



SALE

RVINYLY

PHOTO BY JOEY KAWATON



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RVINYLY

REO **SIDE ONE**

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Richmond is a mid-size city with a big heart and it's full of vinyl records. So where did they come from? Why do we have so many? The stories and guide on these pages will clue you in to RVA's vinyl culture and what keeps record collectors spinning.

RECORD CITY USA

Demographics and psychographics combine to make Richmond fertile ground for vinyl collectors **BY CRAIG BELCHER**



very few months, there's another story about the resurgence of vinyl records. It's a narrative that's worn out but keeps on playing, because someone wants to hear it. The real story is that vinyl records never went anywhere. They might've been tucked into attics, basements, storage units and hi-fi cabinets when the compact disc arrived, but they never truly left. It is true that record labels are pressing more records these days, and now they can be found at exclusive boutiques like Target, Urban Outfitters and Whole Foods, and young people do love the shiny black discs. Richmond is a good place to find them. Most major cities have a handful of record stores, but Richmond boasts 11 independent shops that sell records. Some, like Barky's Spiritual Stores and Plan 9 Music, have been around for decades, while others, such as Records & Relics and Small Friend Records and Books, are new to the game. So why does Richmond have so many independent record stores? Where are the records coming from?

Katie Gilstrap, assistant professor of marketing at Virginia Commonwealth University, doesn't own a single record. But Gilstrap, the former chief marketing



Record enthusiast Aaron Bushman peruses the stock at Steady Sounds on a regular basis.

officer for a local bank and daughter of a bluegrass musician, thinks she knows why there are so many record stores in Richmond.

"I think that what you see around this issue and other related issues is that Richmond is the perfect storm of the psychographic profile of hipsters," she says. "I know that's not a scientific term, but it does have meaning in marketing in terms of personas of audiences."

So Richmond has a lot of hipsters — you may not have needed a college professor to tell you that. To some, the term "hipster" conjures an image of a

bearded white dude in a plaid shirt holding a plastic cup of craft beer. But this doesn't encompass everyone Gilstrap is referring to.

"It's a lifestyle and a point of view," she says. "I don't see it tied to gender, age or ethnicity."

But back to that perfect storm that's raining records on River City.

"We are also such a young city, demographic-wise with the four universities, that we have this constant influx of young people here, and we are a nostalgic city that's steeped in a love of all things vintage," Gilstrap says. "That's manifest-

JAY PAUL



Top left: Barksdale "Barky" Haggins of Barky's Spiritual Stores; Top right: Records & Relics; Bottom: Record Store Day at Plan 9 Music



ing itself in things like record stores, tattoos, you see it in craft beer, you see it in artisanal coffee, so it's not surprising to me that we're over-indexing in vinyl records, because we over-index in related categories that speak to that young, hipster, vintage, psychographic profile."

Not a bad analysis from someone who streams her music exclusively. It should be noted that record stores aren't the only places selling records. Thrift stores such as Diversity Thrift, Goodwill, FanTastic Thrift, The Love of Jesus and many others typically have a healthy record selection with varying degrees of quality. Of the chain stores with records in their inventory, Urban Outfitters, which has a shop in Short Pump, is one of the largest sellers of records in the country, while 2nd & Charles, with two locations in the region, has an immense selection of records and books. You'll also find records in a few places where you wouldn't expect to see them, such as Car-ytown Pack & Ship, which has a rack of dance music for sale. Though these other places sell records, they don't have that indie record store vibe.

"In my day, when we used to go to record stores, it was about a community," says John Glaser, vice president of sales for Alliance Entertainment, the country's largest distributor of vinyl records. "You can walk in there and talk about music with someone. You knew they were going to turn you on to something new and fresh and maybe something that you weren't exactly coming in for."

"That's a big number," he says, when



told about the amount of retailers in Richmond selling vinyl, almost double the tally you'll find in Miami, near Alliance's headquarters in Sunrise, Florida. "There's probably fewer pure record stores in your town," he says. "I assume the majority of those guys are diversifying into different products." Indeed, most of the "guys" are peddling something besides music. At Barky's, you can buy a choir robe; the records at Steady Sounds share space with vintage clothing; Plan 9 has posters, turntables and 8-track tapes; Oregon Hill's Vinyl Conflict offers vintage band T-shirts; and Records & Relics has, well, relics.

Despite the popularity of vinyl, making a living selling records is still tough. Local store Monument City Coffee & Records closed in 2015. Retail mainstay

Plan 9 Music sought protection under Chapter 11 of the federal Bankruptcy Code in 2011, after closing most of its satellite locations. Small Friend Records & Books turned to a crowdfunding site for help several months after opening last year.

Chicago resident Quinn Cunningham closed his brick and mortar store Funk Trunk a few years ago. Now he buys records for Reverb, an online marketplace for audio gear that has added records to its repertoire. Cunningham recently made his first visit to Richmond as a buyer. He spent approximately \$70,000 on records, buying them at stores and storage units and through house calls over a week.

Does this mean he might return?

"It means that I might move there," he says, and laughs. **LA**

TOP LEFT: ROB HENDRICKS; TOP RIGHT AND BELOW: JAY PAUL

INDEPENDENTS DAY

COMPILED BY GRADY TREXLER, OLIVIA DIAZ, ADAM CHEEK AND CRAIG BELCHER // ILLUSTRATIONS BY MELISSA DUFFY

THESE 11 INDEPENDENT stores aren't the only shops where you can buy records in the city, but they are your best bets for finding something you have to own that you never knew existed before you stopped by. The shops are curated by seasoned collectors, musicians, veteran retailers and just plain music nuts. If you're looking for that rare pressing or getting started with the whole vinyl thing, here are the places to go. —CB



6131 RECORDS
5710 PATTERSON AVE.

BACKSPIN: An indie record label that started 13 years ago in California opened a storefront in the Near West End last summer. Open Fridays and Saturdays.

FEATURING: Current releases on their label, of course, as well as classic titles. The store doesn't carry used records, but they've got T-shirts, buttons and tote bags in stock.



BARKY'S
18 E. BROAD ST.

BACKSPIN: Richmonders have been buying music from Barky's since 1954. The business has survived a fire and sweeping changes in the music industry and consumer habits.

FEATURING: Gospel music in almost every format. You'll also find minister robes, hymnals, DVDs, bibles, white gloves and other church supplies.



BK MUSIC
2833-A HATHAWAY RD.

BACKSPIN: Celebrating 20 years in business next year, BK Music survived being pushed out of its former location to make way for Starbucks and Chipotle.

FEATURING: Lots of new and used records and CDs, with rock, soul, blues and jazz staples that any store should stock. There's also sell T-shirts, DVDs, turntables and CBD products.



DEEP GROOVE
317 N. ROBINSON ST.

BACKSPIN: Started by a former Plan 9 employee in 2009, this is a smaller store that makes good use of its footprint, with a quality selection of popular and pivotal releases.

FEATURING: A mix of rock, jazz, R&B and reggae records, along with other genres, plus a small collection of used turntables and a variety of postcards.



MEMORY LANE
8609 SANFORD DR.

BACKSPIN: More like a warehouse that sells records than a typical record shop, Memory Lane opened in 1979. If you have the time, digging through the shelves, racks and crates can be fruitful.

FEATURING: Just about anything. There is an emphasis on antiquated recordings, with music dating back to the early 1900s among the tremendous selection.



PLAN 9 MUSIC
3017 W. CARY ST.

BACKSPIN: Opened 37 years ago, this is the prototype of the modern record store in Richmond. (Former employees own two of Richmond's other shops — Deep Groove and Steady Sounds.) One of Prince's final tweets was a shout-out to the Carytown store.

FEATURING: Rock, jazz, pop, soul, hip-hop, R&B and almost everything else. Besides records, there are CDs, cassettes, turntables, T-shirts, posters and DVDs.



RECORDS & RELICS
2704 E. MARSHALL ST.

BACKSPIN: Open less than a year, the shop is among the newest in Richmond and the only record store in the city's East End.

FEATURING: Used records, only. Along with the blues, jazz, soundtracks, hip-hop and rock records, the shop has a small selection of books, home décor items and pop culture memorabilia.



SMALL FRIEND
105 N. 17TH ST.

BACKSPIN: The year-old Shockoe Bottom store takes its name from a dog, Peluga Lee, who is the smallest friend of the couple who own the store.

FEATURING: An eclectic assortment of books and records, both new and used. There's also a healthy assortment of zines. The store hosts a lecture series called "Small Talk" on the last Thursday of each month.



STEADY SOUNDS
322 W. BROAD ST.

BACKSPIN: Founded by two Plan 9 expatriates eight years ago, the store now shares space with Blue Bones, a vintage clothing retailer.

FEATURING: Lots of dollar records and a well-curated inventory of rock, soul, pop, hip-hop and jazz discs both old and new, along with new and vintage stereo equipment and music memorabilia.



VINYL CONFLICT
324 S. PINE ST.

BACKSPIN: This midsize shop caters to customers who like a certain type of music and doesn't try to be anything else. Opened in 2008, the store is a hub for the hardcore scene.

FEATURING: Punk, metal, hardcore and hip-hop records. There's also a curated collection of T-shirts, cassettes and zines.



WAX MOON
1310 ALTAMONT AVE.

BACKSPIN: A post-punk and extreme-metal shop that opened three years ago in Scott's Addition. The black-walled store is usually overseen by a shadowy cat named Miho.

FEATURING: Since its opening, the store has expanded its inventory to include less extreme genres. There's also a healthy selection of VHS tapes, posters, badges, pins, cassette tapes, retro video games and T-shirts.

SOUND CINEMA

This month, the Byrd Theatre is wagering that record store owners know a few things about films, too, and letting five of them pick the Wednesday night movie.

5/1 "THE LOST BOYS" VINYL CONFLICT
A 1987 horror-comedy about a gang of vampires, featuring Keifer Sutherland and the two Coreys, Haim and Feldman.

5/8 "WILD STYLE" RECORDS & RELICS
1983's "Wild Style" details the genesis of hip-hop through the life of a graffiti artist.

5/15 "I CALLED HIM MORGAN" PLAN 9
A 2016 film about Lee Morgan, a brilliant trumpeter who was murdered in 1972 by his common-law wife at a New York nightclub.

5/22 "SPACE IS THE PLACE" STEADY SOUNDS
Starring pianist and composer Sun Ra as a musician attempting to resettle African-Americans on a new planet he discovered (1974).

5/29 "THE HARDER THEY COME" DEEP GROOVE
Features reggae icon Jimmy Cliff as a fugitive and reggae singer in 1970s Jamaica. Directed by Perry Henzell. —CB

THE COLLECTORS

How many records are enough? These people probably don't know.

PHOTOS BY JAY PAUL



UNHEARD OF

After accumulating some 6,000 records, this collector seeks new sounds

BY CRAIG BELCHER

When you're a record collector and you share a home with a person who isn't, it's important that everyone knows their place—especially the records. For Jermain "JayQuan" Hartsfield, "it's a very contained thing," he says of the part of his Chesterfield home known as the "throwback" room, with shelves of records, compact discs, action figures, musical instruments and more records. The 48-year-old says his wife, Kara, understands.

"She knew when she met me what she was getting into," he says. "She knew that I was into music, she knew that I had a record collection."

It's a collection that has grown since he started with a record by the Archies when he was 8 years old. Since that time, he says he has only parted with a few of the estimated

6,000 records he has accumulated.

"I have 95 percent of the records that I ever purchased," he says.

Among those are his own recordings as part of the pioneering Richmond-based rap group known as the Too-Def Crew and later as the First Sons. While he still records music, these days he's making his mark as an expert in the history of his chosen genre. He recently inducted several rap luminaries (Big Daddy Kane, the Sugar Hill Gang, Melle Mel, Biz Markie) into the Hip-Hop Hall of Fame and serves as a historian for the organization that supports it. He's also working on a documentary that looks at the seminal hip-hop record label Sugar Hill Records. As his role in the music industry has evolved, so have

his preferences.

"I listen with a different ear now," he says. "I was looking for loops and drums—now as a more adult person that's not looking to sample the record, I can enjoy."

There's a lot of music to appreciate in a collection that includes rare and classic rock, jazz, and hip-hop. At this point, there's a particular kind of record he looks for, and he knows them when he sees them.

"Today, because I have so much already, I'm looking for stuff I've never heard of," he says.

Surprisingly, JayQuan wasn't aware there were so many record stores operating in the city. "Now I'm going to spend more money. I might not have needed to know that [laughs]."

THE COUPLE THAT COLLECTS TOGETHER

Their voluminous vinyl collection's true value is in the joy it brings

BY GENEVELYN STEELE

Tracy Wilson has turntables in every room of the midcentury ranch home that she shares with her husband and fellow discophile Kenneth Close, including a child's player with disco lights on their screened porch. On warm evenings, they mix drinks and whir through boxes of 45s. Audiophiles might cringe at the portable's sound quality, but for Wilson and Close, who hunger for music rather than acquisition, listening satiates.

Wilson and Close play together in Positive No, a band that distills hard-riffing guitar and heartfelt pauses, mixed with pop grooves—a sound that defined the indie '90s, an era Wilson knows well. A collector since her teens, Wilson owns over 8,000 albums, which cover the walls and fill the record room of their Maymont home, chosen for its lack of windows and radiators, two things that can devastate vinyl.



"My first purchase was a Go-Go's album in 1982. It was a ritual to take my allowance and buy a new record. After that purchase, an employee gave me a list on the back of a paper bag. I learned about a world outside of Top 40—alternative music, English New Wave, The Smiths, Siouxsie and the Banshees," says Wilson, who grew up in New Jersey.

Wilson and Close visit record stores when they travel, spending hours combing through bins. They cull from the 1950s to now, covering primarily punk, rock, soul and funk.

It's been said that music saves lives, and Wilson has a story to tell. After she was struck by a car in 2011, her medical bills piled up, and unable to work, she turned to her record collection for help.

"I owned the very first Jack White 7-inch [45], pre-White Stripes. A bidding war broke out [on eBay], and the record sold for \$1,200. That saved my life. It paid my rent, which superseded any attachment to the record... I don't fetishize my collection—its value isn't dollars."

THE PIED PIPER OF PLATTERS

Richmond's original crate digger still collects

BY DON HARRISON

Richmond native John Wood is surrounded by vinyl and assorted music memorabilia at his Chester home—he even built a separate guest cottage for his 45s. "I guess I have a half million records," he says. "It's really hard to say." Looking for a singular piece of rare psychedelia, some hard-to-find jazz or a scarce Broadway cast album? Chances are, if it's not here in Chester, it

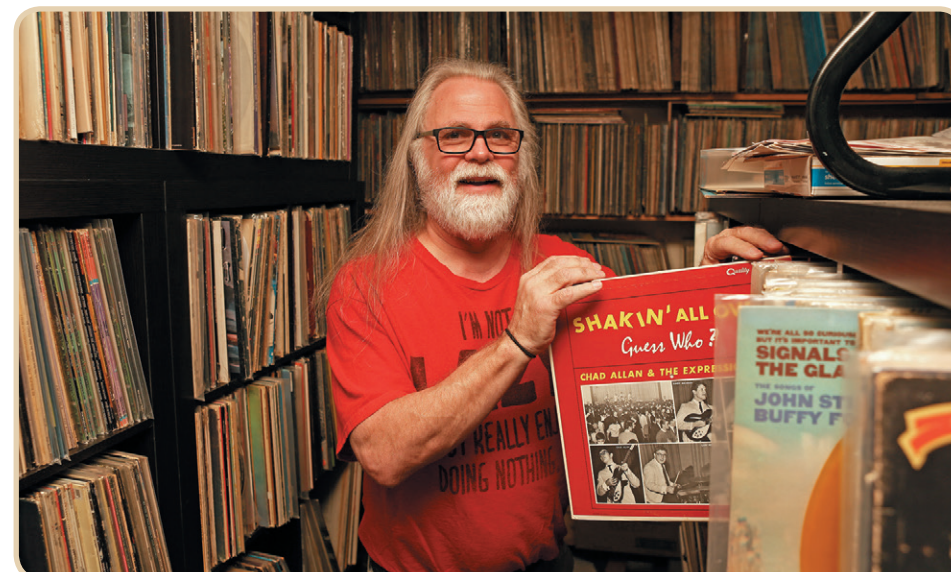
passed through at some point.

The 58-year-old collector, who has worked for years in concert security, most recently at The National, traces the foundation of his massive assemblage to a handful of 45s his mom bought at a church flea market when he was 5 years old. "It was everything from the Beatles to Johnny Cash to Walter Brennan, the actor," he recalls.

In his teens, Wood began purchasing large collections and dealing discs out of his house. In the early '80s, he organized the first Richmond record conventions and helped to sell the initial discs (on consignment) at a scrappy little Carytown curio shop called Plan 9. Later, he set up his wares at the now-departed Super Flea in Midlothian, helping to bring music legends such as Richmond's Rock-a-Teens and The Jarmels and Gene Vincent's Blue Caps to perform at the market.

"I'm still more into the old school music than the newer stuff," the Santa-bearded Wood says. "But I do have a few current artists that I love. Cults, Delta Rae, Devendra Banhart, to name a few."

Wood says he's been in "hibernation" lately, not making his usual appearances at area record shows. But as he speaks, he's finishing up a sale to a traveling dealer who is setting up at a North Carolina show but is light on stock. "Oh, I have people coming through here almost every day looking at records," he says. You believe him. **■**



Stock up on these Richmond-region staples

From STARTUP to SHELF



Meet the Folks Behind the Brands pg. 79



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Nightingale Ice Cream Sandwiches

OPPOSITE PAGE FROM LEFT: COURTESY SALSAS DON SEBASTIAN; SARAH DER THIS PAGE FROM LEFT TO RIGHT, TOP TO BOTTOM: COURTESY CRUNCH DYNASTY; STEPHANIE DENNEHY, COURTESY WILD EARTH FERMENTATION; SARAH DER; CATT LEVESQUE, COURTESY BIRDIE'S; COURTESY AR'S HOT SOUTHERN HONEY; COURTESY MOTHER SHRUB



Hot!
Crunch Dynasty
Sprinkle it on everything!

Pickled Paradise!
Wild Earth Fermentation



"I can't believe it's not dairy!"



page 80
UnMoo Vegan Cheese



Birdie's Pimento Cheese
A true Southern staple!

The shelves and cold cases of grocers like Union Market, Ellwood Thompson's and Stella's Grocery are laden with local goods. Behind all these products are tenacious food entrepreneurs, risk-takers and visionaries who have tirelessly worked to get their products to the market — and to you. →

BY EILEEN MELLON

Sweet & Spicy

AR's Hot Southern Honey



Mother Shrub
Try all **6** flavors!

THE BUSINESS OF FOOD

Small-business incubators, commissary kitchens and branding experts help culinary entrepreneurs achieve success

“Food startups aren’t a super-sexy, quick-turn, high-velocity investment,” says Austin Green, co-founder of Hatch Kitchen, a commissary-style kitchen and food and beverage small-business incubator. “This stuff can take years, and we’d really love to see that improve in Richmond as we recognize there are a lot of people doing creative things, and an audience that wants to buy these products.”

Green and Brad Cummings opened Hatch Kitchen in Manchester in January 2018. Green learned about the unexpected hurdles startups face when he and business partner Greg White launched Texas Beach Bloody Mary Mix in 2015. Cummings, a successful entrepreneur and co-founder of the

nonprofit Startup Virginia, shared his vision of bringing together like-minded food entrepreneurs to share ideas, network and learn — something Cummings refers to as “positive collision.”

Currently home to a 9,000-square-foot kitchen and a corral where area food trucks can park, Hatch plans to add an on-site health inspector, a cafe and event space, a certified food bottling line and packaging operation, and a USDA meat inspection area — a one-stop food-startup paradise.

“I think that we may have kind of underestimated how long it takes for a food business to get everything they need to be up and running,” Green says, noting that one of the biggest hurdles startups face is raising capital.

Open 24 hours, Hatch’s main kitchen features stainless work tables, industrial mixers and other large-scale kitchen equipment. At any time of day, members bustle around — one visit found a Gaucho food truck employee making arepas while across the room, high-end lollipops from A Secret Forest were being painted like works of art.

According to Elaine Lidholm of the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS), an average of 120 food businesses seek product approval each month. For a product to go from concept



to container, business owners must submit an application outlining production steps, intended consumers and a list of ingredients. The product must also have appropriate labeling and packaging. Once it is approved and deemed safe, the kitchen where it is produced is inspected.

“It’s a lot more complicated than most people realize,” says Pam Miles, food safety program supervisor for VDACS.

That’s why Hatch offers business classes taught by Startup Virginia and The Apple Cart. Barb Upchurch and Stephanie Ganz (a Richmond magazine contributor) founded The Apple Cart in 2014 to help small food businesses. Now the sole owner, Upchurch’s consulting firm offers services from branding to website development to locating brick-and-mortar space.

“Nobody enters into the food industry because they think it would be fun,” Upchurch says. “They are passionate about what they are making; there’s a reason behind that particular product.”

Helping a product’s story come to life is essential. That’s where people like Christie Thompson, lead strategist at Campfire & Co., come into play. Thompson takes her clients through “brand therapy” sessions, where they work to discover the identity of their product and create a cohesive concept. “Our role early on is to help them organize these ideas and create something with longevity,” she says.

Every two years, VDACS hosts the Virginia Food & Beverage Expo, connecting purveyors with buyers, grocers, restaurants and media. Last year, a record 180 exhibitors participated,

and the next expo in March 2020 is expected to top that total.

Many of the products at the expo are part of the 30-year-old VDACS Virginia’s Finest program.

“That [Virginia’s Finest] label is a genuine seal of approval,” Lidholm says. “Agriculture is the largest private industry in Virginia, and many people realize that buying Virginia products keeps food dollars in the local economy.”

In recent years, local products such as Reginald’s Homemade Peanut Butter and KimKim Korean Hot Sauce have received national attention and widespread distribution. On the pages to come, follow the journey of two Richmond-based companies, UnMoo and Nightingale Ice Cream Sandwiches, from startup to shelf, as they work towards their dreams of national success. ■



ALEXIS COURNEY, COURTESY CAMPFIRE & CO.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: COURTESY ELLWOOD THOMPSON’S; JAY PAUL; COURTESY SALSAS DON SEBASTIAN; COURTESY BELLE ISLE MOONSHINE

PRODUCT PIONEERS

Local grab-worthy goods to add to your shopping list



GOURMET HEMP FOODS
This budding company, led in the kitchen by Chef Tye Hall of T&R Catering, offers hemp-based pasta and various condiments. Are you a hot-sauce head? The hemp “Hottie” sauce made with local peppers is a must.



SALSAS DON SEBASTIAN
Founder America DeLoach started this company as a small-batch salsa purveyor using family recipes. Since then, she’s added chimichurri and an addictive jalapeño dip to the mix.



BELLE ISLE MOONSHINE
Founded in 2013 by brothers-in-law Vince Riggi and Brian Marks, Belle Isle has poured a lineup of six spirits into the market along with its latest offering: crisp, quaffable canned cocktails.

CASE STUDY:

THE MAD SCIENTIST

COMPANY: UNMOO

EST: 2018

OWNER: JOSH KADRICH

In less than a year, Josh Kadrich, founder of UnMoo, has gone from making cheese in a friend's kitchen to receiving a call from a local investor checking on his search for a new, almost 10,000-square-foot production facility.

"This was my depression medication, starting UnMoo," says Kadrich, 30. "I didn't feel like I was contributing a lot of value or living up to my potential. The opportunity to be smart and work hard for myself has been so empowering."

Kadrich grew up in the suburbs of Lynchburg. He was the neighbor kid who caught grass snakes, had poison dart frogs as pets and dreamt of saving the rainforest or becoming the next Steve Irwin. "I was never the best at anything," he says, "except for science." He studied biology at VCU for three years and then began working as a quality manager at Biotech Services.

Kadrich, who says, "I love cheese, but it doesn't love me back," would watch as his boyfriend, Taylor Holden, filled their fridge with goat cheese from the farmers market. Unhappy with his corporate lab job, in the summer of 2017 Kadrich began experimenting with making cheese from cow's milk before trying cashew milk, which he could digest more easily. He describes the first trials as slimy, off-putting and malodorous. But he was determined to figure it out.

Kadrich dove into the world of lactic acids, bacteria and chemical composition, often waking up on the couch cuddling a stack of science journals and artisan cheesemaking books. "I'm pretty crunchy in a lot



Encounter the Cashew

THE HOP

1600 W. Cary St.

Pickle Back pizza: White sesame-seed crust, house red sauce, cashew-based cheese Notz, dill pickle chips, soy chorizo and a hot-pepper relish swirl

HERITAGE

1627 W. Main St.

Impossible Burger: bibb lettuce, onion jam, tomato, Notz and smoked tomato aioli on a brioche bun

IDLE HANDS BREAD CO.

407 Strawberry St.

Croissant: vegan croissant made with Nutter instead of butter

LAMPLIGHTER COFFEE ROASTERS

26 N. Morris St. and 116 S. Addison St. locations

17 1/2: hot pressed sandwich with marinated tofu, Notz, balsamic glazed onions and jerk-spiced Vegenaïse

of ways but willing to put on my lab suit and play with beakers," he says. "This is equal parts science and technology."

His goal was to create a vegan product that could provide the same sensory experience as cheese. In early 2018, after six months of experimentation, he was finally successful, creating a meltable, shreddable, tears-of-joy-inducing nondairy mozzarella-like cheese that vegans have been waiting for.

UnMoo and its first product, "Notz," were born.

At the time, there were no regulations for vegan cheese production in Virginia. Kadrich approached VDACS with 65 pages of proposed operating procedures. Together, he and a state food scientist determined how the cheese would be regulated.

In July 2018, UnMoo signed a lease at Grindstone Kitchen in the Museum District, and a few weeks later, the company passed VDACS inspection. In early August, Kadrich sold Notz for the first time at the Williamsburg Farmers Market. His product line eventually expanded to include Notz in peppercorn and lemon lavender flavors, a cheese dubbed Habby Jak, and a vegan butter called Nutter.

Idle Hands Bakery owner Jay Metzler, who has a number of loyal vegan customers, discovered Nutter on Instagram. He soon began making vegan croissants with Nutter, and UnMoo's first local partnership was born.

"It's the best vegan butter I've ever tasted. ... It's basically magic," Metzler says.

Soon UnMoo was in stores like Union

[| THE MAD SCIENTIST CONT'D ON P.166 >](#)



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: UnMoo's vegan cheese; founder Josh Kadrich; Taylor Holden (left) and Jonathan Lewis during cheese production

OPPOSITE: SARAH DER

CASE STUDY:

A COOL COINCIDENCE

COMPANY: NIGHTINGALE ICE CREAM SANDWICHES

EST: 2016

OWNERS: HANNAH POLLACK & XAVIER MEERS

Nightingale Ice Cream Sandwiches' eight-person female staff methodically moves through the process of making their daily inventory of 3,000 handmade ice cream sandwiches in the production space at Hatch Kitchen.

"When we started, we would only make 100 a week, and that was so much," says Hannah Pollack, laughing.

Pollack, 33, is the younger, slightly more serious half of Nightingale, a company she officially founded in 2016 with her husband, Brussels native Xavier Meers. The couple met while working together in the kitchen at the bygone Belle Vie restaurant in Midlothian, which Meers, 42, co-owned.

While working as executive chef at Greenleaf's Pool Room, Pollack made an ice cream sandwich for dessert. Upon trying it, Meers immediately realized that that the sandwich, vanilla ice cream between two brownie cookies — now Nightingale's "Classic" — had the potential to be more than a novelty treat and become a successful food product. "I knew from the moment I tried it," he recalls.

Pollack would return to her home kitchen after dinner service at Greenleaf's and make as many ice cream sandwiches as she could, selling them to friends at other restaurants and markets. Between lunch and dinner shifts as executive chef at Brux'l Cafe, Meers would deliver them. They named their business Nightingale as an homage to its beginnings at Greenleaf's: The pool hall is named for Ralph Greenleaf, a 20-time World Billiards Champion, and his wife, vaudeville

Signature Sandwiches



FAT BANANA

Peanut-butter cookie and banana ice cream dipped in chocolate



CLASSIC

Chocolate brownie cookie and vanilla ice cream



COOKIE MONSTER

Chocolate chip cookie with cookies-and-cream ice cream



CHOCOLATE ESPRESSO

Chocolate brownie cookie with chocolate-espresso ice cream

actress Amelia Ruth Parker, was known as "The Oriental Nightingale."

By November 2016, Pollack found herself physically unable to balance production and her full-time job, and after a nudge from the optimistic Meers, she quit Greenleaf's to commit to Nightingale. Failure wasn't an option.

"Once you take that step, it scares you enough to where you think, 'I have to make this work, there's nothing to fall back on, no salary,'" Pollack says. "It was hard at first, but we wouldn't be where we are if we were living both worlds."

Serendipitously, Performance Food Group, a Richmond-based food distributor, was looking to add local products to its lineup. Meers, a longstanding customer of PFG as a chef, had shared Nightingale's sandwiches with a sales rep. Four months after Pollack left the restaurant world, Nightingale partnered with PFG for distribution — first in Virginia, then to the entire Mid-Atlantic region. They graduated to a commercial kitchen space at Westbury Pharmacy and began selling an average of 1,200 sandwiches a week to PFG. Today, their products, which include four signature flavors and a number of seasonal sandwiches, can be found in 12 states.

For the last few years, they have worked to grow their business, collaborating on exclusive flavors with local breweries and restaurants. In the beginning of 2019, they became an anchor member of Hatch Kitchen, where they have a designated space and a

[| A COOL COINCIDENCE CONT'D ON P.167 >](#)

OPPOSITE: SARAH DER



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Nightingale's ice cream sandwiches; founders Xavier Meers and Hannah Pollack; Nightingale's custom sandwich molds

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Market and Ellwood Thompson's, on food trucks like Zorch Pizza and in restaurants such as Pupatella. Then came a call from a local investor, Dan Phipps, offering life-changing capital to UnMoo. Other investors followed.

UnMoo has quickly become a Richmond name. But will it be known nationally?

By October 2018, Kadrach had hired multiple part-time employees, along with a trio of full-timers who abandoned stable jobs to help UnMoo succeed, including his best friend, Jonathan Lewis, along with Tanesia Thompson, a college friend and former sous chef at the plant-based eatery Little Pine in Los Angeles. Now UnMoo's head of production, Thompson recalls a conversation she had with Kadrach before returning to Virginia: "I said to him, 'You know what would change the world? Vegan cheese.'"

Kadrach's boyfriend, Holden, recently left his job at an engineering firm to join UnMoo. "I told my boss, 'This is our life at this point, we are putting everything we have into trying to build this,' " he says.

As the business has grown, Kadrach has evolved from the sole producer and gatekeeper of knowledge to thoughtfully directing his team, building relationships with markets and restaurants, raising money, and systematizing the business. "That's what I have to do in order to ... turn us from a hobby to a national company," he says.

UnMoo envisions an entire line of potential, value-added products distributed across the country — ready-to-bake pizza, brie and blue cheeses, ravioli, cheesecake and cream cheese.

Since March, the team has been scouting properties for a kitchen to call their own, which will help significantly to extend the shelf life of their products. "It's been hard to imagine what is even possible because we've been bottlenecked by this facility, and what we've been able to put out here has been pretty impressive," Kadrach says. "The nature of having a high-growth, volatile startup is that you build your company around conquering hurdles. ... I wouldn't trade it for anything." ■

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large walk-in freezer constructed specifically for them.

Now the charismatic Meers, who spent 25 years running restaurants and heading various kitchens, thrives as the face of the company at trade shows across the country.

Pollack, who considers herself more introverted, has been pushed outside of her comfort zone by Nightingale's quick growth. She's no longer working 16-hour shifts making ice cream sandwiches and instead focuses on other facets of the business.

"That was one thing, too, realizing that nobody is going to be like you or work like you," Pollack says of the transition. "That's one thing I would always struggle with, but you have to take a bit of a step back and realize what's reasonable."

Although Nightingale is Richmond famous, and Pollack and Meers are local food celebrities, expanding outside the region and the state has had its challenges as they work to convince customers that their nostalgic, premium handmade treats, often made with local ingredients, are worth \$4 per sandwich.

"When we got further out, how hard of a push it was was surprising to us," Pollack says. People would ask, "How much for an ice cream sandwich?"

As demand has increased, they have invested in equipment to assist with production, transitioning from a KitchenAid ice cream maker to an industrial appliance, and from using an ice cream scoop and spatula to a recently purchased depositor and custom molds.

In less than three years, Nightingale has grown from a culinary side project to a multistate operation eyeing half a million ice cream sandwiches sold this year. Meers and Pollack are working toward their goal of filling the cold cases at high-end markets and grocers across the country while holding onto their local Richmond roots.

"I think the people involved with us strongly believe in us — they know the future can be something big and interesting," Meers says. "You have to go and fight for it if you love it, and that's what we do." ■



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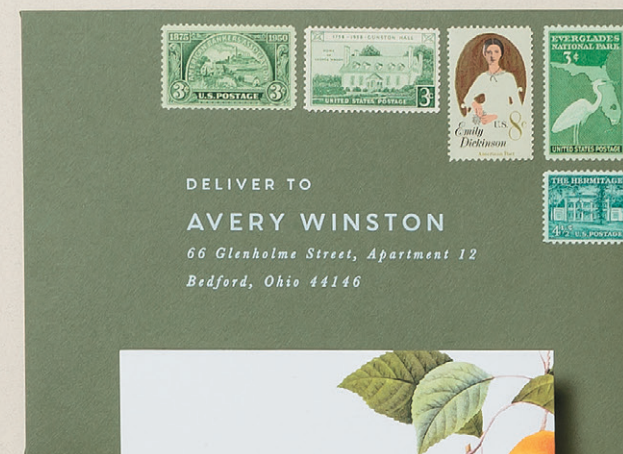
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