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Volume 1: STEVEN COX

the Cause + Affect behind Vancouver's Pecha Kucha Night

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Steven Cox is one of the founders of Vancouver design firm Cause+Effect. He's become a familiar face on the local cultural scene as a catalyst who brings together the hottest, hippest and most unexpected elements at events. Most recently, he's helped bring Pecha Kucha Night to the city.

Here, he sits down to talk with the Vancouver Observer's Linda Solomon and Jenny Uechi about the parts of his own family and work life that have combined to create the unique brand that is Steven Cox.

LINDA: I'm interested in your Winnipeg beginnings. It's a mystery to a lot of us, that city. If you had to sum up Winnipeg to an alien, what would you say?

STEVEN: Well, Winnipeg has lots of beauty and lots of ugly. A very ugly core, a dead downtown - classic dead downtown - core. It also has some wonderful parks, gardens and neighborhoods as well.

L: When did it die?

S: I think it died in, like, 1910.

L: The neighbourhood never...

S: At the turn of the century, Winnipeg was one of the hubs of North America. Trade was going east-west and it was gonna be the same size as Chicago. Then all that stopped, the air took over, people flew around Winnipeg, trade went north-south. Nobody cared anymore. It sort of hit a stall. It's basically the same size now as it was then. It's like 750,000 people.

L: Let's talk about you. How many kids in your family?

S: Myself and my sister, she's two years older.

L: You went to public schools?

S: Went to public schools, pretty normal. My mom was a teacher. She taught in high school and then moved into teaching special needs and troubled youth in high school.

L: What was the family "trademark", in terms of what your family told you over and over? What is life? How did they explain the world to you?

S: They explained it by doing, not as much by telling. So I watched my parents, who had very strong morals and they believed very much in personal relationships. Both being teachers didn't sort of leave our home with an air of smartness. But as a teacher, you get a much more intimate knowledge of people and this sort of led us to have good relationships that were more informed than other kids.

L: No generation gap?

S: No. It made it harder to fool them.

L: What kind of kid were you?

S: I was a good kid. I was a very athletic kid, a big hockey player. In Winnipeg, it is impossible to grow up not playing hockey.

L: What happens if you don't?

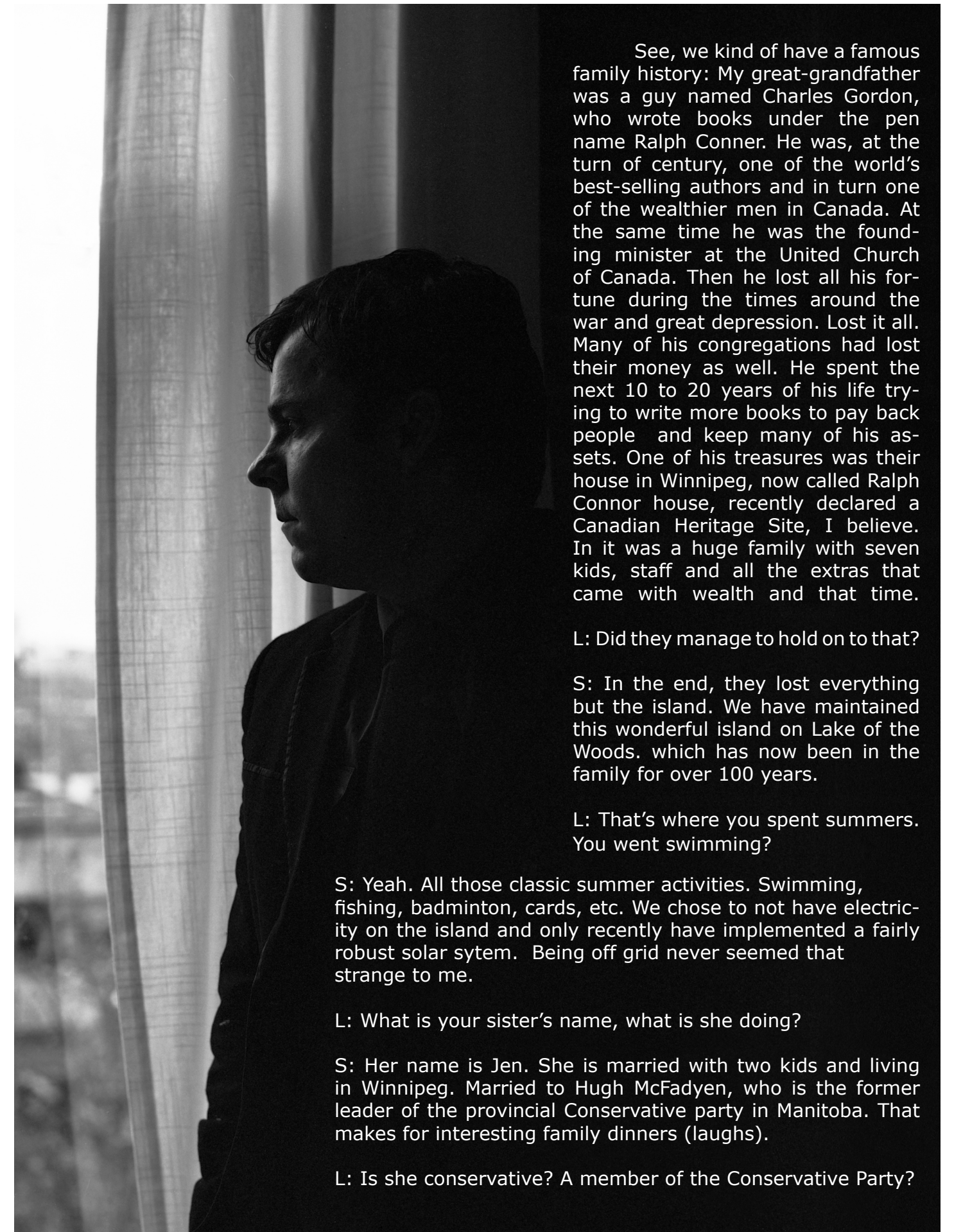
S: In some ways, nobody knows who you are. You end up being the weird kid. You miss out on a friendship base as for a while, your entire social sphere was built around hockey.

L: So was yours?

S: Absolutely. As a kid, until I was about 15 and started to think that missing the junior high dance and other stuff for a hockey game was kind of dumb, because there were girls there. So then you start to question how much time you are spending on that, and the dreams of getting into the NHL start to seem a little bit ridiculous.

L: What did you do in the summer?

S: Everybody leaves Winnipeg in the summer, it's a ghost town. We had a cottage on an island in Ontario on Lake of the Woods. The island was originally purchased by my great-grandfather and has been in the family ever since.



See, we kind of have a famous family history: My great-grandfather was a guy named Charles Gordon, who wrote books under the pen name Ralph Conner. He was, at the turn of century, one of the world's best-selling authors and in turn one of the wealthier men in Canada. At the same time he was the founding minister at the United Church of Canada. Then he lost all his fortune during the times around the war and great depression. Lost it all. Many of his congregations had lost their money as well. He spent the next 10 to 20 years of his life trying to write more books to pay back people and keep many of his assets. One of his treasures was their house in Winnipeg, now called Ralph Connor house, recently declared a Canadian Heritage Site, I believe. In it was a huge family with seven kids, staff and all the extras that came with wealth and that time.

L: Did they manage to hold on to that?

S: In the end, they lost everything but the island. We have maintained this wonderful island on Lake of the Woods. which has now been in the family for over 100 years.

L: That's where you spent summers. You went swimming?

S: Yeah. All those classic summer activities. Swimming, fishing, badminton, cards, etc. We chose to not have electricity on the island and only recently have implemented a fairly robust solar sytem. Being off grid never seemed that strange to me.

L: What is your sister's name, what is she doing?

S: Her name is Jen. She is married with two kids and living in Winnipeg. Married to Hugh McFadyen, who is the former leader of the provincial Conservative party in Manitoba. That makes for interesting family dinners (laughs).

L: Is she conservative? A member of the Conservative Party?

S: I wouldn't say that she is an overly conservative person but it's one of the things... she kind of married into it.

L: Are your parents?

S: My parents are ultimate liberals. They live in River Heights, the only Liberal seat in Manitoba ... the liberal hotbed of Canada (laughs).

L: Did they ever run for office?

S: They were always interested, but not involved. They did do some lengthy door knocking for the Conservatives on Hugh's behalf, however. I think that showed that family was stronger than political lines.

L: It sounds like you had an amazing family...

S: I had a very stable home. I would call it nice, wholesome, loving. Lots of support, all those things that you take for granted.

L: In all your years of young adulthood, did you have a moment of awakening?

S: No, not really. I lived in a pretty good bubble, even going through my Masters of Architecture, there was a little feeling of just going through the motions. I don't think there was a particular moment in my life; it was more like one big slow evolution.

My awakening really started, I think, when Jane, who is my partner in life and business, came into my life.

L: When did you meet?

S: We met when I was in my second year in university. She was in her first year. It was kind of a classic thing. She was in the interior design program, which every year usually has about 30 new women and two guys and both guys are usually gay.

I shouldn't admit it, but there's a hotbed of cute girls coming into the faculty and as a guy, there's always this kind of checking out that goes on. Jane happened to be one of those girls.

L: Once she came along, what happened? The evolution in your life ...

S: In many ways, we became a team very early

on, so we were 21, 22. I am 38 now. As a team, life is just easier. Making decisions is easier, as someone else always has your back.

L: So lucky.

S: After we completed our degrees, we had that classic decision to make. Which city: New York, San Francisco, Chicago, London. We knew one person in London, an Aussie girl that Jane worked with in Vancouver. And at that time, London was kind of booming. The dot.com stuff had started to come to Eu-rope and there was a lot of money there. This was 1998.

So we moved to London, we spent our first year in that typical horrible basement flat with mould on the walls. It was a couple of blocks from Arsenal football grounds in North Islington and it was great. The plan was to stay for a year, and we ended up staying for five. We moved out of that basement flat and ended up sharing a two-bedroom flat with another couple for four years. Imagine, two couples, one bathroom, four years.

This was kind of where the evolution started, because we both kind of moved away from what our education told us to be doing.

Jane was supposed to be an interior designer, which was what she started with. She worked for a big interior design firm called Gensler, a big American firm. It went from being in a firm of 80 when she started to like 300 in a couple of years. Big corporate headquarters and great parties and all that kind of stuff.

I started working for a Canadian architect living in London, named Alison Brooks. I mainly did work on a house in Hampstead Heath.

And we both stayed in these jobs for like two years, and then we both moved. Jane moved out of interior design into a more strategic and marketing role in a small agency and I moved to a design firm called Softroom. We were doing more interior branding stuff. Like restaurants, museums, hotels, retail environments.

So we both spent another three years doing those things, and then we began thinking about what the next stages

of our lives were going to be. I had also proposed. She had accepted.

L: How did you propose?

S: Well, it was really totally cliché, but it seemed great at the moment. I proposed in a private box on Valentine's Day in the London Symphony Orchestra.

L: Wow. What was the production?

S: It was basically love songs, playing everybody from Bach to Tchaikovsky I think.

L: At what point of the program did you propose?

S: I don't know, it was all a blur. A big blur.

But we were both convinced that the music adjusted to the moment... and then you get the sense that the whole place is looking at you.

I rented the box, bought the other two tickets out. It was funny, because Jane said: 'Oh, it is so weird that all the other boxes are full and we have the only box for us, that's great!' and I was like, yeah, that's so great.

So, we got married back in Winnipeg because we wanted to be close to everybody. And we ended up getting married at my great-grandfather's mansion house. It is sort of a tradition in our family, not a big wedding, maybe 100 people.

L: You still stayed in London for a while?

S: Yeah, we had another year in London. We married in 2002 we came back in 2003.

L: You said there was an evolution in London. I was wondering what impact London had on you guys. All of a sudden you went from Winnipeg to London. You were in the big world. What impact did that have on you two?



S: I think for some reason we both found ourselves very naturally fitting into the metropolis style. We were both super hungry for new, interesting, cool stuff. We were going to lectures, fashion shows, bands and all that stuff. I had this great office in the middle of Soho. It was pretty super cool (laughs).

I think that the biggest thing for us was to learn that there are no boundaries to what you do. Meaning that you are not your job description. I'm was a registered architect. I became a registered architect in London but then I never actually did architecture. Well, perhaps a little bit, but mainly I did other stuff. I worked on music videos, I designed restaurants, airplane interiors.

Same goes for Jane, who was an inte-

My first job was designing a house in Hampstead Heath.

weirdest thing they ever saw, because that house was brick. Anyway, the house ended up being really unique, and winning a bunch of awards.

I had a bunch of these sort of strange foreign scenarios. I had another one where I was designing an art gallery for the Devon Guild of Craftsmen. Imagine this 28-year-old kid who looks like he's 22 with an American accent. He goes to the countryside in Devon and tells a bunch of 65-year-old craftsmen how to turn their 200-year-old mill into a modern gallery (laughs).

We started off incredibly adversarial but in the end, they just sort of thought I was hilarious.

After that, I spent a year working on the design of the upper-class cabin interiors for Virgin Atlantic. It was the first time they were implementing flat beds. As opposed to British Airways, who had the business traveller, we were catering to rock stars and models.

L: Did you ride in one?

rior designer but beyond the first couple of years, never really did interior design.

You realize you're just a creative, design-focused person. You can talk intelligently about all kinds of things and you just start soaking all those things around you. You just became a sort of creative hub ... in a dynamic and constantly moving city.

L: Did you go to any shows or exhibits that turned your head around?

S: I don't think that it was any particular show or exhibit, I think for me the interesting thing was that I got put in all kinds of uncomfortable situations in my design business life.

In the middle of the project, my boss went on maternity leave for three months. It was a learn-or-die situation. It was a modern house and I only really knew design detailing stuff from Canada, stuff that I had learned in school. Luckily, my boss thought that modern wood exterior cladding was completely appropriate. Well, people in Hampstead Heath thought it was the

S: No. I got to sit in the mockup. But Kate Moss wasn't there. I guess I just had weird experiences which I wouldn't have got I if I had just stayed in Canada doing work. I think if I had done that, I would have ended up as a bitter architect.

You see, architecture is tough. It's undervalued, it's hard, it's actually quite misleading, as it's not a lot of design, it's actually not that creative, a very misleading profession in general. At least in my experience.

L: Tell me about your return to Canada.

S: We knew we were always going to return to Canada. It was the decision about either Montreal or Vancouver, but neither of us speak French very well, so it was because of that that Vancouver became the place.

And we were never interested in Toronto. Both of us had spent time there and it seemed a little bit, in our minds, that it lacked a certain culture and the

times we spent there we were never like: 'Oh, this is where I want to be.'

But we knew nobody here in Vancouver, back in 2003. We did the very typical thing. We moved in to the West End, which is what everybody does when they move to Vancouver. We had an awesome apartment; we were at the very end of Nelson Street on Stanley Park in this '50s tower called the Silhouette apartments. Great!

I started working for Arthur Erickson. It was really not that intentional, but all the architects that I wanted to work for didn't hire me, so I was kind of a little bit lost, and that's when Arthur called and asked for an interview. Well, Arthur didn't call, his assistant called.

But it was still one of those weird moments you go through in your career when you're like, 'Oh yeah, Arthur Erickson is going to call you' (laughs).

But really, when you're working for Arthur Erickson, you're really working for Nick Milkovich, who was really the man behind the man. They had this really weird and slightly dysfunctional relationship. But it was good for both of them. I did some good stuff with them. Nick is a fantastic person.

I also kind of gave up on architecture at that time as well. I had worked on an addition to the Evergreen building. A five-storey addition. During the process of city approvals, there were a lot of backroom deals and eventually the project was squashed. There was all kinds of nastiness and horrible stuff going on and this was the moment where I was kind of done with architecture. It was slow, it was boring, it was bureaucratic... and for me it didn't result in any interesting...

The same time I was doing that, Jane was bouncing around from companies doing consulting work. I guess she was always a little bit too senior to be hired full-time. We had these conversations at dinner. I told her, you know, you're just going to have to start your own thing. No choice. You're unemployable (laughs). So she did.

We met, well she met, a woman who ran the Home Show. Which was at the time a big, quite nasty thing at BC place, with all the brooms and mops and slicers and dicers... and through this personal relationship, she was telling us: 'You guys seem totally hip and cool, you should help me get some design element back into this event.' So we said sure.

At the time, we spent the year kind of becoming aware of all the interesting designers in Vancouver. We realized there were tons of interesting designers, and no one really knows about them and no one knows each other, there was no community, and we thought, let's do an exhibition.

So we started this exhibition called Movers and Shapers and we



featured all kind of designers/designs. It was not only architectural, there was jewelry designers, product designers, furniture people. We focused on 10 designers and we designed this very modern, white, very London (laughs) sort of... exhibition. In the middle of the home show.

L: You broke out of the box.

S: Yeah, kind of a diamond in the rough, so to speak.

We got huge attention, we got the front page of one of the sections of the Sun or something... and we also developed all these friendships, friendships that we still have today. The best way to meet people is to have an exhibition feature people (laughs).

This project also meant that we had to name our company. I still remember writing down the name "Cause + Effect" on a piece of paper while I was sitting down at my desk in Nick Milkovich's office. And I thought, but it's not Cause and effect, action and reaction. It's cause and affect, which is action with purpose.

It was also at a time when "cause" wasn't the loaded term as it is now. Cause is a term that has become loaded, from everything from social justice to sustainability. We didn't really mean it that way. That really wasn't the intention. The intention was, we want to do more as a company rather than just be the design people at the end of a process.

For design, especially in Canada, most of the process and decisions have already been made by the time the designers come on board the project. Then the designer would be told what to design and they would go 'OK, I'll do that'. If the designer goes, 'well that's kind of dumb', the client would say, "too late! already decided."

So I would be thinking, how did you decide to do that? They'd answer, well my neighbour's husband told me, or my daughter's best friend said we should. It was just that usually the decision-making process to reach the design component was really uninformed. And it's that stage where all the innovation could happen, in the process before the designer was hired.

I think we were aware of that because of the stay in London. We have seen more possibilities.

When you get to America, you get into strong silos... North America lives specialization. Right? You do one thing and you do it better than anybody else. In Europe, it's the total opposite. In Europe, you're more interesting because you do that and you do that, you do many things at a time. It makes your work richer. Canada and the States are really suspect of that. I think the message we are trying to get out is: "because we are doing more things, we are more interesting, because they are each informed by the other."

So if you want specialization, you are going to get exactly what everyone else does, but you going to get low risk, probably not that expensive, and you know what you are going to get before it starts.

But that's not what you are going to get with us. We didn't want you to know what you are going to get.

L: It sounds like you wanted to engage in a creative process where something amazing that you didn't expect happens.

S: That's right. We wanted to solve a problem without defining how we are going to solve that problem.

Like the analogy: You go to a coal company for energy solutions. It's likely they are going to recommend coal. We didn't want to be that. We wanted to be the company that gives you a solution that you never heard of. Cause and Affect was trying to say, 'we are not just an "affect" company, we are also the front end.

To do that, we had to build a company that had variety so you could solve the problem in a bunch of different ways. Then we became this kind of weird group and nobody knew what we did. You know, we created an exhibition, then we did some graphic design, then we created an event series.

C+A started to become interesting when we started working for the Vancouver Art Gallery and they said, we want to improve our awareness. People walk by the building, they don't know what it is, how to get in etc.. So we said lets start with signage. At the time, VAG had a big sign over by the stairs and they had a green canopy that came out one door. It looked like you were entering a funeral home.

L: I remember that.

S: So we started doing really basic things. Like, we put really big banners up at the entrances. Stuff that for us was like Step 1 in a 30-step process on how to improve. But anyway, they were so excited with the simple stuff that we did. But just to get those banners up on a heritage Class A building was so much bureaucracy. So we finally changed the thing from green to red, put up some banners, added some additional signage out on the sidewalk, with flexible signage that could be replaced with what was happening inside. We brought the gallery out to the community a bit more.

The next thing they asked was, how to get the younger audience?

At the time, they had a very old membership, very old audience. So they said, 'Why don't you guys design some cool posters?' and we said that cool posters aren't going to do it. You have to change the way people think of the gallery, you have to totally change the perception. The only way to do that is to get to them to experience the gallery in a different way.

And so we convinced them to do 'Fuse'. With Fuse, the idea was to turn the gallery into a social space, a party space. I remember that we said people might come to the gallery and not look at the art and that's okay. The staff at the VAG were pretty uncomfortable with that idea.

They said, wait a minute. Why would we want people to come in here and not look at the art?





We want to increase their appreciation of art, we don't want them to just come in here and have beer and ogle each other. So we said, let's do three events. So we had agreement to do three parties.

L: You put on the party? You put out a mailing list?

S: No, we helped... we helped. They knew people, we created the concept, named it and designed the graphic identity for it. We curated the event itself, brought in the DJ, brought in the entertainment. Came up with the concept of how it would work, how people would move through the gallery.

L: So you weren't designing, you were curating an event.

Cause+Effect office space



S: Yes, well that's where design comes from. We understand the physical experience and know how to create something that people can get engaged with, and it's also about how to communicate that. That's really where we began growing as a brand and marketing company. We didn't just create the idea, we named it, we sold it to the general public, we branded it.

L: How did you connect with the people you wanted to get?

S: Well they were hoping to get 250 and 1,200 showed up. It was a total nightmare, they sold out everything, there wasn't even a leaf of lettuce left. It was like a hurricane had gone through. Staff there were totally overwhelmed. It was amazing, it was great.

Then we did two more for them, which were huge successes. Everyone thought it was a great thing, and then the VAG was like, OK, I think we can take it from here. And they have run with it. I think it's gone through its ups and downs. But it has the trump card, right? It has the venue.

L: Did it create a young audience for them?

S: Absolutely. I would argue it's the single most important thing they did as an organization with regard to audience participation. They have improved their curatorial drastically since Kathleen took over, but it was that event that made them cool.

We learned a couple of things from that event. We learned that people want social activities with cultural significance. In London, every cultural event was social. Drinking is part of everything. It didn't matter if you went to the opera... because drinking is a significant thing... and it's fun. Here, there is a real separation between the cultural events like lectures, art openings. Things were not that fun, kind of, but not that fun. Then there are the fun things like bands and movies or Canucks games, which is fun, but you didn't walk away from it smarter. And I think what we did with Fuse, we gave people the ability of engaging in a social thing, where they might actually walk away from it and feel like culturally richer.

L: Did you guys want to do that?

S: Fuse gave us another thing. It gave us the confidence to talk to clients about anything. We were able to talk to clients about branding, which is eventually what we became, a branding company. We didn't set out for that, it just kind of happened. I think we're a more authentic branding company because we kind of backed into it.

Most branding companies are graphic design companies that are trying to expand their services, or marketing companies that are trying to be taken more seriously. But we just started providing services and suddenly people were like, "what do you do"? And we were like, "I don't know, we do this and this and this. What do you need?" I guess that's... branding. But it was never our goal.

L: So how long until PK happened?



Concept Condo, Photo credit: Adam Blasberg

S: It was a couple years until Pecha Kucha happened. We did the home show and then we did this funny project we called Concept Condo at a competitor's design show, which has now become the IDS West. We designed this little bronze-clad, free-standing condo unit that a guy lived in it for five days. 325 square feet. Trying to show that a small space can be nice if it's designed properly.

That project lead to EPIC, our first big comprehensive brand project. The Globe Foundation had seen some of our work in the trade show world and they said "OK, we want to launch a consumer show about sustainability, but we're experts in B-to-B organization.

We have no idea what that means."



So this was like 2005. Sustainability was just starting to be a mainstream issue, at least the relationship between sustainability and consumer products. It was also the time that sustainability was hitting its peek in this kind of cliché symbolism.

Working closely with the folks at the Globe Foundation, we created this brand called EPIC, which stands for Ethical Progressive Intelligence Consumers.



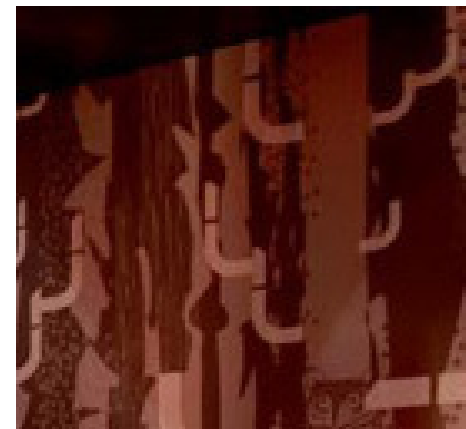
RWDV exhibition by Cause+Effect. Photo credit: Adam Blasberg

It was all about not being the typical green thing. No frogs or raindrops, no green anywhere. The language was all intellectual. It was challenging, honest, intellectual language and it wasn't about guilt. It was about desire. The tagline was: 'You can buy a better future'.

It was pretty much saying that if you buy, buy well, but educated. Educate yourself and buy properly. That show is still alive today, six years on. I feel like we were ahead of the curve. Now that the curve is catching up, they need to move that brand forward again.

For us, it was that project that strengthened our ability. We had named something, we marketed it, we designed the interior of the show and we curated speakers. We were able to say that we can be an experience for a company from start to finish.

From there, it just grew. Another job and another job, we got more staff, more



S: What I have become is more of a choreographer or a curator or orchestrator.



designers, different people, continued to be picky about the things we do, and suddenly seven years went by (laughs).

L: Can we talk about this whole idea of how design can actually define the future of Vancouver, has the potential to push the city in a certain direction?

S: Yeah, I'd love to. At the end of the day, I am a designer. This is how I define myself.

L: The question is, what do you design?

An art director. I actually rarely sit down at my desk and design these days. I now direct other designers. At Cause+Effect, It's more about designing systems for the city, whether that means we design something small, like an exhibition, or something larger, like a company's brand.

For example, recently we branded Modo, the car co-op. Great organization, bad brand. Therefore little influence, and for an organization that has strong values and advocacy, this was unfortunate. Now they have a strong brand, good organization, more influence. Bigger change.

L: Since the rebranding, have they seen business go up?

S: Yup. 40 per cent.

L: Wow. Congratulations that's amazing.

S: It is amazing, but for them it's because they're a great group. They just had a dysfunctional brand.

JENNY: You probably talked with Trevor Boddy about Vancouverism, but do you think that design itself changes – not just bring out what is already there – but changes the way something is?

S: It's funny. Vancouverism, I'll talk about that first.

Vancouverism was a term that was used in a specific context around a travelling exhibition that we designed and Trevor Boddy curated. It is a term used in the context of urban design focused on the down-town peninsula (of Vancouver). It is basically describing a planning model of high density, thin towers, balanced by substantial amenities and outdoor space. The quality of those amenity services could be argued, but people would say they've been provided.

For me, Vancouverism represents the dichotomy that is currently Vancouver. The city faces constant criticism from its citizens and in almost the same breath, they remind you that we live in the best place in the world. I think that's a funny thing. Our big question at C+A is, "How do you turn a livable city into a loveable city?"

When you look at other metrics like Monocle Magazine, for example, they have Vancouver slipping from eighth to tenth to 15th to 20th... wherever it is now. They measure more unique cultural, influential things - like can I get a hot corned beef sandwich at 4 in the morning? Do people know the name Koolhaas on the streets, and when is the last time a project of significant architectural quality was built. They measure these things in terms of cultural potency.

I feel like what I read between the lines of what Monocle wants... is that they want Vancouver to act its age. Like: 'Look, if you want to pretend to be a global city, talk about being a global city, then you have got to deliver things that can happen in Vancouver and nowhere else. I feel like we do not do a very good job of creating those kinds of experiences, and we do an even worse job of celebrating the ones that we do have.

J: Is Vancouverism a romantic concept?

S: I think it could be. But currently, no, I think not. The skeptic in me thinks if I were a politician or real estate developer, Vancouver would be a pretty good model. You develop thousands and thousands of square feet of real estate. You increase property values exponentially, stretching the gap between rich and poor. And still people think you live in best place on earth. That would be a pretty good model to me.

There is still a concern from the outside that there is a lack of a soul, however. I think Vancouver has a soul, but it has done an absolutely terrible job at communicating that soul to the world.

And it's because Vancouver is owned by the tourism industry. The entire brand of Vancouver is all about tourism, all about beauty and leisure, looking outwards, all about the mountains, the water, walk along the seawall. But you almost never see a picture of the city itself, of things that happen in the city.

And what we have shown through Pecha Kucha is that the city has that incredible wealth of interesting things that happen in the city, and people that most people don't know about them.

If you were to travel, and people talk about Vancouver, they say: 'Oh, Vancouver is so beautiful. I love Whistler, the mountains and the water etc..' Nobody says: 'Oh, I love your music venues and the small art galleries and oh my god the food scene, the restaurants'. Nobody talks like that.

Like if you go to Copenhagen or Amsterdam or Berlin... when you go to Berlin, you'll tell me stories about a weird little bar where you go downstairs then you go upstairs again, and back upstairs, it only opens at 4 a.m.... That's the kind of experience you never had anywhere else and you'll never have it again.

If Vancouver had the ability to share those moments with more people, we would have a better understanding of our own brand, and ourselves.

L: You mean have more of those moments or share them?

S: I think we have them. I just think we don't share them.

L: So if we had the opportunity...

S: If we had the opportunity to share those things internally, meaning, the media might write about them. Radio might talk about them. Then we would learn about ourselves and we would grow our appreciation of the city. And when we go travel, we would go talk about those things. Someone says, what's so great about Vancouver, then you actually have something to say, rather than falling back on the propaganda that tourism industry gave you, which is that it's so beautiful, you can ski and play golf on the same day.

So when I look at the analysis of Vancouver by Monocle magazine, they've taken a very surface view of the city and haven't seen much. There's nothing that's making the really unique parts of our city obvious.

So I feel with Pecha Kucha, it's starting to open that channel. If I packaged our 20 shows and gave you 250 speakers and audiences of almost 20,000 people, there's so much content there. The city could literally publish a book and send it out to the world and the world would go, wow, Vancouver is so interesting. But they don't do that. That's where we're missing opportunities.

J: What are adjectives you would use to describe culture in Vancouver?

S: I think the most interesting people in Vancouver have an understanding of what a live/work balance is, they've understood how both those pieces of them can make each other interesting and rewarding.

For example, I met a woman the other day who said, "I don't like Vancouver. I'm more of a Toronto person." She said, "I went surfing in Tofino and it was awesome, but I'm more like Toronto, go-go-go."

I thought, that's interesting. You've yet to figure out how to do those two things at the same time, which is what I think the successful Vancouverite knows how to do. It doesn't mean everyone needs to golf or hike or surf, but you develop an ability to know that work doesn't go from 8 in the morning to 8 at night. You understand that life is more balanced and you somehow are a more interesting person because of it. You are more open to change, you are not so... directed.

Which is where innovation comes from. I think that's why we are a very successful entrepreneurial city. Entrepreneurism tends to be more creative and more free...

