



Street level in Toronto

City_people



PHOTO: JAIME HOGGE/THE GRID

EVERGREEN BRICK WORKS

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PEOPLE

Richard Florida: Toronto enthusiast

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Ten years ago, Richard Florida's *The Rise of the Creative Class* turned its author into an unlikely academic rock star. Since then, the urban guru has become a Toronto resident, the head of U of T's Martin Prosperity Institute, and an international lightning rod. He recently released a 10th-anniversary edition of the aforementioned tome. We caught up with Florida at one of his favourite Hogtown destinations, the Brick Works.

What is it that you like about this place?

My wife and I live not far from here, on the ravine. For us, the Brick Works has become almost a second backyard, and we always bring out-of-town guests to visit. It speaks to me as sort of the soul of Toronto and really exemplifies the intersection of natural urbanism and built urbanism.

For readers who aren't familiar with your concept of the creative class, can you lay it out?

About 10 years ago, I set out to understand what was changing in our economy and our society. I realized that physical labour was no longer our most important form of currency. What had replaced it wasn't information and wasn't technology: It was creativity. I was able to define the creative class not just as artists and traditional creative types, but also doctors, scientists, bankers. I wanted to look at how the growing dominance of this class was shaping the evolution of our cities, and I developed a methodology using the three Ts—technology, talent, and tolerance, basically determining that cities with an abundance of these things were thriving.

Your new release is called *The Rise of the Creative Class, Revisited*. What has changed since the book first came out?

In the new edition I was able to add two chapters, which allowed me to expand on the rise of inequality and also the great divide between the classes, which has obviously widened significantly in the last 10 years, whether it's the separation between red and blue in the States, or Ford voters vs. non-Ford voters in Toronto.

You're obviously aware of your own lightning-rod status. What criticism irritates you the most?

What bothers me is how people on the left will waste all of this time and energy arguing over what I can only see as the narcissism of small differences. It's not that I don't welcome the debate, but with the combination of Rob Ford and the Tea Party, we have a unified right that is intent on taking out bike lanes, rolling back gay rights, and looking at the arts agenda as something that needs to be thwarted. We can't afford all of this infighting.

I think the expression is arguing about the curtains when the house is on fire.

You're a very good writer.

Not to dredge up the past, but I'm sure you saw those "Can we please stop talking about Richard Florida" buttons that circulated a few years ago.

Yes. I would love to get my hands on one. I agree! As an academic, my natural inclination is to move away from the spotlight, but that's the problem—ideas get personalized, and because I'm a good speaker and have a larger-than-life personality, I guess people got stuck on me. For a while I wrote less about Toronto, but then we got this mayor, who I would argue is the worst mayor in

the modern history of cities. Given my platform, I want to be on record as a voice saying we can do better.

Got any dream candidates for the 2014 race?

I would like to see a younger person and someone who is not a usual suspect. Somebody who looks and acts like Jian Ghomeshi.

Someone who looks and acts like Jian, or Jian?

I don't think Jian would ever want to do it. You'd have to ask him.

In one of your recent studies of creativity, Toronto ranked a pitiful number seven in Canada. Were you surprised?

If we just took inner-city Toronto, it would rank a lot higher, obviously. The old me would have recommended that we de-amalgamate so that the city can reach its full potential, but then where are we leaving our suburbs? Now I think we have to heal ourselves as a whole and find a new way forward.

Presumably, you could live just about anywhere in the world, so why here?

We came to Toronto because there was a phenomenal opportunity at the Rotman School to build the Prosperity Institute. It's also close to my wife's family, which is important to us, and then, of course, it is a really great city and it's only becoming better.

You mention your wife, Rana. I've heard people call her your secret weapon.

She absolutely is. She manages every aspect of both my career and our social life, so all I have to do is think and write. I am so grateful. She didn't have to do this. She had a successful career in marketing when we met. Recently, she started blogging for *The Huffington Post*, which I am very proud of.

You two are quite the power couple.

I think it's called assortative mating, the theory that increasingly well-educated people marry people like themselves with complementary skills. Rana and I do almost everything together, which I think is another key. The more things you do together, the closer you become.

Sounds like *Rise of the Creative Relationship* is practically in the bag.

Rana could definitely write that. Not me.

LIGHTNING ROUND!

Batman or Spider-man?

Spider-man.

Wake-up time?

7:30 a.m.

Most overrated intellect?

Pass.

Most underrated intellect?

Too many to name.

Favourite city?

New York.

City you're dying to visit?

São Paulo.

Desert island album?

Electric Ladyland, The Jimi Hendrix Experience.

Celebrity lookalike?

Somebody more attractive than me.