

Something Old, Something New

Familiar faces and places celebrate fresh perspectives

BY ANNE CRUMP RAY

When Sam the Butcher closed its doors in the wake of last year's devastating floods, an era ended. The butcher shop was an institution that had served local residents at its location on Ross Common for 35 years.

Now, Sam the Butcher is back—but without a T-bone in sight. In October, investment fund manager Marcel Houtzager reopened the space as Sam the Butcher Contemporary Art, preserving the name and spirit of its predecessor while providing a new kind of local flavor.

The gallery project is a labor of love for Houtzager, who hails from an art-oriented family (he and his daughter both paint, and his mother and sister serve on the boards of their local art museums), and it grew partially out of a zoning ordinance. Wanting to both use the space as an office and comply with its classification for retail, he devised a plan

to share the storefront with the public, promote local artists and create an inspiring environment for his firm's headquarters at the same time.

Under the new arrangement, Houtzager aims to present quarterly solo exhibitions that feature the work of local artists on the walls and in the windows of the former butcher shop, which underwent extensive renovations to repair damage from floodwaters and condensation left by the meat coolers, as well as to create a more open floor plan. While the gallery hours may fluctuate a bit depending on his travel schedule, Houtzager says the art will always be available for people to see, thanks to large windows, informative signage and round-the-clock lighting.

The gallery's debut exhibition showcases the work of Marin-based painter Georgette Osserman, who creates large, colorful ab-

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stractions and landscapes. "We want to focus on the best artists we can find," says Houtzager, who discovered Osserman's work during Marin Open Studios. Since the gallery is supported by his investment firm, it doesn't depend on art sales for its survival, which means he can keep the works up for extended runs, promote the shows prominently and fete the artists with grand opening bashes—not to mention give them bigger cuts of any sales. "It's a win-win-win situation," he says, adding that the community is the third beneficiary, gaining a venue for local art in the heart of Ross.

Osserman's work will be on view there throughout November and December. Call to check the gallery's hours before stopping by; appointments are welcome.

Sam the Butcher Contemporary Art, 19 Ross Common, Ross, 415.902.1019.