

L.A. Life

ENTERTAINMENT

Gallery's founder wants small-screen shows to find a bigger audience, profits

Video maker hopes success comes EZ

By Diana Rico

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John Dorr has a dream. He wants independent video makers to be able to share in the money made from the tremendous new marketplace that has opened up from the sale and rental of home video cassettes.

Dorr, a video maker who founded and runs the 2-year-old EZTV Video Gallery, a West Hollywood screening and video production facility, has taken the first steps toward that difficult goal.

Starting tonight the weekly video programs that until now have been presented exclusively at EZTV will be presented simultaneously at two additional locations: SuperVideo, a production facility and video cassette sales-rental outfit in Santa Monica; and the Apollo, a small video soundstage facility in Hollywood.

His concept is nothing new: a chain of affiliated screening facilities that show programming emanating from one central source. The programs thus shown become familiar to audiences, and when they become available for consumer purchase on video cassette, there already will be people who are interested in buying them.

This is common practice with first-run movies. What is unusual — unique, in fact — is that he is doing this with independently produced videos.

"As far as I know, in the whole country no one has opened a series of commercial facilities, like movie theaters, in order to show videos," says Dorr, a quiet-spoken man who opened EZTV as an exhibition space for video works for which there was no commercial viewing outlet.

The second step in his master plan comes in February when EZTV will issue its first catalog of independently made videos, which will be available for sale to individuals and to video distributors via mail order.

Dorr has not tried distribution until now because there is no existing system for doing so for independently made videos. Mainstream films released in theaters gain a recognition factor among the

audience by extensive publicity and advertising campaigns, he says.

By the time these films end up for sale on cassettes, audience members already know about them and are likely to rent or buy what they think they'll like.

But independently made videos have no such recognition. Dorr hopes to create a release chain like the one that already exists for theatrical films, so that made-for-video movies will find a viable place in the home cassette sales and rental market.

"There's no reason why someone browsing through a cassette rental place is going to pick up something they've never heard of," he points out. "There's got to be that recognition factor. We're creating the recognition factor by screening here first."

The time is clearly ripe. According to a report in *Daily Variety*, the Electronic Industries Association — a major organization of consumer electronics hardware manufacturers — predicts that American households will contain 26 million video cassette recorders by the end of 1985. And the total sales for pre-recorded cassettes will be 33 million units, or 1.5 billion retail dollars — an increase of 50 percent over the estimated 1984 total.

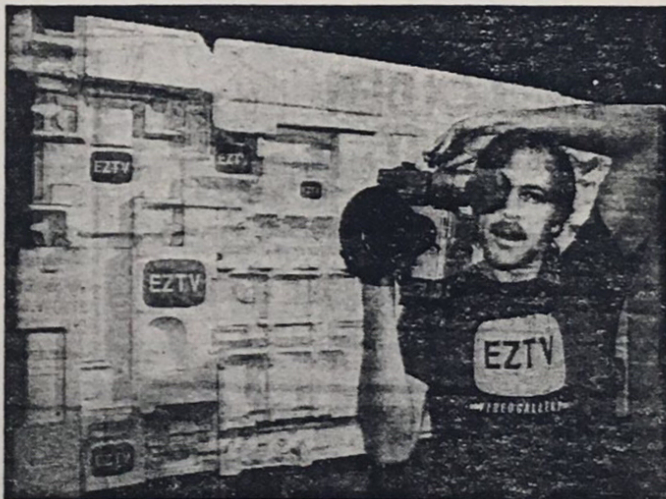
Translated, that means that there's a brave new market out there for anyone who wants to tap into it. Indeed, although most of what's available in video cassette rental and sales stores and catalogs is first-run movies, some made-for-video pieces are starting to be released without any theatrical exposure.

Dorr mentions a new documentary called "Yoko Ono: Then and Now," which will be the second show to be screened at its newly affiliated video facilities (the first is "What Happened to Kerouac?" a documentary about the Beat Generation poet produced and written by Lewis MacAdams and Malcolm Hart, and "Stories From Los Angeles," an evening of poetry readings taped live at the Club Lhasa by the Martin Eden Co. and EZTV and directed by Michael Blake).

"The Yoko Ono video came from Polygram Records and is being released by Media Home Entertainment, a big distribution company, in cassette," says



EZTV Video Gallery founder John Dorr shows how the work gets done with editor Michael J. Mascucci, above center, and client Jan Munroe.



Bob Halvorsen/Daily News

Dorr. "It was made for home cassette sale and rental. But there again, there's no problem with recognition factor, because anyone who is interested in Yoko Ono will want to see it."

EZTV's first catalog will feature such works as "Stories From Los Angeles"; an off-the-wall Hollywood-style feature called "Laughing Horse," also directed by Michael Blake; some of Dorr's own early feature films; and segments of "Hour 25," a science-fiction interview show produced by Mark Shepard. Dorr says publicity about EZTV's upcoming catalog has already generated calls from both individuals and distributors who are interested in the out-of-the-mainstream releases.

It's an ambitious gamble — nothing less than opening up a whole new

marketplace for a product that didn't even exist a decade ago. If it works, what does Dorr expect the situation to be in 10 years?

"In 10 years? If anything's going to happen, I'd like for it to happen in five years," he says, laughing. "In five years I would like for independents to have an ongoing, viable system so that when they make something it gets shown in video theaters around the country and then goes into general distribution, with their being able to share in revenues from sales and rentals in home cassettes.

"Frankly," he adds, "I'm torn between the reality of being a very small-time operation right now, just eeking to get by, and the possibility that we could make the creation of mass media accessible to anybody who wishes to do it."