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02. The Flats

From Al Quoz, Dubai, to Bushwick, Brooklyn, warehouse districts seduce art galleries with lower rent and the ultimate urban luxury: space. Vancouver, though short on industrial legacy, is no different. Equinox Gallery is one of more than 12 contemporary art galleries to select the Flats, a gritty yet up-and-coming patch of stubby concrete buildings, dusty auto shops, and railroad tracks clustered around East 1st Avenue between Main and Clark. Equinox made the move in 2012 after growing weary of its location on South Granville, Vancouver's gallery row of yore. "I was looking for my perfect building for years when I saw this 13,000-square-foot space with 25-foot-tall ceilings and parking. It was raw, but immediately I leased it," says Equinox owner Andy Sylvester.

An Etienne Zack oil painting portraying a labyrinth of redacted documents hangs on a stark wall in the Equinox gallery, née Finning Tractor & Equipment Company. The philosophical commentary on memory continues as far as the

eye can see; the space is larger than the main floor of the Vancouver Art Gallery and is divided into two big galleries and three smaller viewing spaces. "The space allows us to merge the hierarchical boundary between what museums do and what commercial galleries do, so we can put on exhibitions that create a larger conversation about contemporary art," says Sylvester.

The Flats is at a pivotal moment, with esteemed advocates of contemporary Canadian art including the Catriona Jeffries, Grunt, Winsor, and Monte Clark galleries, as well as live/work artist studios, art suppliers, digital media startups, and the collaborative Centre for Digital Media. Factor in future resident Emily Carr University of Art and Design, which will relocate to a 45 per cent larger campus on Great Northern Way upon completion in 2016, and the Flats is on the verge of transitioning from an alternative arts hub to Vancouver's premier creative district.

"The centre of gravity in Vancouver is moving east," says Jennifer Winsor of Winsor Gallery, which relocated from South Granville to a former fish-packaging warehouse on East 1st Avenue

in 2012. "The Flats represent a perfect-storm scenario. We've reached a critical mass."

Serious collectors and free-access art seekers make the pilgrimage to the previously unheralded no man's land; the common denominator in the Flats is dedication. "We don't have the casual walk-by. We have people that are here with intent," says Winsor. And according to Sylvester, "You have to figure out where we are—that's part of the responsibility of being interested in art."

In addition to more space and the edited crowd, the Flats has community synergy; the galleries are a stone's throw from the studios of the artists they represent. "Say I have someone here looking at an artist's work and I thought, 'I know something they would love.' Five minutes later, an artist can walk a piece in," says Winsor.

It doesn't hurt that cool upstarts Brassneck Brewery, 33 Acres Brewing Company, and Red Truck Beer have moved into the area, which also happens to be Vancouver's historic brewery district, giving art habitués a place to congregate. "We welcome the breweries and restaurants. We need more," says Sylvester. "You go to a gallery and you



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need a respite. You need to think; you need to drink." —*Taraneh Ghajar Jerven*

03. Baker at Brougham Interiors

It's been over 30 years since brothers Mark and Rex Panther opened furniture specialist Brougham Interiors in North Vancouver, and for the past 15, they've made a point of carrying Baker's American classics. This spring, as they celebrate the three-year anniversary of relocating to an expansive, 15,000-square-foot showroom in Vancouver's Armoury District, they have another milestone to recognize: a space for Baker to call its own.

In the refurbished "annex" adjacent to their showroom at West 2nd Avenue and Fir Street, a bright, sleek area houses a multitude of the American brand's designs from industry heavyweights such as Barbara Barry, Laura Kirar, Jacques Garcia, Bill Sofield, and Thomas Pheasant, the latter of whom was recently on hand with the Panther brothers to offer a preview of the new space.

"Baker is one brand that is truly sophisticated and elegant, and it requires its own space to

be translated properly," explains Mark. "Any collection requires a certain amount of product to be displayed to have a meaningful presentation, and because of the detailing on the Baker pieces—the style and the finishing—it requires the space so that you can see it in the proper context."

Baker's collections are inspired by various historical periods, which the company is well versed in. From the brand's founding years in the late 1800s, Baker's lines have come to reflect the spirit of the West, the postwar influence of the Far East, and the modern classics of today—all while maintaining a commitment to Old World craftsmanship, a point that was reinforced further when Kohler bought the company in 1986. Pheasant joined the company's designer roster in 2002 and is contributing his own bit of history to the Baker bloodline: a pair of night tables from his inaugural Baker line are now at Blair House, the official state guest house of the President of the United States, which he was invited to redesign. "I'm playing with colour, I'm playing with pattern," says Pheasant. "It should reflect



America—it should reflect the best of what we have to offer within the romance of this history."

That history stands out in the upscale designs of Baker's current lines—including Pheasant's Blossom Mirror, inspired by a kimono with cherry blossoms—which shine bright in Brougham's new space. Speaking to the creative freedom and encouragement given by Baker, Pheasant reveals that the process for creating the piece was incredibly hands-on. "At a factory in Italy, they made me 500 of these different shapes, and I just laid them out on the floor and they welded it just as I had it. The next day, I used pink and yellow Post-its to show where I wanted the crystals to go. It could have just been a drawing, but it wouldn't have been as good because I got to create it with them right there, and it gave us a better product."

Clearly, the Panther brothers are eager to show off Baker's detailed products to Vancouver's design community. "It's terrific because it's so open. With the tall ceilings, light colours, and all-glass front, it has more of a modern execution for classic pieces," says Mark. "And the reality is, this is just a little snapshot of what is available in the collections." —*Kimberly Budziak*