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YOUNGSTOWN: VINTAGE AS WE KNOW IT

By yomag (<http://theyomag.com/index.php/author/yomag/>) / May 12, 2020

By Abigail Cloutier

“I really, really, really get off on finding a bunch of good records.”

Adam Berry sat on a midcentury stool in the middle of West Side Vintage next to the massive records collection he’s curated, restored and marked for sale. Berry, Alexis Sarty-Riley and Rocco Sait opened the Youngstown store in mid-2019.

The store is bursting with vintage clothes, records and one-off pieces of furniture. Jazz music and incense float through from the back. It’s one of several vintage stores to open within the last year in the Youngstown area.

Sarty-Riley, who curates the bulk of clothing, shares a similar passion that motivates her to go on road trips and dig through estate sales.

“You have to want it that badly. It gives me not, like, a rush, but it is honestly an amazing feeling to find something that somebody else might have thrown out or didn’t appreciate. Then we can facilitate somebody else who’s going to appreciate it and preserve it. It’s almost like it’s really more about preservation than anything else.”

The trio spends hours of their own time purchasing and restoring records, furniture and clothes. They don’t identify their store as a thrift store and argue the line between thrift and vintage is their expertise.

“You go in Goodwill, there’s going to be a stack of records. There’s a 97.9% chance that they’re all going to be total garbage,” Berry pointed out. “Even if there is one that’s decent, there’s a 97.6% chance that it’s going to be destroyed or something’s going to be wrong with it.”

“I’m going to have nice, clean stuff for you at a reasonable price that takes into consideration the drive that you have to make to get here, you putting on pants and leaving your house.”

Across town, Mel’s Habitat, branded “a little shop full of things you want,” is an eclectic mix of items tucked away in a green two-story house turned treasure hunt.

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Eclectic items occupy every corner of Mel's Habitat waiting for customers./ Photo by Frances Clause

Owner Melanie Buonavolonta has been in the vintage game for a while. After working at Greyland with Rocco Strait, she opened the vintage consignment store on Elm Street in June 2019.

"Oh, I don't know how to put it. It's

a different flavor than going into an antique shop because it's curated for young people and curated with culture in mind," Buonavolonta said.

"When I became a mom, some of the sourcing and things that really made me excited about vintage and collecting and reselling before weren't actually possible. You can't do it all," Buonavolonta said. "You can't be in every grandma's attic. You can't hop over to the thrift store when, you know, you've got time, because there is no time anymore."

Instead, she lets consigners bring the vintage to her and gives the sellers little shop names of their own, like "Sandy's Closet" or "April Found."

Though Mel's Habitat isn't a "true" vintage store, Buonavolonta still uses her practiced eye to curate pieces.

"If you talk to the community of vintage sellers up in Cleveland that have been selling, they're old, older than me, you know, women mostly, that are hip as hell; they're so cool," she said. "They'll look at this store, and they'll be like, 'Oh no, Melanie, this isn't [all] vintage,' and I know, but it's great, right? And we can get along on that level."

Like West Side Vintage, a Marie -Kondo-like attitude is spread through everything she puts in her shop.

"You can trust your gut, you know. What do you like? My motto here is share the things you love. And a lot of this stuff is just something that makes me happy."

Sustainability is also a big motivating factor of Mel's Habitat.

"The goal here in the shop is just to show people that, like, there are options," she said. "You can still find a lot of these looks that you're getting from like these department stores that are making things really quickly or box stores that are making things really quickly, and it's still super affordable. You can still afford things if you're willing to wear something that was worn before."

Buonavolonta loves meeting the people who come in to shop or consign. People wander in to talk to her about their lives just as often as they do to look at handmade earrings and fur coats.



Photo by Frances Clause

“I could just sell vintage things that I like online and not have to leave my daughter. I wouldn’t have to find somebody to watch her. ... We need each other. We need community.”

On the other side of Youngstown State University’s campus, the trio who founded Vintage of 330 early this year is building a community while making vintage affordable. Michael Jones, Torrance West and David Meadows combined their love of thrifting and vintage items to open a store that caters to the nearby college population.

“We know what a lot of things are worth. But we still sell them cheaper just because we want everybody to be able to afford it,” Jones said.

The three have traveled as far as Toronto, Detroit and Miami to curate pieces.

“You know, we travel a lot just to get different experiences of it just because it’s more than just selling clothes,” Jones said. “We genuinely love to go and pick through and see what we like, and it’s fun to see what other people like. And when they actually do like it and it sells, that feels good.”



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