

# A rebellious, colourful and quirky space on Davenport Road

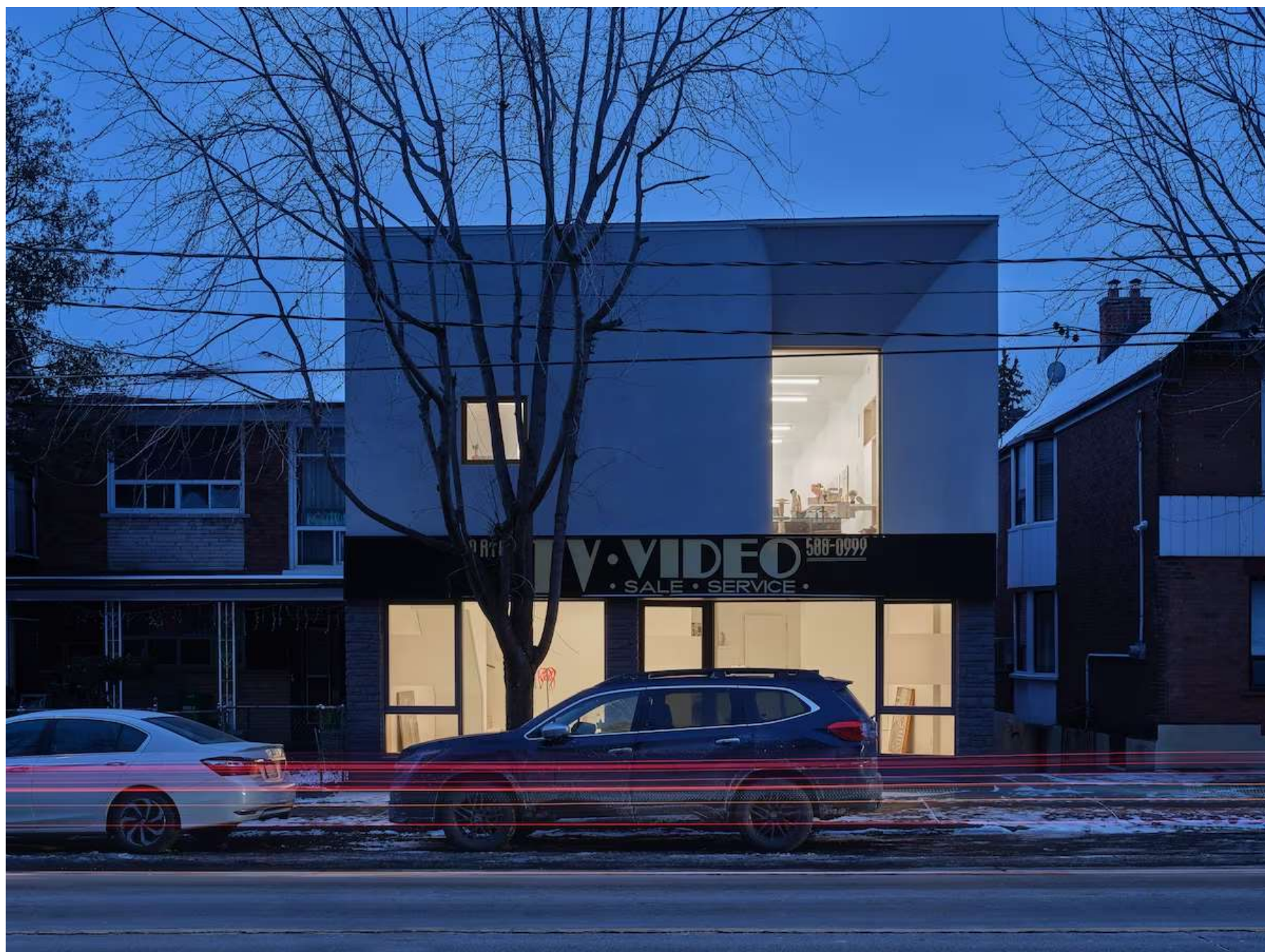


DAVE LEBLANC >

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The newly minted TV Video, a gallery with an unusual, perhaps even rebellious, *modus operandi* at 1265 Davenport Rd.

RILEY SNELLING/RILEY SNELLING PHOTOGRAPHY

Davenport Road is a rebel. Rather than sticking to the rigid grid that John Graves Simcoe imposed upon the rough land that would become the City of York, then Toronto, it doggedly follows the path of the old shoreline of the glacial Lake Iroquois.

Davenport, especially the portion between Spadina Road and Dufferin Street is rebellious in other ways: it's part high street and part residential; the north side features, at points, raised homes with tall staircases (they're higher up the shoreline) from a hodgepodge of eras – 1960s small apartment houses cheek-by-jowl with Edwardian bay-n-gable semis – and the businesses, which pepper both sides of the street, are quirky. There's Faema for shiny espresso machines, coin laundries, the “guy in a store that fixes leather,” cozy restaurants and cluttered variety stores. And now, there are galleries.

While art galleries have existed on the Yorkville-adjacent part of Davenport for more than six decades, in 2020 the Cardinal Gallery opened near Dovercourt Road at No. 1231. And today, about a block west comes the newly minted TV Video, a gallery with an unusual, perhaps even rebellious, *modus operandi*.

“I don't want to be a traditional curator where I'm making group shows, choosing things that fit together. I'm not interested in that,” says Leif Low-Ber, proud owner of TV Video, at 1265 Davenport Rd., for less than three years.

“So then, if an artist comes into this space, they pretty much will control how the space works,” adds Tim Mitanidis, the architect at Creative Union Network who, with partner Claudia Bader, helped Mr. Low-Beer transform the building, which, no surprise, had been a television repair shop named Orion TV Video Sale Service for decades.

Mr. Low-Beer nods in agreement. “There’ll be some kind of formal open hours ... [but] it’ll be up to the individual to bring [people in].”

For the curious passerby engaging in hand-cupping and window-peeking in the next month or so, what they will likely see on the old store floor – now strikingly white and pristine – are the works of Mr. Low-Beer’s parents (dad is a painter and mom a sculptor) or Mr. Low-Beer’s own work, laid out as a sort of test of the space. Or, if the sliding wall panels are open, they might spy Mr. Low-Beer brewing a pot of coffee in the tidy new kitchen.

“I’m still trying to figure out exactly how that works with how I’m using the space and how someone else would use it,” he says.

What the curious won’t see, however, is the massive “box” on the second floor, where the former resident of New York and Berlin will create his own paintings and sculpture. What had been, originally, a tucked back, two-storey house with a one-storey store grafted onto the front is now a full two-storey commercial building. And thanks to the work of Creative Union Network – who removed old streetcar tracks used as load support in some places – the second storey is now a completely open, completely white canvas, literally, for Mr. Low-Beer’s bizarre and beautiful perspective installations.

To explain: When Mr. Low-Beer first told Mr. Mitanidis of his programmatic requirements, he showed him a large photograph. Or maybe it was an illustration? Or collage? All that was certain was that it was a white field with a bunch of colourful, whimsical objects placed onto it. In reality, each object was a three-dimensional sculpture, in a large room covered in white cloth. Some of the sculpture was at the back of the room while other objects were mid-field or quite close to the camera. Using a certain lens and the right lighting, Mr. Low-Beer could ‘crush’ everything to look flat.

“You have to make them less perfect, in a way, so that people can figure it out,” Mr. Low-Beer says of the sculptures, which often combine beach-washed chunks of brick with painted metal or wood. “This space was in Berlin, it was Max Schmeling’s [the boxer] old practice space.”

Essentially, Creative Union Network was tasked with giving Mr. Low-Beer a ready-made space for such photographs, and they delivered. The only interruption in the all-white scheme is at the north end of the long room, where there is handsome, warm millwork in the form of shelves, cabinets, and a worktable. There is also a washroom. And because this is a space designed specifically to make and photograph art, the architects designed an industrial-style, saw-tooth roof. The three rows of skylights point north so direct sun is never an issue, and south and west facing windows have internal shutters for when it’s photography-time. A curve in the ceiling drywall and in the millwork ensures the space doesn’t feel too rigid.

“When you experience it from the inside, it becomes this almost more volumetric roof, and then it also does well in terms of how it refracts the light that does come in, and distributes it a little more evenly,” says Mr. Mitanidis. “The amount of light that comes in here, even on an overcast day like today, it’s surprising.”

In Toronto’s red hot market, it wasn’t easy finding a building large enough to do all of these things; that Mr. Low-Beer had been out of the city for two decades only added to the shock: “I wasn’t fully cognizant of the fact that every square inch was going to be priced out as a condo; I thought you could get an old garage or some place on a highway that was undesirable.”

While that might have been available in Rexdale or Scarborough, Mr. Low-Beer didn’t want to drive for 45 minutes to an hour. Luckily, with Mr. Mitanidis helping with the search, the old TV Video store, a 20-minute walk from his home (he has a wife and children) was secured. And that’s good: quirky, rule-breaking spaces that make downtown neighbourhoods exciting and colourful will never be provided by the corporate world.

“We’re invested now,” finishes Mr. Low-Beer with a laugh.