

## HOGTOWN HUBRIS

Surely some mistake:  
Toronto, gasp, fails to  
make list of top-10 cities

As if Toronto didn't already have a complex about its global reputation, it didn't make a prominent travel magazine's list of top 10 cities in the current edition of *Travel + Leisure* includes rankings of the world's best cities. Quebec City, Victoria and Montreal placed sixth through ninth, respectively. New York City topped the list. Santa Fe, New Mexico and Chicago were also on the list. Florence was voted best city on the planet. The results were gathered by *Travel + Leisure* subscribers between Jan. 15 and March 21 of this year.



AMY ROSEN FOR NATIONAL POST

Ian Jarvis left Toronto for Hamilton more than two years ago: "You need two to three jobs to make a living in Toronto."

Toronto artists are finding a cheap and cheerful alternative to the megacity in our steelmaking neighbour just along the QEW

# Hamming it up

BY AMY ROSEN

**T**he *New York Times* ran a piece last year about how all the young New York artists were packing up their paint brushes and decamping for Philadelphia, which is close and cheap, and, has Philly Cheesesteaks. I joked with my editor: "Hey, maybe the same thing's happening with Toronto and Hamilton."

We laughed. Oh how we laughed. Imagine my surprise when I found it to be true.

"I'm a former Torontonian and I moved here two and a half years ago," says Ian Jarvis, artist and community programmer for Hamilton Artists Inc., an artist run spot that supports contemporary visual arts.

Mr. Jarvis tells me he was part of the whole Toronto arts scene — still is — "but it's really hard to be an artist in Toronto now," he laments. "You need two to three jobs to make a living so there's no time for art, and no room for art storage."

Artists are being priced out and pushed out of work lofts and studios as the buildings morph into cafes and condos. "So we decided to move to Hamilton, where we bought a four bedroom 100-year old Victorian house with a basement rental."

His mortgage? \$276 a month. Actually, make that \$138, because he splits it with his partner. "As a result," explains Mr. Jarvis, "I only need to work three days a week, which leaves four days for creating art."

Accompanying this infusion of artists is a rebirth of the Art Gallery of Hamilton, which re-opened 15 months ago after an extensive renovation. In the first 12 months since reopening, it had 176,771 visitors, more than double the previous 12-month record: 74,000 in 2001.

It is a good time to be an artist in Hamilton, says the gallery's communications manager, Steve Denyes.

"We have a lot of artists in Hamilton because they're being priced out of Toronto," says Mr. Denyes. "Many have settled in James Street North, which is an interesting area because it has lots of great history that shows off Hamilton's multicultural side."

It's an area that has yet to be gentrified. Which means cheap housing. A working class area with character to spare. And no Starbucks yet.

In other words, prime territory for emerging artists.

Gary Herron, president of the Realtors Association of Hamilton-Burlington, tells me the real estate market has had "pretty steady growth" over the past few years in Hamilton.

West Mountain, for example is a traditional older neighbourhood with houses built in the 1950s and 1960s, that range from \$225,000-\$280,000. Comparing these to likewise homes in likeminded areas of Toronto, and you'd be looking at \$450,000 and up. There have been aver-

## WEB SITES

- **The Art Gallery of Hamilton:** [artgalleryofhamilton.com](http://artgalleryofhamilton.com)
- **Tourism Hamilton:** [tourismhamilton.com](http://tourismhamilton.com) (artist tour maps, info on Art Crawls and the Art Bus which tours you around further afield to other arty areas.)
- **Hamilton Artists Inc.:** [hamiltonartistsinc.on.ca](http://hamiltonartistsinc.on.ca)
- **Arts Hamilton:** [artshamilton.ca](http://artshamilton.ca)
- **Mixed Media:** [mixedmediahamilton.com](http://mixedmediahamilton.com) (Hamilton T-shirts can be bought here)
- **The Factory:** [hamiltonmediaarts.org](http://hamiltonmediaarts.org)
- **The Imperial Cotton Co.:** [imperialcottoncentre.com](http://imperialcottoncentre.com)
- **The Print Studio:** [theprintstudio.ca](http://theprintstudio.ca)
- **Downtown Arts Centre:** [dacHamilton.com](http://dacHamilton.com)
- **Sky Dragon Community Development Co-operative:** [skydragon.org](http://skydragon.org)

age price increases of 8% to 9% a year, says Mr. Herron, and 15% in some areas. "There is still affordable housing in Hamilton under the \$200,000 mark."

In up-and-coming James Street North, you can buy a home for between \$70,000 to \$100,000. Homes similar to this in Toronto would cost triple that.

Mr. Jarvis takes me on a walkabout of James Street North. Where James meets King Street is the city centre. You head north towards the water (opposite of Toronto, weird), and moments later, you enter Hamilton's Soho. Within a five-minute walk, you'll hit a handful of galleries, an artist's supply shop, a print studio and a couple of co-ops for visual and film arts.

"The nice thing about Hamilton," says Mr. Jarvis, "is it's an urban downtown core. I can walk to the farmer's market, the lake, see movies, or go up a mountain. Everything's close." And cheap. He says his living expenses, from coffee to groceries, are roughly 40% of what he was spending in T.O.

We chat with Douglas Drake, a creative writer, who just moved here from New Jersey to be with his girlfriend, who attends McMaster. He's fresh out of univer-



AMY ROSEN FOR NATIONAL POST

Silkscreen shirts for sale at Mixed Media capture the artistic energy of Toronto's more affordable neighbour.

sity himself.

"In a city like Hamilton, there's a good base for getting your work out there," says Mr. Drake.

"It's smaller, more manageable. You can really get your arms around it."

He does program writing for the Inc., where he is also a gallery assistant. In addition, he has a studio in the Imperial Cotton Centre for the Arts, for which he pays a share of \$100 a month. There, he says, he has all the space he needs.

The centre is a new huge, renovated former factory that has studio spaces rented by almost 50 artists.

As we walk and stop, I note a cultural mix of martini bars and Portuguese coffee shops. There's sushi and Indian. Flower shops and billiards.

We meet Katherine Zarull, a co-founder of the Print Studio, which is two years old, and is a stomping ground for artists interested in everything from contemporary etching to digital print-making. "It's a real triad of art we have here," she explains. "Art, education and community."

They've had international artists giving lectures and workshops, while everyone's welcome to come and print for a small fee. It's a place for learning and sharing. A bright open space, where artists aren't working away in angst-filled dark back rooms.

"And the energy on the street is amazing," says Ms. Zarull. "There's this teaming; a sense of community. And you don't get that in Toronto."

Dave Devries-Kuruc opened his lovely arts supplies store, Mixed Media, with his wife 10 months ago. He says that they knew what was going on down here and they loved the history of the street and the happening arts scene. "People know it's an experience when they come down this street," he says.

Kind of like what Queen Street was about 20 years ago, when it was cool. Not fake cool. The shop has a gallery on the back wall, all the supplies you could want, cool silkscreen Hamilton Ts, plus a nice selection of magazines, including his own Zine, called *H* magazine, which is all about Hamilton (kind of like Toronto's *Spacing*).

"I meet someone moving here from Toronto every couple of weeks," says Mr. Devries-Kuruc. "I think Hamilton's going to be the next big city to live and work."

But instead of industrial workers, this time around it will be creative workers.

"People come from Toronto and say 'there's no room for this to happen in Toronto anymore,'" says Meaghan McGregor, a recent transplant from Australia, who is an arts administrator at The Factory: Hamilton Media Arts Centre, an enormous film arts hub that opened in the spring.

So far, her months in Hamilton have been good to her. "There's a lovely energy, and you have more of a chance of having your voice heard," says Ms. McGregor. "It's fertile and affordable."

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