



Art by day and party by night

Brothers hit great idea with Sugar and Sugar gallery and event venue.

JANNETTE EDMONDS SPECIAL TO THE JEWISH BULLETIN

The Sugar brothers have a good thing going – an art gallery by day and a place to party by night. Tucked away on the periphery of Gas-town, in a seemingly less-than-desirable location, is their newest venture – the Sugar and Sugar gallery. Leaving the grime and grit of the street behind, one steps into a two-tiered visual masterpiece of light, space and color, making this a high-end gallery that doubles as a venue for weddings, corporate parties, openings, book launches or whatever the customer wants.

Jason, 36, and Damon, 35, are only 13 months apart, both single and, with no other siblings, they are tight. Coming from different career backgrounds, they have melded their separate talents to run what looks like a sure business bet. Damon is the artistic one. He curates and hangs all their shows, which change every month or so. His background at Emily Carr and his eye for design have served him well. Jason is the operations man and, coming from a background of software design, runs the business end of things.

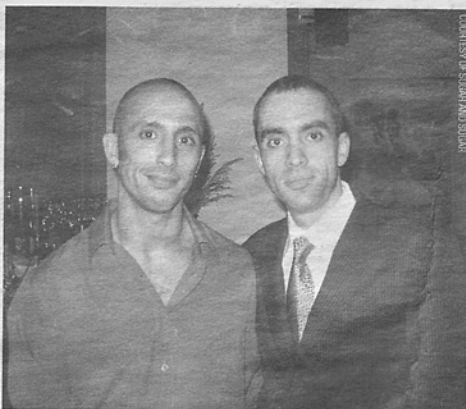
The brothers say they are fortunate not to have to rely for survival on the selling of art, as most galleries do. Their spacious, two-level, 4,500-square-foot space with a full bar upstairs and down and a full commercial kitchen brings in enough rental revenue.

"If the art sells, great," said Damon, "but basically if I like it, I hang it." The pair plan to focus more on the art end of things as soon as they get some time in their busy schedules.

"I feel like we are going 24-7," laughed Jason. "We have the potential to become one of the most successful galleries in Vancouver," he continued. "We have the space and so can hang up-and-coming artists where the more established galleries may not be able to. We can have art for art's sake. It's a win-win situation for us, for culture and for the community."

The Sugars, who are Jewish, moved here in 1989 from Toronto and admit that they are "really good at hosting parties." So that is what they do. They have many contacts within several communities and it all started in 1998 when Damon opened an after-hours place on West Pender.

"It was packed every night," he said. "It was very successful." They had a wide spectrum of people from the corporate world to the film industry, movie stars



Jason, left, and Damon Sugar enjoy their latest business venture, the Sugar and Sugar gallery.

and recording artists. But after two years, they were burned out and looking for something they could do during the day.

Then came the next venture, Sugar and Sugar Studio, which also functioned as an art gallery with cocktail parties booked in the evening. Problems getting the proper licensing eventually closed that business.

"We can have art for art's sake. It's a win-win situation for us, for culture and for the community."

The idea for the Sugar and Sugar gallery started when Damon walked by the property at 99 Powell St.

"The sign in the window said licensed for pub or restaurant," he said. Excited, he viewed the place, which had been vacant for a couple of years, and was stunned by the view from the main floor balcony that looked down to the basement level.

"When I saw all the space on the lower level as well, I knew this place had immense potential," said Damon. Jason got involved and together they worked to raise the more than \$600,000 needed to totally gut the place and renovate it into its current

light and airy space with circular bars, top-notch sound system, baby grand piano and cozy couches and sitting areas spread throughout its roomy dimensions. The brothers opened the gallery in April of last year.

The ever-changing art exhibits are constantly transforming the place. Artists get good exposure and party-goers always have new art to admire.

"The place is continually alive and vibrant. It's a great situation," said Jason. "People love having a party in a dynamic place."

They hope to have events booked every weekend. A big corporation had their New Year's event there and Canadian Friends of the Hebrew University had a recent bash there as well.

Damon is always seeking to better their marketing plan. For now, the marketing is done through media, word-of-mouth and their Web site, sugarand-sugar.com.

"We reach many demographics, so our strategies are varied," he said. "We recently had a booth at the wedding fair. We have a lot of wedding receptions here and we can rent just the venue or arrange everything from food to flowers to entertainment."

Their current exhibit features four artists: Gustavo Rodriguez, Philip Martin, Heather McAlpine and Jewish community member Pnina Granirer, who initiated and organized the highly successful Artists in our Midst Open Studios event involving more than 70 local artists. □