

## facing up to the clear cut future

by sid cooper

submitted photo: (front) rich jensen and matthew stadler



### Clear Cut Press, a new publishing company based in Astoria,

will release its first book, in a series of eight, in January. The Clear Cut Future is an anthology of poetry, prose, research and visual art from the Northwest and related areas.

Clear Cut is the brainchild of editor **Matthew Stadler** and publisher **Rich Jensen**. Stadler is a native of Seattle who has been splitting his time equally between Portland and Astoria for the past couple of years. With an extensive background in publishing, he is currently the Literary Editor of *Nest*, a full color, high-end quarterly of interiors based in Manhattan. He has also had four novels published (*Allan Stein*, *The Dissolution of Nicholas Dee*, *Landscape: Memory*, *The Sex Offender*); and been the recipient of various awards and fellowships. Clear Cut was born out of conversations between Stadler and Jensen over the last five years. Stadler realized, "All of the best work that I was reading was unpublished."

Jensen left Evergreen College in the early 1980's to pursue his interests in music. In 1991, he was appointed business manager at Subpop Records (of Nirvana fame), and in 1994 co-founded Up Records, which has released recordings by such great NW bands as Modest Mouse and Quasi. In August, he gave a lecture at the AVA Gallery as part of an event hosted by Clear Cut, promoting NW music and ideas. Jensen's subject that night was VbStoPe, the idea of a single community stretching from southern British Columbia down into the Willamette Valley (through: Vancouver, Bellingham, Seattle, Tacoma, Olympia, Portland and Eugene) and east/west from the Cascades to the ocean.

As I understand it, VbStoPe is a microcosm and I-5 is its spine (if microcosms can have spines). By recognizing the links that are facilitated by I-5, VbStoPe explores the shared experiences of the people who inhabit the area surrounding this border-defying piece of infrastructure. VbStoPe is not a concrete concept, nor is it a manifesto; it is an idea that has been launched as an experiment, sent out like a message in a bottle. Clear Cut is a tangible aspect of the VbStoPe phenomenon. The two seem linked by the idea that perhaps by examining our environment in different ways, we will begin to understand its future and our future within it.

The Clear Cut Future is split "about 50/50" between work from writers previously known to Stadler and those who answered a call for submissions. When I asked him about his criteria for publishable work, he said, "Without meaning to sound flip or reductive, the most important thing is great sentences." He went on to explain that he is not looking for what he calls transparent writing. Transportation of the reader into the imagination of the author is not top priority for him. He does not necessarily want to forget that there is a book in his hands. Stadler feels that effective writing "has to do with the author receding and allowing the language to be present on the page."

While Clear Cut will consider written work of any kind, some of the following qualities will help: Straightforward, surprising and musical language built from great sentences; fictions that seduce, speculations that convince, and rhetorics that define. Writing that concerns the global urban condition, particularly as it touches ground here in VbStoPe. Clear Cut is always looking for new writers; writers who may be put off because they don't see the likes of what they write reflected in mainstream publishing. A visit to the Clear Cut website will give a good indication of the diversity to be found in the anthology and beyond.

Authors with whom Clear Cut is working toward publication include (to name but a few): a paleo-botanist; a truck driving linguist; a Dutch photographer who spent five years on the road with the Beastie Boys; a medical temp; the author of *Loser: the Real Seattle Music Story*; a Zimbabwean ex-pat who is fascinated by police; an architect who writes for *The Oregonian*; a novelist who, according to reviews, "pushes the envelope way too far," and something called The Office of Soft Architecture.

The last one really caught my attention. "The Office" is a Vancouver BC poet who was frustrated by the restrictions of writing in first person, and the impersonality of he/she/it. When five years ago she began writing as "we," she logically concluded that she must be an office. The work of "The Office" is, "the advancement of a natural history of civic surface," and has included histories of scaffolding and color, and "site reports" from various cities. According to Stadler, "The form of these documents is clear and clean, but rather than sacrificing style to the needs of facts, she uses facts as fodder to fuel her lyrical engine."

The Office has three pieces in the anthology, which also contains a piece each by a guy who sells poems on the street for one dollar and someone who used to work for Enron. Stadler named Gertrude Stein and (true crime author) Anne Rule when I asked about great writing. It seems that at Clear Cut there is no fixed agenda -- any kind of excellence is accepted.

As well as distributing through local retailers and a distribution company, Clear Cut books will also be available by subscription. Subscribers will receive the anthology in January 2003, with seven more "well published, soft bound books" to follow over the next year to 18 months. The books will be printed on bamboo paper, which has a high opacity and can be printed in full color with great results. Subscribers will receive their books in advance of general release and will receive substantial discounts at Clear Cut readings and events. An eight-book subscription is \$65 for US and Canada.

Clear Cut will be touring for each release. In February, there will be an anthology release featuring two or three of the contributors, and in March (or April), Eugene poet Howard W. Robertson will come to Astoria to read for the release of his *Odes to Certain Interstates*. All Clear Cut events are all ages and feature live music. You can find out more about upcoming releases, submissions and subscriptions at [www.clearcutpress.com](http://www.clearcutpress.com).

It's time to face up to the Clear Cut future.