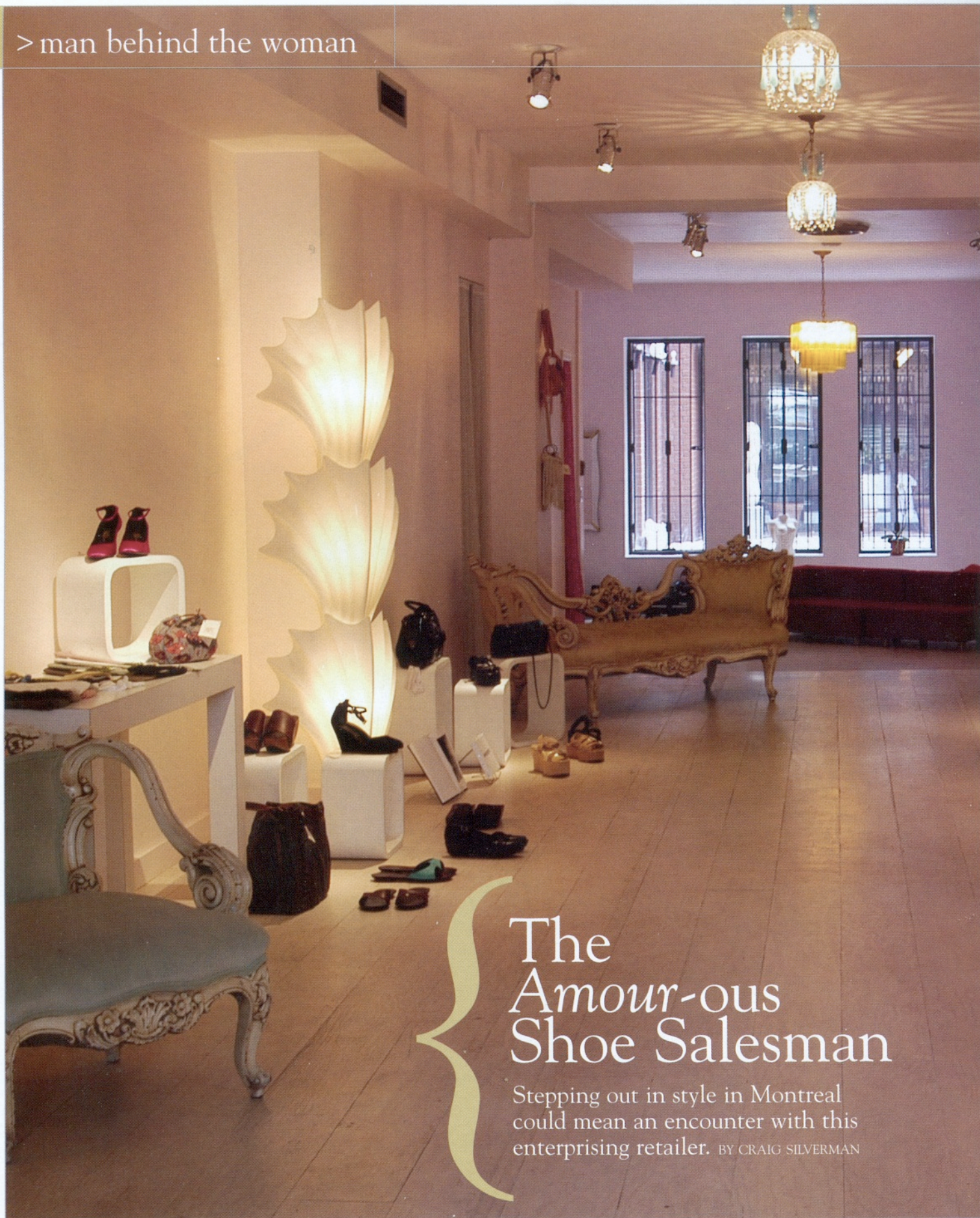


> man behind the woman



The *Amour-ous* Shoe Salesman

Stepping out in style in Montreal could mean an encounter with this enterprising retailer. BY CRAIG SILVERMAN

Meeting with Scott Vineberg presents many options. You could have dinner at the restaurant he founded, gather in the office that also housed his yoga studio, meet at the avant garde women's shoe store he runs with his wife, or in their serene house at the edge of Jeanne Mance Park in Montreal. (One place you will not find him is in a photo shoot for *Scarlett*. We could not pin him down!)

The choices betray the calling card of a serial entrepreneur.

"I'm narrowing it down considerably," laughs Vineberg when asked to list off his current projects. "There is an alternative television network at the top of the list. WeOwnIt, a personal information co-operative, is still percolating, and I've got a fascination with the raw food movement, but there's nothing concrete with that yet."

And there's Mona, mistress to both Vineberg and wife Lisa Bush.

After batting around the idea of going into business together for over a decade, the couple pooled their skills with another partner and opened Mona Moore, one of Canada's most decadent women's shoe stores. (Mona Moore the person doesn't exist. The name becomes *mon amour* when spoken, a clever homage to the place that shoes hold in women's hearts.)

"We are trying to get designers and styles that are not represented," says Bush, as she and her husband sit around a large wooden dining table in their home. "There was only one major store for women who spend money on shoes, and it was much more predictable and conventional."

Bush, a social worker by trade who previously worked as a fashion writer for *The Globe and Mail*, took on design and buying duties for the store along with partner Anna Maria Varriano, who had extensive connections with designers in Europe.

Vineberg, a lithe 38-year-old who can be seen skateboarding around town, then applied his entrepreneurial and retail knowledge to the balance sheets.

"I had the business experience as an entrepreneur, as retailer — and I love shoes," says Vineberg. "Lisa designed the store and is the taste behind it."

The store opened in November, 2002, and was an instant hit with the well-heeled women of Montreal. It has now begun to generate international buzz. US-based shopping bible *Lucky* magazine recently named it one of the best shoe stores in North America, thanks to its selection of European shoes and accessories, and Bush's sensuous, boudoir-like interior design.

Bush and Vineberg married in 1989 and have two daughters aged 11 and 13. They met on an archaeological dig in Sicily in 1984 while both were still in university.

"It took all my courage to come up and kiss her," recalls Vineberg.

Two decades later, they have managed to maintain their relationship as partners in both life and business.

"We were very worried about working together," says Bush, 37. "We talked about the pitfalls and why it might not be a good idea, but it has been fine."

"Of course, all of the pitfalls came true at first," says Vineberg.

"They've been present, but we have managed to deal with them," adds Bush.

They say the key to making the relationship work is keeping their duties separate at the store, and not bringing the business into their home life.

"The other dimension to working together is being parents together," says Vineberg. "You can leave a business but you can't run away from your life partner or co-parent."

In business, Vineberg puts a premium on social responsibility.

"Ideally, it's about integrating social impact with a for-profit model so it's sustainable," he says. "Whatever the enterprise is, you ensure there is market viability along with accomplishing some good."



His mixture of sound business practices and social change go back to his days at St. John's College in Maryland, where he majored in philosophy and math.

"Even then I had a tag phrase for my approach to living: pragmatic idealism. And it is still there," he says.

"Though there's not much idealism in Mona Moore," says Bush.

"Sure there is — we're making rich people feel better so they'll be nicer," laughs Vineberg. He then plucks a piece of seaweed from the table, takes a bite, and turns serious.

"It's not clear for that [business] yet, but once it is sustainable there are a hundred different directions you can go to make it good. It's not hard to set a good example." ■