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## Stores gain national recognition

### Carmichael's and ear X-tacy honored

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Two fixtures of the Louisville cultural scene — which appear to be thriving despite the recession — have been singled out for national recognition.

In its new issue, GQ magazine selected ear X-tacy one of its "20 Favorite Record Stores," and Carmichael's Bookstore was voted Publishers Weekly's Bookseller of the Year.

"We had to prepare a package to send to the judges telling them about the store's marketing, customer service and community involvement, and we're very excited," said Carol Besse, who owns Carmichael's with her husband, Michael Boggs.

John Timmons, owner of ear X-tacy, was just as surprised to hear from GQ.

"How they picked us, I have no idea," he said. "I got a call from GQ and I'm like, 'Yeah, right, I'm Mr. Style and they're calling me for a cover shot.' First I thought it was somebody selling subscriptions, but it's always nice to get the store mentioned. We'll take it, that's for sure."

Both honors underscore the viability of locally owned independent enterprises, even while big chain outlets selling books and music are hit particularly hard by the tail-spinning economy.

Virgin Records is closing its New York City megastores. Borders, the struggling bookstore chain, is shuttering its Magnificent Mile location in Chicago.

And while file-sharing and digital music have cut new album sales in half since 2000 — from 785 million then to 428 million in 2008, according to Nielsen SoundScan — small stores like earX-tacy, at 1534 Bardstown Road, are holding their own as neighborhood hangouts where customers can listen to sounds on headphones and talk music with knowledgeable staff.

Timmons, whose store ranked ninth on GQ's list — ahead of Other Music in New York City, Turntable Lab in Hollywood, Reckless Records in Chicago and Honest Jon's in London — said the store has had to be creative to survive both the recession and the digital era.

"The last couple of years have been really rough, but there is always going to be a need — this is old school talking — for bookstores and record stores where people can gather and interact socially. I'm betting money on it," he said. "We are going to have a digital download store up and running, like April 1, on [www.earx-tacy.com](http://www.earx-tacy.com), with a component where people can go and sample tunes. And vinyl has made such a tremendous comeback — there's something about the physical product that draws people — and that's helped us survive."

A similar industry dynamic and neighborhood charm have accrued success to Carmichael's, which has two stores, 2720 Frankfort Ave. and 1295 Bardstown Road.

While *Bookselling This Week*, the American Booksellers Association magazine, reported disappointing holiday sales pretty much industrywide, some independent stores are doing better than average business.

Announcing its Bookseller of the Year, selected from 18 nominees nationwide by a panel of industry professionals, *Publishers Weekly* wrote, "Carmichael's has been in touch enough with its customers that over the past 10 years sales have doubled and profits have tripled."

Besse said, "We operate on such a shoestring, I think the economy just hasn't affected us as much directly. And also the kind of store that we are, the fact that we're small, we're personal, we know our customers, they're pretty addicted to reading and they've continued to come to us."

She credited some of their success to the growing appreciation for local business, and the American Booksellers Association has its own initiative, IndieBound, that promotes the virtues of patronizing independent stores.

"I think the success of the 'buy local' movement is really what contributed to our sales not declining this holiday season," she said. "I think people are starting to get that message that shopping at a locally owned business is a good thing for the community and is also ecologically responsible."

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