

Artist brews new cafe look

Second Cup aims to reinvent the image of its coffee shops

BY GIL KEZWER
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

Second Cup president Alton McEwen isn't Cosimo Medici; muralist Ian Leventhal isn't Michelangelo; and Toronto ain't Florence.

But their businessman-artist relationship is to the 1990s what the Florentine ruler's patronage was in the Renaissance.

In January, the Toronto-based coffee shop franchise chain contracted Leventhal to reinvent its image in the wacky, exuberant mural style in which he has decorated stores and restaurants across Canada since his first commission, the Pickle Barrel, in 1978.

The irrepressible Leventhal, 42, began the corporate makeover at the Second Cup's Queen St. West and Palmerston branch, formerly a corner variety store.

Given *carte blanche*, an overdose of caffeine and a budget of \$23,000, his objective was to create an avant-garde cafe interior to lure away non-conventional clients from the neighboring Future Bakery, the current local haunt of the Queen Street glitterati.

The month-long job, which he and his two assistants completed in April, has been a great success, both artistically and commercially, McEwen and Leventhal agree.

"This launched their new look. We call it the experiment that worked," the artist giggles. In mid-July he completed a week-long job painting the heritage building's exterior.

Leventhal calls the resulting visual landmark "funky," saying it draws on "all the greatest hits of architecture."

The interior, executed in his



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HIGH-CAMP COFFEE: Artist Ian Leventhal works on mural at the Queen St. W. Second Cup. The chain hopes funky look will lure non-conventional clients.