

Stong House

A century before York University was conceived, the small red farm house on the corner of present-day Keele and Steeles Avenue, stood alone in a small clearing in the bush.

Six generations of the Stong family were born in that house. They came originally from Germany, first to Holland, then to the States and finally to Toronto.

Fifteen years ago the house and land were sold to the Ontario government, later to become property of York University.

Today Stong House houses art studios and workshops.

Its design is to become a meeting place for people interested in exploring the creative arts, for people interested in communication.



ATTIC STUDIO: WAGON WHEEL, LOG TABLE AND BONE



Stories by Anne C. Wright
Photos by Scott McMaster



Pat O'Connor

There's about eight or nine of them in the group. They're all first year students and they feel they have something to say. They feel they have little talent and so they get together every now and then at Stong House and talk about their hangups and about what they think is right and about what they think is wrong. They discuss things like the war and love and pollution and schools and then somebody writes a rough script and gives out parts and then they put their feelings into action — mime — dramatic representation — action without words.

When Pat O'Connor first saw Stong House last summer, he thought it was a co-op.

Today, through a "fantastically lucky break" he actually lives there.

Pat, a grad student in English, and Bruce Katz, a sociology grad from California, share a large comfortable flat on the second floor. It's fully furnished, includes a small separate kitchen, and — here it comes — is rent-free. "It's larger and far more comfortable than residence", says Pat, "plus we get all the residence services — clean linen every week, brooms, light bulbs, even toilet paper — great!"

Their part of the bargain? Light janitorial services, brushing the stairs, and so forth.

So far, says Pat, it's been all advantages. You're surrounded by the arts and interesting people are always dropping in, to look and to talk. No more "pinching pennies" either like in our undergraduate days in residence.

Actually Pat and Bruce had intended on living in Winters Residence this year. They applied, but found they had left it too late — no more room. In their search for an apartment they passed Stong House, thought it to be a student co-op, and left a note requesting information. Ronald Bloore found the note and recommended them to enquire at Physical Plant. The University had intended on leaving the flat vacant, but it didn't take long to convince them that they needed resident 'janitors'. The arrangements were worked out and everybody was happy — everybody except for the conscientious secretary in Winters who'd finally managed to get them accommodation in residence — "After all, you've paid your deposit". Ironically enough, they hadn't.

As for next year... "It's too early to say," says Pat, "It all depends if we go on for our P.H.D.

Bets are a lot of people will be awaiting their decision.



Ron Bloore artist

Ronald Bloore, York's claim to fame in the art world, leaned back in his chair and pondered the ceiling.

"Let's see... how long have I been at York? ... two years maybe... or three..." He rummages through the books and papers on his desk but fails to find what he's looking for. "You'll really have to research that information," He smiles. "You see I never worry about the past, only the present and future."

A lecturer in York's fine arts department and in the modern art course Humanities 273, Bloore is already an established Canadian artist. His works have been exhibited all over Canada, in galleries from Vancouver to Charlottetown.

Self-taught, Bloore says he has painted "vaguely" all his life, and "intensively" for the past 10 or 11 years. Last year he was commissioned to do the 11½ by 12 foot mural at the Montreal Airport; also the 12 by 12 foot mural for the Confederation Centre in Charlottetown.

His most recent exhibition opened last weekend at Toronto's Jerrold Morris Gallery, 15 Prince



Arthur Street. The works in this exhibition range in size from miniatures to murals; all are examples of his famed, so-called 'white on white' technique. Painting with multitude hues is cheating, maintains Bloore. It simplifies life. Thus he paints using only white paint so as to explore the tremendous range of shades in this one color. In some paintings he uses up to 15 different shades of white. After all, as the detergent ads tell us, white can be "whiter than white".

With degrees in the history of art and in Chinese archaeology Bloore has also taught at the University of Toronto, Washington University in Missouri, and at the University of Saskatchewan.

Today he paints solely in his private studios on the ground floor in Stong House — the house which he describes as "the one piece of worthwhile architecture on campus."

Stong House — "An Extra Curricular Studio Workshop in which Areas of the Fine Arts can be Explored" read the mauve posters scattered around campus, boasting four thugs and a nude posed strategically (especially the nude) in a cluttered truck-driver type cafe.

Stong House — an open studio, available for anyone who wants to use it, says Tim Whiten, a tall, congenial American sculptor, lecturer in Humanities 175, and appointed director (by Student Services) of Stong House activities.

A newcomer to York, he feels Stong House holds fantastic potential as a place for discussion, a place for showing films, and, above all, as a place for experimenting with art — whether it be painting, sculpture (the most popular to date), ceramics, drawing, wood carving, or whatever.

"My main concern", he stresses, "is not so much to give art lessons, though I will help anyone specifically requesting them, but rather to provide the milieu and necessary facilities for any students wishing to try their hand at art."

No previous training or developed talent are necessary, only a curiosity in experimenting with art. The basic materials — canvas, clay and drawing paper — are all supplied free of charge.

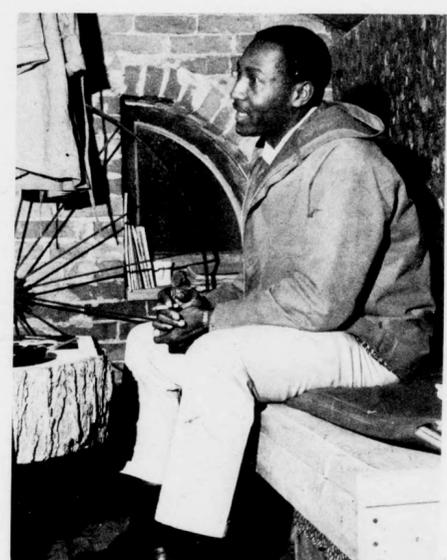
And, says Whiten, other materials, such as plaster and wood cuts, can easily be obtained if and when the need arises.

The initial response was "real fine" he says with a musical American drawl, especially for the films currently being shown free of charge on Tuesday evenings from 6-9 p.m. and sometimes on Fridays from 2-5 p.m.

The development of a mime troupe has been especially encouraging, as has been A.B.C.'s occasional use of the house for their work with high school students.

"But the response is not what it should be", he says. "We want people here. This house has such character — in many ways it's a refreshing change from the modern architecture that typifies York. This house should be full of all kinds of people — people who want to express themselves through creating and painting, and people who just want to talk, and discuss, and sit around and drink coffee."

A sculptor himself, Tim Whiten is meanwhile busy setting up his studio in the long low attic of the house. But the second floor and much of the first still remain empty — large empty rooms with uneven floors, roughly painted in white from floors to ceilings — large empty rooms waiting to be used but empty save for the occasional straight-backed chair or unused vat of clay.



Tim Whiten sculptor