

## Settlers of Whyte Ave

The Hexagon Café offers board games and Calgary-based coffee

To the less-discerning passer-by, the name and logo of The Hexagon Café could simply be a crisply designed logo, one that manages to pop out along the walls-to-wall stores of Whyte Ave. But astute board gamers will know better: the Café's namesake shape is two linked *Settlers of Catan* pieces, a sly little flag tossed up to represent the café's true intentions—offering a social environment in which to play board games.

"I've always loved board games," co-owner Randy Wong begins, sitting beside a demoed-up *Catan* board. "I'd always want to go to a café myself, bring my own board games and play it there, because it's a better environment than the kitchen table. And then I started thinking about this idea, and a few months later, we found out about this board-game café in Toronto, Snakes & Lattes. And I thought, 'Oh, this might be viable.'"

Co-owners Wong and Kelli Ho both graduated school with degrees in Architectural design, but had the misfortune of doing so back in 2008, the start of the recession. After months of a fruitless job search, the two went off to teach English in Korea, where they found a love of board games—*Catan* in particular—acting as a social unifier between them and their fellow teachers from all over the world.

"As an English instructor, you work late hours," he recalls. "And after work we ended up going to someone's house for some tea, and saw a box of *Settlers of Catan*, and said, oh, let's play this. It ended up being a huge social event between us and the teachers from all over the world: South Africa, Australia, the UK. It could be a huge social event for a bunch of people from a bunch of dif-



ferent countries. The thing that was common was *Settlers of Catan*."

**When they came back**, they began working on a business plan: the two first-time business owners skipped out on taking a bank loan, instead choosing bank-rolling the whole endeavour themselves. And now, arriving slightly

10123 Whyte Avenue  
**The Hexagon Café**  
 thehexcafe.com

ahead of its target University audience's classes, the Hex is open: for \$2.50 an hour, you can come in and play any of the 400 games spanning a significant shelving unit. The staff can recommend options and even instruct you on how to play, if you never have. (There's also Table Top Café, down on

57 Ave and 75 St, which opened last September, and offers another public board-game setting in town.)

There's coffee, too, from Fratello down in Calgary; Wong notes the brothers who run it were particularly generous in offering ideas and advice as they were progressing the Café.

"They've been helping us through the tire process of this, for two years," he says. "They've given us a lot of advice, and they didn't charge us a cent for those consultations. They were like, 'Our goal is to get you guys up and running to sell our coffee. If you sell tons of coffee, you're going to buy tons of coffee. We want you to



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be successful."

Wong and Ho are working on getting The Hex licensed, too, as soon as they

can. But for now, Wong hopes the appeal of public board-game play (and coffee) is enough to intrigue, and draw board gamers away from their kitchen tables into a more open, ac-

tive environment.

"I find board games may have had this stigma of it's something you do on a rainy day," he says. "But for me, when you play board games, sometimes it brings out that competitiveness that you wouldn't normally have. This whole new level of thought process."

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## WHYTE AVE GEM



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