



Grinders - STRETCH sharing his story



Crane Yard Studios - Cyd Ross explaining her process

NOVEMBER SESSION: A HEART OF GOLD-EXPLORING KANSAS CITY'S ARTIST GEMS

Kansas City's art community is a treasure chest of hidden gems. There's a flood of creativity within this Midwest town that flows as powerfully as the waters of the Missouri & Kansas rivers. Creative endeavors pool up in pockets all over town filled with inspiration and passion to be fearless makers. Of course, this town has its institution of artistic bedrock – marbled museums and velvet stage curtains – but this month, the Pillars went panning in the river for gold.

Beginning the afternoon with a pizza lunch at Grinders, owner STRETCH Rumaner shared his interesting, sometimes unbelievable, incredible story. He's been around the world and back, studying different forms of art, culture and food. His love for food resulted in the opening of Grinders pizza. STRETCH believes that art, music and food can cross cultural boundaries and create conversations worth having. As he puts it, the arts are a universal language. You will always find a connection with a stranger when it involves these three creative channels.

Just a short five minutes away is Crane Yard Studios, part of the Belger Art Center. Marketing and Community Engagement Manager, Consuelo Cruz led the group through the ceramics shop, gallery and studio spaces. The building's architecture is simple, yet beautiful and holds memories of an inspiring past. The Belger is a true gem for local artists

of sorts, providing top notch equipment, a well-stocked supply shop and a stunning view of downtown KC as the backdrop to their gallery. We concluded our tour with an introduction to Cyd Ross, a local ceramic artist. Cyd spoke about what inspires her and her creative process while bringing a ceramic red barn to life. Her pieces are inspired by architecture and the landscape it resides on. She was as excited to meet with a group of architects and designers as the group was to meet with her.

After saying farewell to Cyd, the Pillars journeyed across town to Rightfully Sewn. Founder, Jennifer Lapka spoke about the why behind this multi-faceted nonprofit organization. Their seamstress training program and fashion designer professional development program provide opportunities for budding designers, opportunity seeking immigrants and at-risk individuals looking for a sustainable way to support their family. There are 40 entities in KC that employ skilled seamstresses, most graduates of Rightfully Sewn's program. Their goals are focused on creating affordable, American made items, supporting the smaller fashion community by reviving Kansas City's fashion history and most notably, being a leader in providing employment with fair and equitable pay for its industry members. The pandemic spotlighted the need for a domestic supply chain as face masks were in high demand. The team raised money and produced 40,000



Rightfully Sewn - Jennifer explaining the business of fashion



The Pillars outside Blackbox Theater in the West Bottoms

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masks all donated to local hospitals. Rightfully Sewn also creates one dress a year designed by artists within their community.

Down in the West Bottoms sits a small, unassuming building called The Black Box theater. Heidi Van and her partner, Rusty Sneary, founded Black Box to provide an ever-evolving stage space for bold and provocative performances. The space can be rearranged and transformed to accommodate any show and audience. Both Heidi and Rusty were running their own small theaters – the Fishtank and the Living Room – and combined them to create Black Box. During the pandemic, they shifted their stage to the outdoors to continue supporting Kansas City's theater community while staying safe.

The Pillars made one last stop to enjoy happy hour at Mini Bar and visited with owner Steve Tulipana. Steve has been a part of the KC music community since the 1980's. He is co-owner of not only MiniBar but the well-known Record Bar and the newer Lemonade Park. Steve humbly told his story and why he continues to simply do what he loves. "Dig in, figure it out, and ask for help when you need it," Steve said about how he's been successful all these years. What was truly inspiring about his story is how quickly he and his partner could have monopolized in the KC Music industry, having the

right connections for big named bands and musicians, but instead, stuck to the root of their passion and stayed true to their "why". Steve respects the art of music and maintains that true magic and experience happens at a smaller, more intimate level. Over the years he's supported countless local, regional, and national bands and plans to keep the encores coming.

A recurring theme from each stop became clear – these creative minds are passionate about what they do and care deeply about the community they are a part of. Financial gain is not the goal. Sharing what they love with their little corner of the world, and helping someone along the way, is why they do what they do. To say these people are inspiring would be an incredible understatement and Kansas City is lucky to have them.



Pillars happy hour at MiniBar



Heidi Van of Black Box