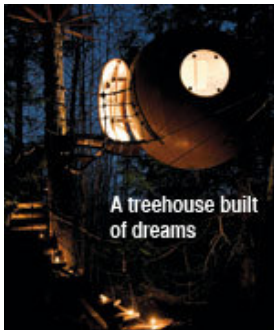




At home with mystery writer Anthony Bidulka

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Our Mission Statement



Private detective Russell Quant is the hero of the series. Like his creator, Quant is a charming gay man who was raised on a prairie farm but loves travelling the world. "Write what you know" is classic advice for novelists. Bidulka has taken it to heart, and what he doesn't know, he's happy to find out or make up.

The gracious bungalow he shares with his partner, Herb, is filled with paintings and tasteful furnishings. The palette is whites and greys with hits of colour, as in the narrow cherrywood mantel accenting the gas fireplace. Massive windows frame views of fenced fields, trees and sky. Yet in this calming space there is murder and mayhem, every day from 6 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. That's when the disciplined writer is at the computer in his lower-level office, gazing out at his garden, or maybe taking a break to stroll around the pool while pondering the exploits of his alter ego.

So far, he's packed Quant off to Paris to solve the case of the missing groom (Amuse Bouche, 2003); to New York to deal with a blackmailer (Flight of Aquavit, 2004); and onto a Mediterranean cruise ship, where he struggles to prevent the murder of a wealthy client (Tapas on the Ramblas, 2005). In Stain of the Berry (2006), Quant trails a predator from Saskatoon to Vancouver to the high Arctic. And in Sundowner



Ubuntu (2007), the detective tracks a wayward teen to South Africa.

The series, published by Insomniac Press, has been well received. Bidulka won the 2004 Lambda Literary Award for Best Gay Men's Mystery for Flight of Aquavit, and he's been a finalist in other competitions, including the Saskatchewan Book Awards. A Toronto film company has optioned the Quant books for possible development.

Russell Quant is a gregarious character and one who savours the good life. Fittingly, each title in the series contains a reference to food or drinks.

Bidulka claims his protagonist is "taller, younger, wittier and more adventurous than I am," but allows, "Little bits of me pop up in Russell. You always reveal parts of yourself [in writing] whether you intend to or not."

Another difference between the author and his creation is that Quant swims, and Bidulka does not. Of his fondness for water, Bidulka quips, "I took a cruise once and enjoyed that." Pointing to the shallow end of the lovely in-ground pool just outside his office door, he says, "That's my half."

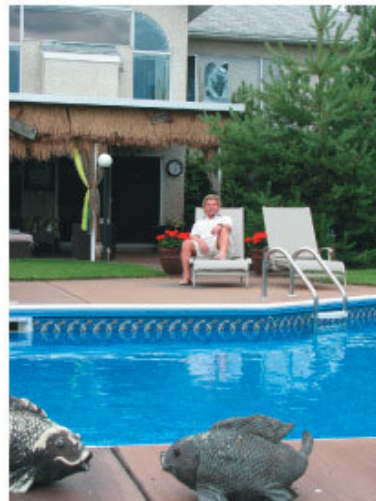
Quant, a former police officer, became a detective because he likes helping people. Far from fearless, he often second-guesses himself. His bumbling, apparently naïve approach is reminiscent of the techniques of the 1970s television detective, Columbo. "Russell's not perfect, and a lot of people can relate to that," says Bidulka.

"I wanted my hero to be someone new," he adds. Since Quant is a gay man of Ukrainian heritage, and a detective in a small Canadian city, "it's a wide-open field for me to mine. There are some unique story lines and perspectives that people haven't seen."

Bidulka has an international following, thanks to his novels, his blog on amazon.com, and his website: www.anthonbidulka.com. "People ask me where I live now, assuming I've moved to Toronto or Vancouver," he says. "But Saskatoon is such a great place to live. I love bringing this city and this province to people who have never heard of them."

In his writing, he combines actual sites and buildings in Saskatoon and district - from the Hotel Bessborough to Spadina Crescent, Calories restaurant and Pike Lake - with fictitious ones. He was pleased when a reader planning a visit to Saskatoon contacted him to ask for directions to Colourful Mary's, an imagined bistro frequently mentioned in the Russell Quant series.

Bidulka also enjoys doing research around the world. A carved wooden mask (left) in his living room is a souvenir of his visit to Johannesburg, South Africa, when he was gathering material for Sundowner Ubuntu. The mystery he's writing now is partly set in one of his favourite destinations, Hawaii.



Bidulka had several careers before he turned to creative writing. After high school, he left the family farm, near the village of Prud'homme, Saskatchewan, to attend university in Saskatoon. He supported himself by selling shoes, working as a waiter, and serving as a cook and chief bottle-washer at a uranium mine. To his Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Saskatchewan, he added degrees in education and commerce, the latter leading to a successful, 10-year career as a chartered accountant.

It was an aptitude test that pointed him to accounting, he says. "I like the black and white part of it. I'm a very organized person, and I like it when things add up."

As he neared 40, he was working 60 to 80 hours a week and meeting all his career goals, but yearning for a change.

"I've wanted to write since I was a kid," he says. "When I was financially and mentally prepared, I decided, 'Let's just give it a go.' I knew I had options. I like being successful, whether it's washing dishes or being a CA. I had a very supportive spouse and a boss who encouraged me."

The home Bidulka and his partner built, more than a decade ago, is situated on a natural rise and surrounded by 12 acres of rolling fields. A soaring drive-through portico makes for a grand entrance. A pair of concrete lions preside over the front porch.

The acreage is a mere 20-minute drive from downtown Saskatoon. It has proved to be the perfect spot for a home-based writing career. "Being in nature is one of my greatest joys," Bidulka says. "It's peaceful and inspiring for me."

Having been raised on a farm where big gardens were the norm, Bidulka says he likes "getting dirty and digging stuff up." However, about the time he began his writing career, he realized he was spending too much time weeding flowerbeds. Now, most of the plantings in the yard are low-maintenance trees and shrubs. "Mugo pines and Scotch pines grow out here like crazy. On the open prairie, you need trees, or you're going to be blown away."

Bidulka notes that his books contain numerous descriptions of weather. "I love weather and being outside," he says. "Out here, we love the silence, the peace and quiet. You're not wondering when the lawn mower is going to start up next door."

The 4,200-square-foot home, with a lower-level games room that opens onto a poolside cabana, is ideal for entertaining, even if it's a trifle too large for its occupants.

"We've both put on weight since we've lived here," Bidulka says with a grin. "We've decided we're like goldfish that have expanded to fit our bowl."

