



**MY THREE SONS** ERIK NORDSTROM RUNS THE COMPANY WITH BROTHERS PETE AND BLAKE. GRANDPA EVERETT DID THE SAME WITH BROTHERS ELMER AND LLOYD, ALL SONS OF FOUNDER JOHN W. NORDSTROM



SHOPPING

## Hey, Big Spender

*Judging from the construction dust, luxury brands are thriving in a tepid economy by super-sizing the boutique vibe*

buy like a department store or display like a department store. We're going to shop the world," explains Mark Derbyshire, president of Holt's. "Last year we attended 164 runway shows. We introduced 35 new brands. And that's because that's what the people of Vancouver want to see in their shop."

It's no surprise these titans are keen to distance themselves from a descriptor they see as pejorative. Separating the wheat from the Wal-marts will be key to high-end stores' success. In a tough consumer economy, it's hard to be a mid-level retailer. Target bailed on Canada after two half-hearted years; the carcasses of abandoned Sears locations are scattered across the country (or rebuilt as a Nordstrom, in Vancouver's case); Gap is set to close 140 North American stores by year's end.

Yet luxury thrives. Before the dust from Nordstrom's construction settled, Holt Renfrew began work on an expansion that will extend the showroom floor to 400,000 square

feet. This summer, McArthurGlen Designer Outlets opened for business, slinging Armani and Coach just outside the airport. Saks Fifth Avenue is rumoured to be coming to town in the next few years.

"There's a lot of talk of luxury in Vancouver, but there's nothing new about it. It's been alive and well and flourishing for a long time," says Derbyshire. "We're cultivating existing relationships but also seeing new customers, who are either new to the city or at that point where looking good and feeling great is now part of your life." As the city's population grows, so does the number of people who see value in high-end experiences.

Holt Renfrew owes much of its success to the experiential nature of its shop. The soon-to-be-updated Vancouver location—part of a \$300-million cross-country renovation plan—aims to "develop the intimacy of a boutique," explains Derbyshire. "Retail should be fun; it should be about the thrill. There's something in the journey of

acquiring. Whether it starts with the valet or a spot to have your stuff monogrammed, today's customer wants an experience." (A personal shopper might spend time each month hosting a customer for meals or jetting off with them to markets and fashion shows, just to pick their brains.) "A huge part of my job is just listening."

Nordstrom is ready to offer Vancouverites something special too, boasting a roster of decidedly un-cookie-cutter features in the new shop—think themed pop-ups curated by the director of creative projects, a concierge desk for making dinner reservations, and an in-store cocktail and wine bar. The store stocks plenty of Nordstrom exclusives, like Delvaux's leather goods collection, alongside goodies from Vancouver designers (jewellers Poppy Finch and Melanie Auld; menswear line Wings + Horns).

It's luxury, it's local, it's everything we love. After all, this is a city for which the special is truly special. We'll spend all weekend picking up gourmet sausage from the nose-to-tail butcher, cute bags from entrepreneurial designers, and artisanal beer priced like rare Scotch. It's no surprise high-end brands here are trying to get in on the action of big-box stores with a boutique vibe.

The faux-cobblestoned McArthurGlen also sells itself as something more than a place to snag a sweet deal on a Lolë sweater. There's the "European food hall" and a live-music series planned for the main square. "It should feel like a little village, somewhere to just come and look around and enjoy the experience," says general manager Robert Thurlow, touring the site. "And if they shop? All the better." —*Stacey McLachlan*

Jenny Read



## LUXURY REBOOT

The northwest corner of Robson and Granville was previously a César Pelli design infamously described as an "unending urinal wall" and "early washroom architecture." James Cheng (locally, the Shangri-La and Fairmont Pacific Rim) is aiming for something less scatological—and tenants seem to approve. Alongside Nordstrom, the spot will host Boss, Kate Spade, and Ted Baker shops, as well as office space for Sony Pictures Imageworks, law firm Miller Thomson, and Microsoft



ZOOLOGY

## ON A WING AND A PRAYER

*CSI meets The Birds*

→ Ildiko Szabo is accustomed to receiving strange mail. "Take a look at this," she says, pulling out a Ziploc bag. "It arrived last week." Inside is a scrap of feather the size of a stamp—all that's left of a bird that met its end at YVR. "Birds go through a jet engine incredibly fast, and often there is no blood or visible trace left," she says. "But sometimes you can wipe out the grease in the engine and find the fluff."

Szabo's task is to identify the species this fluff came from, a job that requires unique expertise as well as access to a large number of bird specimens. She qualifies on both counts: one of only two people in the world certified as an avian forensic morphologist, she is also an assistant curator at UBC's Beaty Biodiversity Museum, which houses 21,000 bird specimens.

Identifying the remains is important because it helps airports devise effective wildlife-control measures. Bird strikes can smash windows, damage engines, even cause crashes. The cost to commercial airlines worldwide is estimated at US\$1.2 billion a year.

American airports can send the remains of birds killed in this way to the Smithsonian Institution for free analysis. Canada has a costlier response. If only blood and tissue—or "snarge" (short for snot and garbage)—are recovered, they go to the Canadian Centre for DNA Barcoding at the University of Guelph. DNA and the Beaty's feather identification cost \$250 each, so not all airports bother—fortunately for Szabo, who would otherwise be swamped.

The primary tool is a microscope. Under extreme magnification clues about the barbules—filaments extending

along the barbs of feathers—jump into sharp relief. An owl's, for example, feature blunt spikes; a duck's have triangles; and a hawk's have long spines. After determining bird family, Szabo will try to pinpoint the species by finding a match in the museum's collection.

Appropriate to her scientific specialty, Szabo's career path is unconventional. Born in Paris to a Hungarian father and a Canadian mother, she was raised in Montreal, then moved to Vancouver. After a BSc in oceanography from UBC, she coauthored a tabular key on zooplanktonic crustaceans, and did work for the Canadian Wildlife Service: "My first assignment was studying the regurgitation of the Cassin's auklet." After a few years of fieldwork she made a major detour, serving as a project manager for a Vancouver construction contractor before returning to academia to split the year between international bird surveys and the Beaty.

Today, in tandem with her curatorial duties, she maintains a Working With Birds webpage that many schools use as a tool and teaches a university course on preparing avian specimens. Holidays are often spent pursuing rare bird families. Her most recent trip saw her slogging through the papyrus swamps of Uganda in search of the shoebill—a bizarre, prehistoric-looking stork with a yellow beak shaped like a size 12 Dutch clog.

Szabo finds her forensic work to be an absorbing challenge. "When I get a package, I never know what's going to be inside. It's like Christmas." —*Kerry Banks*





## DEMOGRAPHICS

# Squeezed Out

*With no housing or jobs, and struggling to make it in an impossible city, a generation plots revenge*

FOR JENNIFER FOX, 37, LIFE in Vancouver has not turned out as she'd hoped. Despite having three university degrees and dreams of a West Coast home and family, she finds herself caught—like thousands of her contemporaries—with none of the accoutrements of success. She lives in a no-bedroom, 380-square-foot West End shoebox and is happy if her income as a research assistant at UBC leaves her \$100 extra at month's end.

Discouraged by the few job opportunities, massive education debt, and the conviction that life is passing them by, 10,000 members of the newly coined Generation Squeeze—ages 20 to 40s—have left the city in the last five years, according to Statistics Canada. Too expensive. A career black hole. In fact, every one of Fox's dozen closest friends has moved away. "I feel stupid not leaving in 2010," she admits. "I'm young and live in Vancouver: my glass is half-empty."

This sentiment is familiar to Paul Kershaw, a professor at UBC's School of Population and Public Health. Kershaw, 40, invented the term Generation Squeeze four years ago, and has spent the time since studying the economic and cultural trends that have led many of Canada's frustrated millennials to ask themselves: "What am I doing wrong?" His conclusion? Nothing, but 21st-century demographics and economics—and their own political apathy—have

conspired against them. This is particularly true, he knows, in Vancouver. Security based on higher education, job opportunities, a good income, affordable home ownership, manageable debt, and optimism about the future—touchstones of the boomer generation—is elusive in one of the world's most expensive cities.

The economic and demographic statistics Kershaw has gathered provide vivid comparisons between what boomers faced in 1975 and what their millennial counterparts encounter today. Adjusted for inflation, the average household 40 years ago earned \$65,000 (one family member working)—virtually the same as today's \$68,000 (two members working). But the average adjusted cost of housing in Metro Vancouver in 1975 (\$251,000) is over three times higher today, at \$813,000.

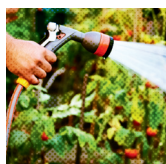
These ratios—typically two to three times worse for today's Squeezers—apply to amount of student debt, likelihood of still living with parents, and chances of finding work in one's chosen field. This, despite members of Generation Squeeze having higher levels of post-secondary education and working longer hours, often at two jobs.

Trying to overturn these odds is Iain Reeve, 32, who works as a union researcher by day and a Generation Squeeze organizer by night. He doesn't blame the boomers, who by their numbers dictated



## CRUEL SUMMER

As the magazine went to press, area reservoirs were already standing a third empty. Responding to the worst drought in recent years, Metro Vancouver upped water restrictions to Stage 3. This means no lawn sprinklers, "dormant" parks and boulevards, pools and hot tubs unfilled, cars unwashed... As the heat rises and we're urged to cut usage by 20 percent, this question arises: Can we stop with the drought shaming and rule-breaking, and just all do the right thing? [Metrovancouver.org](http://Metrovancouver.org)



the cultural trends of the '60s and '70s, and still define government priorities today. For example, every year Ottawa spends up to \$40,000 on each person over 65, but less than \$12,000 per person under 45. To redress this imbalance, Reeve, along with Jennifer Fox and 20 or so others—some, PhD-holding baristas—formed a Vancouver chapter of the new, 8,000-member Generation Squeeze ([Gensqueeze.ca](http://Gensqueeze.ca)) in June.

The organization is a national lobby aimed at pressuring governments to pay attention to the crisis facing today's alienated, underemployed, over-indebted youth. Its plan is modelled on the boomers' million-member CARP (formerly the Canadian Association of Retired Persons). When pensions or health care get discussed, CARP by the tens of thousands speaks out and writes to MPs. But until now, no one has spoken for the often-cynical millennials.

The goal is to unite and amplify the voices of the Squeezed around economic and political issues that affect them: better terms on student loans; more affordable buying and renting of houses; a national child care program; job-creation investments in innovative fields that don't contribute to global warming.

Reeve, for one, is optimistic about this new chapter. "We need to mobilize. We need to get political. That's what the boomers did." —Daniel Wood