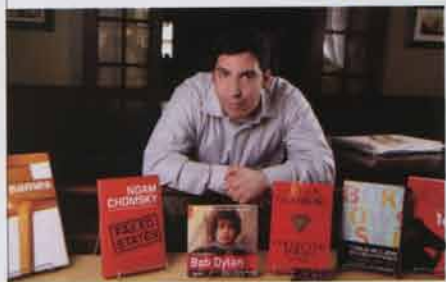


Tremont's new Visible Voice Books is keeping the independent spirit alive with handpicked titles, late weekend hours and a space that owner Dave Ferrante hopes will become a gathering spot.



Read Alert

He has always been the guy with great taste in books.

When friends come to his house, they often end up in the basement, listening to music and digging into his stash of mind-expanding titles. So, when Dave Ferrante peeked through the windows of an empty Tremont neighborhood storefront, he didn't see a bar or a restaurant, not even a coffee shop. He saw a bookstore.

The Cleveland native and his staff of three fellow bibliophiles opened Visible Voice Books in that space earlier this year. The previous owner had gutted the place to open a bar that would join the neighborhood's mix of funky watering holes, art galleries and innovative restaurants. But he changed his mind and sold it to Ferrante, who finished the woodwork and created a tranquil, intellectual atmosphere in the roomy space.

"I want to give someone the experience of what it used to be like to go into a bookstore, being able to hang out and find something and be turned on to something," he says. "That happens less and less today."

With a selection that runs from mainstream favorites to the eclectic, avant-garde and just plain hard to find, the store's inventory is a mix of new and used titles. Ferrante also has the stock of the now-closed independent bookstore 84 Charing Cross, boosting his inventory of used titles by 30,000 books.

What you'll find on the shelves is a handpicked mix of selections based on the

passions of the people who work there. Ferrante developed a comprehensive selection of works by Beat writers, while his staff deepened sections such as pulp fiction and travel. They all worked together to create a huge collection of books about music.

"My niche is the fact that I'm going to give you the really good writers and give you a lot of them, to pick from an in-depth catalog," Ferrante says.

And there is already a community feeling growing at Visible Voice. An upstairs meeting room is available for free. Folks from the neighborhood stop by and mingle with people popping in on their way to a bar or couples out for the night (it's open until 10 p.m. on Fridays and Saturdays). This is what Ferrante envisioned. He's full of other long-term ideas, too: author readings, a patio, acoustic music sets, and, of course, expanding the breadth of the books his store carries.

"I want to be part of the whole ecosystem down here," Ferrante says. "I want to add to the environment, I'd like to help build on it." — TW

Visible Voice Books, 1023 Kenilworth Ave., Cleveland. (216) 961-0084

Shelf Life

Fiction, cooking, history — Visible Voice has all the usual sections (and their contents are *always* full of surprises). But we were snared by the unconventional categories, even more jam-packed with unforeseen options. Here are a few of our favorites:

Disinfo

The vibe: From Howard Zinn to Noam Chomsky, alternative viewpoints that deviate from the mainstream

The find: "Trust Us, We're Experts! How Industry Manipulates Science and Gambles with Your Future" by Sheldon Rampton and John Stauber, \$14.95

Beats, Counterculture and Iconoclasts

The vibe: From Charles Bukowski to Tom Wolfe, extensive works from tons of authors, rather than the best-known titles from the most popular writers

The find: "The Outlaw Bible of American Literature" edited by Neil Ortenberg and Barney Rosset, \$24.95

American Culture

The vibe: From Chuck Klosterman to Babette Hines, tons of used and new books examining different phases of our collective life

The find: "Presidential Doodles, Two Centuries of Scribbles, Scratches, Squiggles and Scrawls from the Oval Office" text by David Greenberg, \$24.95

Other Indies:

Blue Heron Book Store, 1539 Main St., Peninsula, www.blueheronbookstore.com

Fireside Book Shop, 29 N. Franklin St., Chagrin Falls, www.firesidebookshop.com

Learned Owl, 204 N. Main St., Hudson, www.learnedowl.com

Loganberry Books, 13015 Larchmere Blvd. W., Shaker Heights, www.loganberrybooks.com

Mac's Backs, 1820 Coventry Road, Cleveland Heights, www.macsbacks.com