



BALLS IN THE AIR. Guy Berubé says he "oozes" creativity. Whatever you call it, the results of this gay man's talent can be seen all over downtown.

Creative orgasm

Guy Berubé grabs life and lives fully in his creativity

GHETTO DESIGN

Carl Stewart

GUY BERUBÉ HAS A lot of balls in the air. He is an art dealer (he was late for our first meeting because he was closing the sale of a Warhol print of Marilyn Monroe), a collector

(his apartment is a fabulous curiosity shop including a Diane Arbus and a real stuffed baboon), a curator (he programs exhibitions for Helsinki Lounge and Bar 56 in Ottawa and for spaces in London and Paris), a photographer (in July he will show his own photographs at Bar 56), a party planner (remember Holy Fuck, the party at Helsinki with the big cock contest?

— that was his idea) and he is one of the most sought-after interior designers in Ottawa.

Berubé describes his eclectic style and approach to design as ghetto.

"It's from the gut, by instinct, self-taught, without the benefit of academic training," explains Berubé. "I compare it to naive art, the need to do without knowledge or understanding. A simple urge to be part of something more."

It was this simple urge that led this native of Northern Quebec from Ottawa to Europe to San

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Creative orgasm

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Francisco and, finally, New York.

"I was living in San Francisco and I lied about being able to use a 16mm camera to get a job as cameraman on a film crew heading to New York," he chuckles.

Berubé was quickly found out. But instead of being fired, he was offered the job of assistant cameraman. The film wrapped in two weeks. He stayed for 10 years.

In New York, in need of work, and willing to do anything "if it paid and I could be around art," the enterprising Berubé photographed himself in his underwear and distributed flyers offering himself up as a bartender because, as he contends, "everybody needs a bartender."

Soon he was getting bartending gigs at private parties and gallery openings and the occasional odd job.

that would change his life. And like most life-altering introductions, it had a very rocky start.

"We hated each other. He called me white trash. I called him a tired old leather queen," says Berubé, describing their first meeting. "I worked for him for four years. He taught me about collecting, auctions, bidding; he ended up being a grandfather, a mentor, a Svengali."

During this time he had been making regular trips to Ottawa to visit his family, and it was on one of these visits in 2000 that his mother was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. Within 48 hours he had moved back to Ottawa to, as he jokes, "party with my mom while she can still remember it."

He continues to party with his mom but now it's a different kind of party. When his mother's illness progressed to the point where she was beginning to lose her ability to

for his restaurant, Zibibbo.

"Behind every cool straight guy is a really cool gay guy," says Meliambro.

And this really cool gay guy created a really cool space combining ultra-modern lighting with a sumptuous wall made of blocks of walnut, an intimate booth and a wall that at first glance appears to be small sheets of bronze but is actually sheets of sushi paper applied like gold leaf.

Since then, Berubé has been designing private residences and commercial spaces all over Ottawa, including Bar 56 in the Byward Market, Flowers Talk on Wellington Street and Il Negozio Nicastro, a popular restaurant and grocery in Westboro.

For Il Negozio Nicastro, Berubé has transformed the first floor of a non-descript office building into a space that is a food-lover's wet dream: at once an Italian grocery and a smart, sophisticated eatery where you could easily imagine the Sex And The City girls sipping cosmopolitans and cruising the hot waiters.

And while you may come for the waiters, you'll stay for the great food and ingenious décor. Working closely with carpenter Matthew Claydon, Berubé has created a space that really must be experienced to be appreciated. As you enter, you come face to face with a nine-by-12-foot wall best described as a sort of rustic marquetry — fallen branches and trees cut to three-inch lengths and attached perpendicular to the floor. The back wall of the bar is constructed of stacked scrap wood and floating overhead are cool white acrylic clouds by the Bakery Group.

What's next for Berubé?

He is currently in negotiations to curate art for spaces in Bassel and Barcelona. He is designing a line of Eames-inspired furniture made from trees being cut as part of a forestry management project in Northern Quebec.

And he is in love. What effect will this have on his work?

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Perhaps oddest among them was his work for an elderly gentleman for whom Berubé would pick up chicken cutlets every Thursday and, wearing only white briefs, dust the gentleman's apartment as he looked on. When the dusting was finished, Berubé cooked the chicken, got paid and left.

It was on one of these Thursdays that the gentleman asked Berubé if he would be willing to help a friend, an antiques collector who needed to be taken to the doctor once a week. Berubé agreed and was introduced to the collector. It was an introduction

to speak and communicate, Berubé needed to find something that would allow him to engage with her.

"I had an artist friend, Juan Carlos Noria, make a drawing of a sun for her. It was on her wall and one day in frustration I suggested we colour it. She loved it and I thought, 'Jackpot!' I asked Juan Carlos to make a colouring book for her and now once a week my mom and me sit together and colour."

Berubé quickly re-established himself in Ottawa and his first design job came when his friend Luigi Meliambro needed a designer

GUY BERUBE.

www3.sympatico.ca/guyroshima