then that rises above."

There's also a strong individualistic streak to the Delphina style, and not just because, as Smithart-Unruh puts it, "None of us have the exact same taste in anything." Smithart explains that they don't buy large quantities of the same garments, but small runs of all different things. "If you come in and get one of the jackets," he says, "you're most likely going to be the only person [in town] rocking that jacket. It gives you a little bit more individuality." He estimates that 70 to 80 percent of the store's stock isn't available anywhere else in Eugene.

While Eugene isn't exactly teeming with people dressed in Delphina-style clothes — Smithart-Unruh says that when she goes to the nearby Dari-Mart, people ask what band she's in — Andresen hopes his store will contribute to Eugene's nightlife. "It helps people who want to go out and be seen," he says. "My experience has told me that when people wear these kinds of things ... that just translates into more activity, to more performers, plays, movies, bands." And, most likely, more teenagers trying to convince their parents to let them through Delphina's doors. **ew**

Delphina, 941 W. 3rd Ave. 343-3225.



Delphina owner Stephan Andresen and buyer April Smithart-Unruh flank EW writer Molly Templeton. All three are dressed entirely in clothes from Delphina. For the story behind the photo, go to blogs.eugeneweekly.com

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