



# ALLSTON OUTFITTER

by Rosie McCobb

When you walk into the creaky, wooden building that houses Hot Sugar in Allston, you immediately feel as if you have entered a place that George Orwell might have been describing as part of the counter-culture in 1984. There are no high-tech alarm systems blockading the threshold, there aren't a million trendy salespeople hovering around (fakely asking you if you need help while spying on you to make sure you're not taking anything) and minimalism certainly isn't a prevalent theme. In fact, the only thing about Hot Sugar that is minimal is the actual store space (probably no bigger than your living-room) and the number of staff members (one). While American consumer culture hasn't quite reached a point where absolutely nothing from the past is available for purchase or utilized in the stores themselves, we've all been to enough so-called "hip" stores to realize that anything even remotely unique either costs way too much, or simply doesn't exist. And true, human beings physically still *do* most of the work, but with mass-produced, generic items being sold by people who either don't know about what they're selling, or don't care (or both), going shopping for anything these days is enough to make a person yearn for the "mom and pop" places of old.

Suzie Bookbinder, owner, buyer, decorator and purveyor of goods at Hot Sugar, says she originally decided to open the store to provide "cheap, fun clothing that everyone could afford."

Not of the braggish variety, she initially fails to mention that unlike most entrepreneurs of the '90s, who have been a part of the system long enough to afford the means to start such a venture, she was only seventeen years old when the idea for

Hot Sugar was born. "I graduated high school in January of '91 (half a year early) and moved down to Boston from New Hampshire and lived in an apartment on Mission Hill, worked in a really crummy cafe downtown—and it was the most backbreaking, awful work—for like, seven months, and then voila! I opened the store."

Of course, the Hot Sugar as it now is—cozy, kitsch-filled parlor offering clothes, housewares, jewelry and fanzines—did not magically materialize overnight, but it didn't take years of putting up with other people's bullshit for Bookbinder to decide that perhaps she could put her ideas and interests realistically to work.

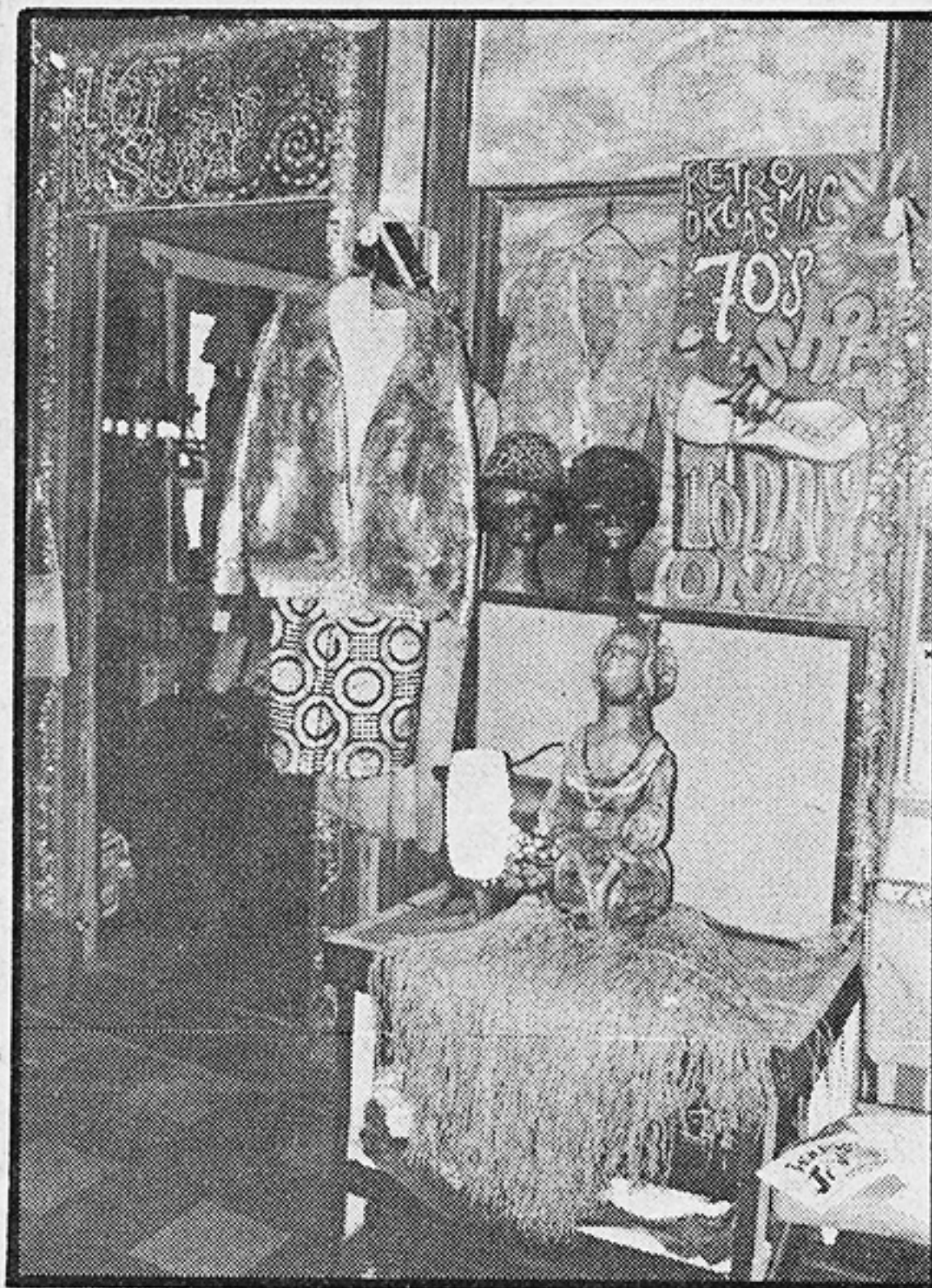
It may sound like the American dream, and perhaps it is, but not in the typical '90s fashion. "I'm not a trust fund kid, like, I didn't get any money from my parents, and in the beginning I was pretty, pretty poor," Bookbinder stresses. "I kept my job through the time in which I was setting up the store, and kind of camped out here for a month, and just really put everything I had into the store—really overextended myself. Like I'd read an ad for junk jewelry in the *Want Advertiser* and take an hour bus ride out to like,

Walpole, to get jewelry and come back with a trash-bag full."

"It's been a little over a year now and I think my prices are still the lowest in Boston," the nineteen yr. old Bookbinder says, changing from a fire engine red, chiffon dress into a more business-oriented outfit. "Everyone really seems to like the store, but I wish the foot traffic was a little bit better in here."

While we both agree that the stylish Allston Mall address might have much to do with the lack of strollers by (it's a cool place to go, but out of the way for some people who aren't Allston regulars),

photos by Lauren Glatzer



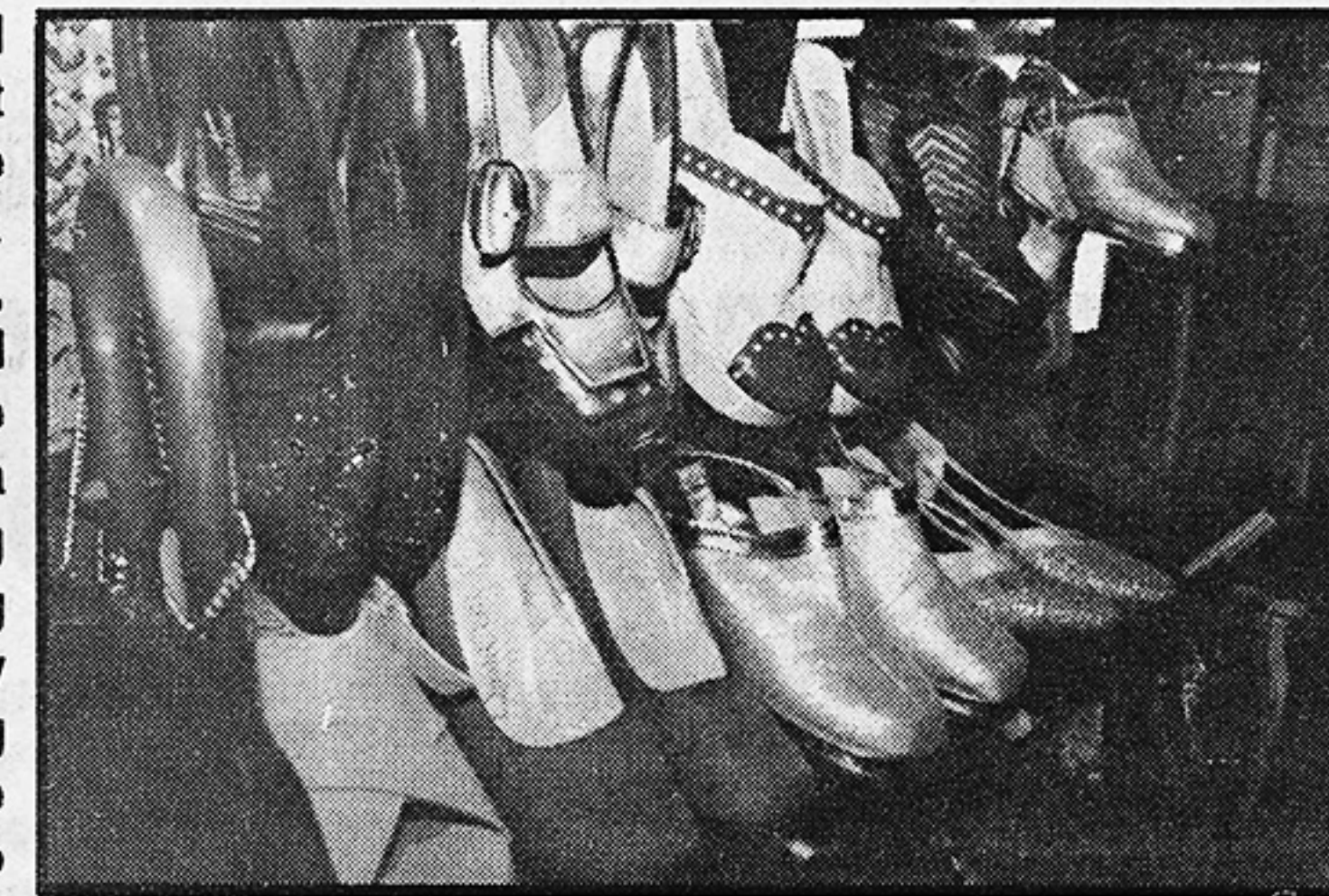
Bookbinder has decided that staying at the present location will probably fare better in the long run. "We've been here a year, and we're starting to build up a clientele, and the space is so cheap. Plus a lot of vintage clothing stores aren't even doing that well right now. I know other places are making like, nothing, and they've got much higher rents to cover, they're probably doing a lot more work than I am and I don't have to have someone sitting in the store."

On the money she has saved by being completely self-sufficient, Suzie Bookbinder has decided that since this gamble seems to be working, instead of being content with running the store and doing alterations and custom work on her sewing machine, she's getting ready to expand and capitalize on the achievement. "In this store, I'm trying to get people to consign things, and pretty soon the Hot Sugar line of clothing will be coming out. There'll be like, crazy go-go clothes, hot pants, leopard skin and fake fur. Then the Hot Sugar Factory is opening next week, it's right across the hall from here." Bookbinder explains.

"That's going to be fun cause we're going to stock records in there, and it's going to be my sewing room. So it's going to be custom clothing, alterations, and then you can get weird things in there like fabric—everything that there's not room for in Hot Sugar will be over there, along with records. It's just going to be a mish mash of everything."

As far as the music section of the new store, called G Force, goes Bookbinder has been working with friends Lloyd Stanley, Sean Coleman and Steve Dugan, who have organized all-ages shows at the Cambridge Baptist Church in Cambridge in conjunction with Tools of the Revolution in order to get a little capital set aside. "We booked Beat Happening, and we did a Noise show, and we just did a hardcore show. I'm setting up a show on the 18th and 19th of December, a Noise show of four or five bands," Bookbinder says, "any profit we've made off of the shows will all go into ordering records."

Eventually, Bookbinder hopes to expand into other retail areas, as well as attend Mass Art, but don't expect Hot Sugar to turn into the next hip chain



store. "The other day I wrote out these little notes, on pieces of scrap paper saying: Urban Outfitters is not alternative. The alternative is to shop at small, independent businesses," Bookbinder proclaims. "I mean, this is a recession, this should be my time; people can't afford to go to Urban Outfitters every weekend and plop down fifty dollars on a pair of jeans cause their other

pair is dirty. I have the feeling that fourteen dollars for a pair of really nice, used jeans in good condition is much better, or like—just wearing retro, '60s clothing is so much more fun."

So while it's still legal for small, non-conglomeration businesses like Hot Sugar to exist opening alongside our nationally run chains, their addresses are usually a little out of the way for the Newbury St. strolling crowd. To escape from the Thought police (especially at Urban Outfitters where just yesterday I was accused of stealing and practically given a body cavity search simply because the security sticker on a pair of pants I bought on sale two days before at the Cambridge store was making the alarm go off—and guess what, even after producing the sticker they still didn't believe me!) interested patrons can hop on the Green Line or the 57 Bus and check out Hot Sugar in

the Allston Mall, 107 Brighton Ave. in Allston.



## The Golden Blue Collar Poetry Moment

God bless the hammer,  
It's the greatest tool I've found.  
For when you have a hammer,  
You're construction bound.

by Tony Stiker