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Weekend, February 16-19, 2018

VANCOUVERING



FRESH PERSPECTIVES AND COMMENTARY for your weekend

Craft jobs becoming hip and cool

URBAN SCRAWL A BOOM IN BUTCHERING, COBBLING AND BARBERING



Christopher Cheung
For Metro | Vancouver

Every three weeks, a full animal from North Vancouver's Blue Goose Cattle Company arrives at Sebastian Cortez's artisan butcher shop.

That's the way he likes it. "From the nose to the tail," said Cortez. "Certified organic beef."

Cortez was once a chef in Toronto, but the frenzy of late night and weekend work drove him away from the profession.

Cortez wanted to try something else but still work with food. He decided to help out a friend who worked at a farm with meat-packing.

"It was very intimate," he said. "When I worked as a chef, I don't think I cleaned any pieces of meat. The executive chef would take all the protein and I'd just end up watching."

Cortez was immediately drawn to the craft of butchering. Ten years ago, he opened Sebastian & Co. Fine Meats in West Vancouver. Aside from offering high-quality goods, Cortez is all

about special requests (you can choose how long to dry age a steak) and personal service.

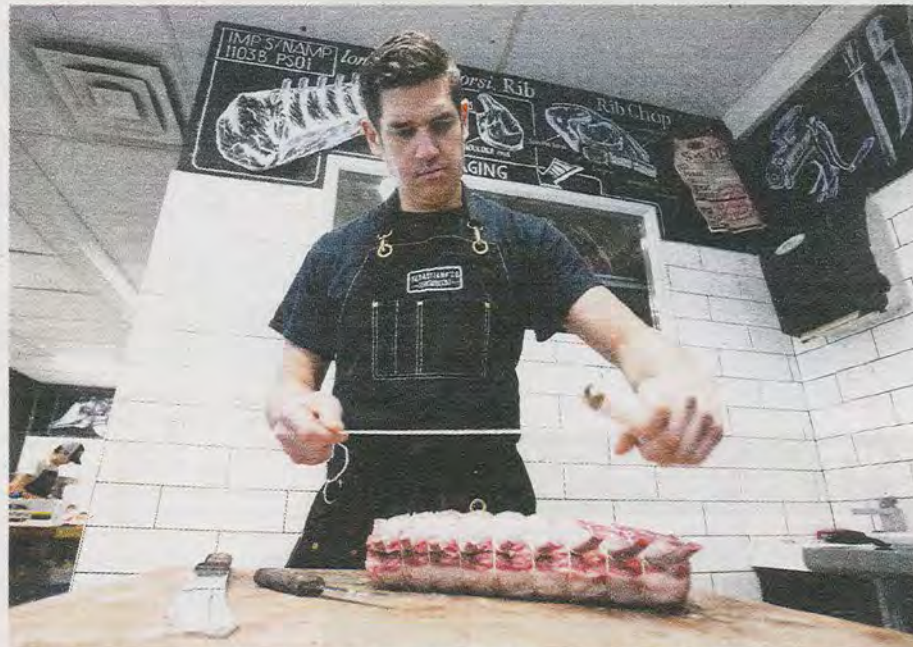
"At the supermarket if you want to ask someone about a product, they might have to get their manager," he said.

Cortez is part of a new urban economy. Forget the buzz about tech and cities for a moment: a number of common, low-status manual-labour jobs are having a renaissance. Not only is there renewed interest, these jobs are becoming hip and cool.

Sociologist Richard Ocejo of the City University of New York wrote *Masters of Craft*, published last year, on this phenomenon. Ocejo studied four trades — specialized bartending, distilling, barbering and butchering — and why many young people, men in particular, are choosing to pursue them as careers.

"People want to go back to something more solid," said director Martin Constable of Vancouver's London School of Hairdressing.

The school's Old School Barbering Program, launched in 2009, is their



Sebastian Cortez, drawn to the craft of butchering, opened Sebastian & Co. Fine Meats in West Vancouver ten years ago. JENNIFER GAUTHIER/FOR METRO

most successful program.

"People want to do something that requires their brain, but without mechanical assistance.

"They want to have something they can hold in their

hands and create."

Campbell's musings are in line with Ocejo's findings.

But these workers possess more than just the technical aspects of their trade; they also possess the cultural

knowledge that elevates their job to a special craft. For example, there are bartenders who use late-19th century methods to mix drinks.

That performative aspect

of these jobs is part of their appeal. Unlike other manual workers like electricians or plumbers, these workers have a public stage and audience and can be given special recognition by their peers, clients and the media.

"Once I became a butcher, I made a lot of buddies in the food industry and got more recognition and respect," said Cortez. When he worked in a kitchen, "trying to talk to big chefs was pretty hard. It's a different game."

Getting craft products or services isn't cheap. But well-educated young people with disposable incomes in particular have a taste for unique, distinguished consumption experiences. As they move into cities, all things artisan, craft and heritage are on the rise.

It might be easy to poke fun of companies that desperately slap the word "craft" onto products to get attention or how many men now have identical beards trimmed from high-end barbers, but at the heart of this renaissance are people like Cortez who love their work and love to share it.



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