

TARANTINO'S SHOP CLASS

THE ORIGINAL VIDEO ARCHIVES is now Riviera Tuxedo, but the new, expanded store two miles away in Hermosa Beach, Calif., still exudes the presence of its most famous clerk. A huge painting of Quentin Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs* hangs in the front window. Inside, *Dogs* posters from Cannes are on sale, and owner Lance Lawson is closing the place early (even though it's Friday) because Tarantino is holding a private *Pulp Fiction* screening for Archives employees.

To hear the people who worked with and rented from Tarantino tell it, in his pre-fame days he was probably the most persuasive video enthusiast on the planet. When the 20-year-old high school dropout first walked into the tiny store in Manhattan Beach, in 1983, he just wanted to talk movies. "He came by as a film buff one day," says Lawson, "and we started talking movies and got in a discussion about Brian De Palma. Four hours later, we were still talking." Tarantino returned the following day—and the subject was Sergio Leone. After about two weeks of visits, Lawson offered him a job.

Tarantino started at around \$4 an hour plus perks that included unlimited free rentals. (He'd sign out 10 tapes in any given week, says Lawson.) He dressed mostly in black, drove a silver Civic, dined at Denny's and Jack in the Box, read crime novels and comics voraciously, loved Elvis and the Three Stooges, always celebrated his birthday at the movies, and—legend has it—amassed \$7,000 in parking tickets. He also met weekly with fellow clerk Jerry Martinez, 31, to watch tapes of

the Japanese TV action series *Kage No Gundō*, starring martial-arts legend Sonny Chiba. (In the Tarantino-scripted *True Romance*, Christian Slater attends a Chiba triple bill on his birthday.) Among Tarantino's few dislikes: film snobs and Merchant Ivory movies.

"He could forget to pay his phone bill, but he never forgot anything about any film," says Lawson. "He'd talk so enthusiastically about some movie that [a customer] couldn't say no."

Ask Martinez and Lawson which genre rentals increased when Tarantino was working, and they smile and say almost simultaneously, "Women in prison." Tarantino made a convert out of Archives customer Gene Moore, 52, whom he introduced to the likes of *Caged Heat* and *The Big Bird Cage*. "He was always in a good mood," says Moore. "He was so enthusiastic about sharing his interest." Moore recalls one late-night discussion about tipping in restaurants that Tarantino used in the opening scene of *Reservoir Dogs*.

And to their delight, Lawson and Martinez occasionally spot bits and pieces of their friendship with Tarantino up on the big screen. "For years he was my movie-geek friend," says Martinez. "We miss having him around." —Kate Meyers

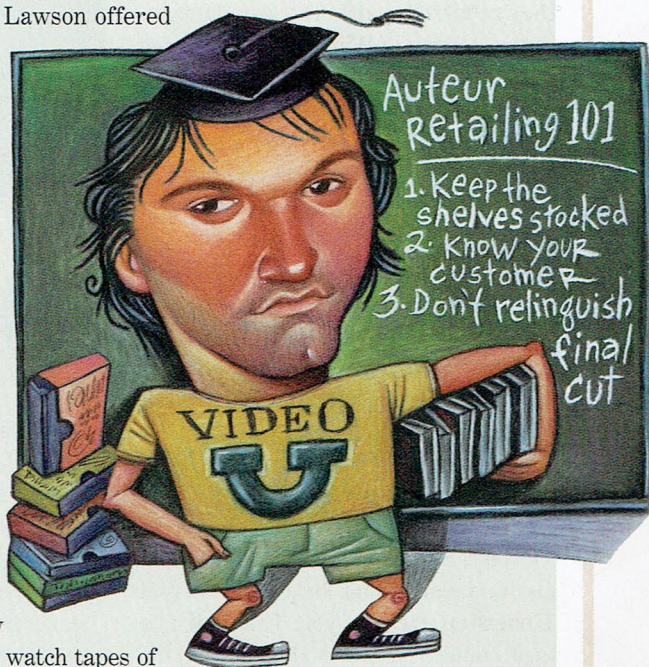


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