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Photo by Todd Linebaugh

Zoomers is an NYC slice into the ascension of Gen Z via Smash Bros.

The Off-Broadway play *Zoomers* came to a charming painter's studio in the West Bottoms to perform the disastrous complexity of adult Gen Z life. It was grounded in reality, leaving acting choices up to the young actors on stage. With the director, Frederick Rivera, being from Kansas City, and the set being surrounded by an authentic artist's loft, *Zoomers* created a self-reflective, astute experience, sometimes leaving you to wonder if it was a play or if you accidentally wandered into someone's apartment.



Courtesy the author

Cultural historian Dr. Kristin Kobes Du Mez tangles with the influence of white Christian women in *Live Laugh Love*

Author and historian Kristin Kobes Du Mez furthers the conversation on the roots of White evangelicalism she began in *Jesus and John Wayne* with *Live Laugh Love: The Secret History of White Christian Women and the World They Made.* In this interview, Du Mez discusses her new book, predatory theology and female-targeted Christian media from *Love Comes Softly* to Precious Moments.



Illustration by Teddy Rosen

Stretches of canna-sobriety can make sparking up even sweeter

What used to be the dirty little secret you couldn't consume publicly has exploded into a $1.5 billion industry in Missouri last year, but protecting your relationship with cannabis is a long-term investment in your health. If you're looking for ways to keep your tolerance in check, much less combat dependence on cannabis, Syd Goldberg details strategies that may help.

Savior Complex: Inside the right-wing money machine behind anti-trafficking performance politics connecting Missouri and Utah

In a multi-month collaboration with Salt Lake City Weekly, Michael McGrady Jr. breaks the story on the connection between the anti-trafficking organization Our Rescue and the Human Trafficking Training Center. In their performance activism deeply based in QAnon beliefs and Christian dominionism, these organizations collaborate with local, state, and federal governments and AI technology companies to alter policing tactics across the country. Their work has targeted and harmed sex workers, the LGBTQ+ community, and Asian-Americans in the process.



Courtesy SLC Weekly

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Letter from the Editor

LIVE, LAUGH, LOFI AND THE TIKTOK TAROT REBELLION
BY BROCK WILBUR

Greetings, dearest readers, and welcome to the November print issue of *The Pitch*.

We're doing a bit of a tonal pivot this issue—and for the next few—as we focus less on the normal holiday traditions and put collective energy toward dismantling the ruling autocracy class and deporting our oppressors to the Gulag. Thanksgiving is problematic, but Nuremberg 2 is a treat for the whole family! Pass it on.

Before we get into storming the castle and seizing the memes of production, we thought the November issue could angle toward the cozier side of prepping for assorted darkness to come. Mental health is already a battlefield this time of year. How much worse could it possibly get? [Don't answer, just buy a SAD therapy lamp.]

Forget putting your own oxygen mask on first. We're looking at how to triumph over the rest of fall without falling apart.

I'd like to point to the 1982 feature film *Poltergeist* as an example of the self-care we're advocating. Yes, this is the best example I could think of—I'm doing fine, I promise.

In *Poltergeist*, a family is overtaken by evil spirits in their home, and their daughter, Carol Anne, is sucked into a portal. This is, obviously, not the best. Nor are the assorted ghosts flying around the house, making life quite unpleasant for the living. Watching this as a kid, there's a moment that always stuck out to me as nonsensical, which in adulthood has evolved into a sequence I understand all too well.



The family matriarch has been doing laundry and handing out clean sheets and such to the family members still not portal-sucked. She even knocks on her daughter's door to see if she can drop off towels and pillowcases. On opening the door, there's a screaming whirlwind of evil that knocks her right back out.

Why the hell was she trying to drop off sheets for ghosts? I didn't get it. Why does this family stay in the house, amid a simply unacceptable level of paranormal fuckery? I didn't get it.

In adulthood, I get it. Someone still needs to do the laundry. Everyone needs to stay together, even—or especially—when they get separated. At the worst of the worst, perhaps the most powerful rebellion is to show pure evil that you won't surrender. Maybe how you bump back against the things that go bump in the night… is to keep your own sanity.

There's been a recent run of excellent TV shows (especially *Below* on Netflix) about how normal people find themselves sharing space with terror and oppression beyond imagination. Culturally, we seem transfixed on how life carries on when the inexplicable insists on interrupting. This is never shown as keeping your head down, turning a blind eye, or trying to pretend that none of this is happening. It's about fighting back against monsters by refusing to become a monster.

As Abby Olcese wrote in a recent thinkpiece: "Most horror storytelling uses villains and beasts as metaphors for existential fears. *Widow's Bay* uses its haunted hotels, sea hags, and killer clowns to explore something more mundane but equally profound: How to live alongside forces we don't understand."

It feels prescient, perhaps even permanent, to know that The Bad will always find a place in our lives. Maybe this moves the goalposts in a manner that is less than ideal, but is more realistic than hoping for a day where nothing hurts and the world is beautiful forever. Again, it isn't giving up. It's picking your battles. It's picking when and how. And it is making sure that you survive.

"Live, laugh, Lexapro" is our motto right now in the newsroom. I write this ahead of the Midterm elections—which I'm sure will go great and meganormal—and the only thing keeping us from turning in copy written in the Zodiac Killer's crypto-language is the time we take to take care of each other.

KCRep's production of *John Proctor is the Villain*—covered on page 10—looks at the Salem witch trials through the eyes of teenage girls in the era of #MeToo. The play, which deals with the human (and American) pursuit of mob justice via gossip, presents an inescapable problem as well as an occasional solution It's about not knowing who the monsters are now, and how messy sorting tiers of terrible can spiral.

Luckily, the monsters are pretty easy to spot these days. At least for most of us. I write this the day after Kansas Republican State Senator Ty Masterson accused his female Democratic election opponent of engaging in demonic, Satanist pacts—declaring to a church of supporters that she practices "witchcraft" because of "spells" cast on social media to support her campaign.

I'd argue that Tarot TikTok Girlies have done more to help the average Kansas voter in the last few years, but sure, the reason gas prices are high probably involves Goody Proctor's liaisons with the devil.

As you can tell, we can't leave the terrifying creatures bound to our October issue. They're sticking with us, and in turn… we shall stick it to them.

Pitch in and we'll make it through, P

Brock Wilbur

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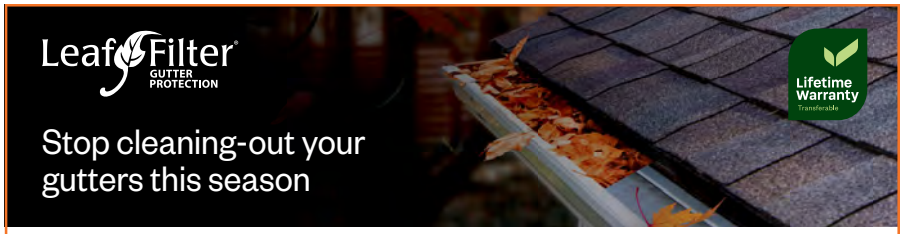
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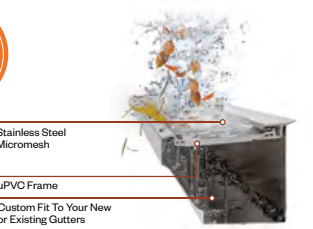
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Barbara Takenaga, Round Trip Time (2024)

ADDITION BY ABSTRACTION

BARBARA TAKENAGA'S *AWESTRUCK* IS CALM LIKE A BOMB

By Olivia Steele

On Friday, October 9, the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art opened its *Awestruck* exhibition, a survey of abstract artist Barbara Takenaga's work. At 77, Takenaga has been committed to abstract painting since 2001, this exhibition marking the 25th year of her commitment and a rare chance to survey a living artist's work.

You'd think an artist of her status might be on a high horse or pretentious when it comes to her art. However, the first thing that comes up in conversation about her art is the spiral cowlick on her dog's butt. It comes up a few times in a conversation with her.

She's whip-smart and unintentionally hilarious. She has the same cadence as a dry-humored stand-up act, yet when the room bursts into laughter, she's surprised. She's almost too humble–when people ask about why she created a piece or her background, she begins to answer before saying, "Oh, you don't want to hear all that." She doesn't take anything too seriously, despite the fact that her work feels larger-than-life.

Takenaga's work draws inspiration from many corners of her life, from big moments to funny details. Her breadth of inspiration seems almost endless, ranging from the very small to the very large–sometimes intertwining. When first viewing a painting of hers, it's difficult to tell if you're viewing something cellular, galactic, or aquatic. She likens her dog's cowlick to the spiral that galaxies are composed of, hoping to expose the thread that's sewn from our connection to the cosmic.

"I get fascinated by things that have the same structure or kinship, from the tiny to the gigantic. There's something weirdly comforting about the connection between the micro and the macro," Takenaga says. "It makes me feel better to know that there's a thread through everything. It's small information repeated in these large concepts that operate in our daily lives on so many different levels."

Takenaga was raised in North Platte, Nebraska, and attended the University of Colorado at Boulder for eleven years studying printmaking. She became bored of her English major the month before she graduated, returned as a printmaking major, and continued to take classes afterward until a friend encouraged her to attend graduate school. She was there all the time, anyway. While in school, her early works were reflective of mid- to late- 1970s philosophy, such as second-wave feminism, East Asian religion, and psychedelia. Psychedelic concepts continue to persist in her work.

Worried she was allergic to the solvents she used in the printmaking process after

The exhibition will run through April 11, 2027. Admission to the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art is free.



Barbara Takenaga, Night Painting (Red) (2005)

health issues began to arise, she visited her doctor. They had to break the news that nitric acid was, in fact, bad for her to inhale. She transitioned to painting after that, beginning on plywood and stone. When hauling boxes of rocks throughout New York City got shockingly too annoying, she began painting on canvases.

Her process has evolved and changed with her over the course of 25 years, beginning with ten years of highly repetitive, intentional, patterned dot and mandela paintings. After that time, she wanted to loosen her process, beginning with pouring paint on a canvas. This has become a hallmark of her painting, following the footsteps of the abstract expressionism movement of the midcentury. She enjoys combining fate with her own willpower. After the paint has migrated to wherever it pleases on the canvas, she then begins to add in details of her own will.

"I would look at the pour the next day, and I would spend days, weeks, or months just staring at the thing, waiting for it to collaborate with me," Takenaga says. "I'm trying to incorporate chance into the creative process. It'll tell me what to do and the composition will start coming up, and I'll just go with it before I impose my own will onto it."

More recently, she's begun to work with outside sources, including a book of Japanese screens and prints that she began tracing during COVID. Citing lockdown boredom and a rush of inspiration when she couldn't get to her studio, she began tracing the kimonos or men's robes off the book's pages. She distorted them in cartoonish ways or flipped them upside down, referencing old drawing class practices for when creativity just won't flow. These "riffs" of other work, as she calls them, are a thesis of her amusement.

"It's funny working with these kimono shapes," Takenaga says. "When you flip them, they become like Georgia O'Keeffe flowers. They're sexy and funny, but they're natural. If you flip a mushroom upside down, it's a sexual organ. It's equally sexual and funny."

The exhibition spans four rooms, each built around a Takenaga pillar: nods to art history, an emphasis on process, a confusion of scale, and an embrace of illusion. Curated by Jessica May of the Kemper and Tae Edell of the Library of Congress, the exhibition is designed to tell the story of Takenaga's career through her process rather than chronologically. Navigating the bends and curves of her career, the exhibition is a colorful, psychedelic, grounding collection of work spanning the last nearly three decades.

When May began her position as executive director at the Kemper in 2024, an administrative position after spending her career as a curator, she was offered the opportunity to take up a curation job marking this transition. After spending years becoming a fan of Takenaga's work, she knew the direction she wanted to take the project.

"We're living in a complicated moment right now where it feels like there's so much information, chatter, data, and conflict coming at us from all sides," May says. "Barbara's work makes us stop, look, and think. It's not prescriptive, but it's not neutral. You have to resolve it on your own. That feels like a bomb for this moment."

May and Edell decided to name the exhibition *Awestruck* for the feeling of viewing Takenaga's work for the first time, referencing the cosmic, cartoonish nature of her work.

"I like watching viewers have a moment of surprise. I look forward to hearing that little gasp from visitors," May says. "One thing that's remarkable about her work is that when people first encounter a Takenaga painting, they go quiet. You hear them take a breath and stop. They're simply awestruck."

According to May, Takenaga pushed back against the title, not wanting to seem like she was bragging or referring to herself or her work as "awestruck."

Edell, an independent curator, collaborated with May to write labels, conduct interviews with Takenaga, and interpret the works. May describes the experience of her and Edell working with Takenaga as a "fangirl moment." Their love of collaborating with one another is evident in the way the three women laugh loudly together at seemingly nothing mid-conversation.

Viewing the exhibition, it's easy to get lost in a trance. To visit means finding yourself staring at a painting for minutes on end, trying to make sense of it, letting your own thoughts take over. You might even find a piece you can't seem to stop returning to. It might be the way the light catches the glitter on in the swirl of a geode, and you think you've seen three new colors. It might be the way your eyes strain when staring too long at a dotted mandala. It might be how her work seems to envelop you, regardless of the canvas's size.

"We likened the experience of viewing Barbara's work to cloud watching," Edell says. "You bring yourself and the kind of day you're having, and you pick out your own images. It's a very personal experience. It's an active exhibition."

When Takenaga stands in the exhibition, her paintings tower over her, being two or three heads shorter than most. She's sharp, excellently talented, and highly decorated. While anyone else would probably be entrenched in ego, she's simply there to have a good time with those who attend. At a reception on the eve of the exhibition's opening, the crowd was filled with some of the region's most notable art collectors and former colleagues. Yet the back row of chairs were filled with her college friend group, still whooping and cheering for her half a century later.

Viewing her art is similar to meeting her. You're met with a difficult-to-navigate yet incredibly calming presence, larger-than-life and right in front of you at once. It's hard to tell whether or not she's aware of her massive legacy as it surrounds her. You can only assume she has to be. Regardless, she will continue to talk about her dog's cowlick and let her imagination lead her wherever it deems fateful.

Modern Proctology

Kimberly Belflower's clapback to *The Crucible* excels in KCRep's hands

By Abby Olcese

Kimberly Belflower's *John Proctor is the Villain*, a Me Too-era response to Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*, is currently the most produced play in the U.S., with productions popping up across the country after the show's successful Broadway run last year. The show has benefited from the exposure, though before its bow in New York, it was already a popular production in high schools and colleges. It's easy to see why.

The themes of the play cover everything from how we interpret the canon of Great Literary Works (does Lorde get to be in it? Does Taylor Swift?) to the constant threats facing young women (made sadly relevant once again by the events at Cornell University) to how those same young women figure out what true solidarity looks like while living through violation after violation. It's a beautiful, funny, heartbreaking, and perpetually timely story that's packed with humor, empathy and catharsis.

I've now seen four different productions of *John Proctor is the Villain*, including the Broadway staging. Every time I see it, I promise myself I won't cry during the final scene, which feels like rage and hope and raw female energy channeled and released. This is a foolish promise, because every time, I still wind up in convulsive tears like a Pentecostal Christian at an altar call.

Part of that comes from the strength of the play itself. Part of it also comes from seeing how different productions put their own stamp on the material, not changing the text but filtering it through a specific vision of direction, performance, and design. It's good to be reminded that an artist can always take the familiar and find a new way to make it powerful and personal.

KCRep's production of John Proctor is the Villain in October was a fantastic example of exactly this. Laura Alcalá Baker's staging of Belflower's play stayed true to its themes and characters while making distinct choices that amplified specific elements of the story in ways other interpretations haven't. The production felt loyal to its source and personal to the people making it.



Photo by Don Ipock

John Proctor is the Villain is set in a one-stoplight town in Georgia (the news that they might get another stoplight is cause for celebration). The students in Helen County High's junior honors English class study *The Crucible* under their charismatic teacher, Mr. Smith (Shane Kenyon). At the same time, a handful of Smith's students—overachieving Beth (Jo Pellow), her best friends Ivy (Lilly Gerend) and Raelynn (Avery Moss), and new girl Nell (Amari Lewis)—are trying to start an extracurricular feminism club.

Hanging over all of this is the absence of classmate Shelby (Mizha Lee Overn), who abruptly left town following a breakdown that culminated in Shelby hooking up with Raelynn's boyfriend Lee (Sam Moore). Shelby's sudden reappearance and reaction to class discussions of *The Crucible* lead to shocking revelations that, alongside other events in town, echo Miller's play.

The cast, especially the actors playing the girls, were excellent. Standouts included Lewis' sweetly energetic Nell and Moss' Raelynn, who grows the most over the course of the play. Pellow's Beth was also delightful, carrying over many of Fina Strazza's best choices from the Broadway production, with a little more twang.

KCRep's staging also featured several technical elements that easily matched (and in some cases outdid) that immensely successful Broadway run. Eleanor Kahn's scenic design made great use of the Copaken Stage's space, particularly in the play's one scene set outside Mr. Smith's classroom, in a convenience-store parking lot. Other productions usually project a backdrop onto a screen over the existing classroom set, which works but awkwardly shows the seams. Kahn's set included an extra fold-out portion that, with a spotlight, turned that part of the stage into a different location.

Kahn also added elements that tied Belflower's play more directly to Miller's, including a forest of 20 trees (one for each person killed in the Salem Witch Trials) surrounding Mr. Smith's classroom. These were a constant reminder of the wild space The Crucible's Abigail Williams and her friends claim as theirs, and they became a moving focal point during the play's powerful final scene, a moment Ethan Korvine's sound design also expertly teased throughout.

Baker's direction and blocking also made subtle changes that refocused some elements of Beth's arc (it's hard to say more without invoking spoilers). This, ultimately, was the only part of the KCRep production that didn't entirely work for me, though whether or not it did for others is down to a matter of preference. In particular, the blocking in the show's final scene shifted the play's emphasis from what kind of woman Beth wants to become to the risks she faces. Considering the entirely female-powered act of solidarity that makes up the play's final moments, changing the focus weakened that impact somewhat, even though it made a valid argument.

This is a small criticism, however, and a choice that still felt part of a distinct vision, so it's worth noting. Ultimately, KCRep's production of Belflower's play was a fantastic example of how artistic vision can influence an existing text. This staging made interesting, smart choices that adapted to the performance space and directed the audience's attention to important themes in both the play and Miller's work. I'm glad there was space for discussion afterward—the play invites it, and this production in particular opened up rich avenues for dialogue. P

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Photos by Max McCarthy

Boots on the Ground

DRAG SUPERSTAR LAMBYYY BOOTS REVELS IN LFK'S DIY GLAMOUR

By Olivia Steele



It's 10 p.m. on a Friday night, and Lawrence It-Girl Lambyyy Boots is dressed to the nines, microphone in-hand. She's hosting the weekly Henry's Upstairs drag show, a come-one-come-all event designed to showcase LFK's hottest and up-and-coming drag acts, and making friends with everyone in the crowd. Wearing what has to be at least four-inch heels and a long, blonde wig, she towers over the crowd and somehow feels like the most important and least important person there.

"Whose first time is it at Henry's? Whose birthday is it? You guys, in the corner in business casual–you here for a conference? What's everyone drinking? Tell me in the microphone and make sure you tip your bartender." At a show hosted by Lambyyy, everyone in the room is a Very Important Person. When you see her perform, you never know who you'll get. You could get a Hollywood diva in a floor-length gown, a messy-haired and faced punk, or a bikini biker gal. There's no Lambyyy look. There's just Lambyyy, a mosaic of her inter-and-intrapersonal, all on the page.



Lambyyy Boots, winner of the tenth season of the Hamburger Mary's-produced *Drag Survivor,* is the drag persona of 27-year-old native Lawrencian Liam Housworth. He's currently a double feature at Grounded Coffee and Henry's Upstairs–both located at 11 E. 8th St. in Lawrence–working the coffee bar and hosting weekly drag. As Lambyyy, she's also a member of Dorothy and the Dolls, a self-producing drag collective based in Lawrence, which hosts weekly shows at Bottleneck.

In 2023, Housworth saw local drag queens Kansas Campbell and Chay D. Boots hosting a drag brunch at Grounded, and later caught Chay D. at a St. Patrick's Day show at Replay Lounge. As Housworth recalls, "I marched up there and said, 'Whatever you're doing, I want to join.'" Chay D. took him under her wing, becoming his drag mother, and Lambyyy Boots was born, debuting in chapstick and mascara.

Lambyyy's name comes from Housworth's childhood nickname (same title, two less fabulous Ys), as well as a love of Precious Moments lambs, which he inherited from his mother.

"My mom thought drag was crazy and didn't like it. Then, I started doing it," Housworth says. "I loved that nickname a lot, but I think there was a part of me that thought that choosing that name would make her more accepting of me doing drag."

Taking after Chay D., Housworth began working at Grounded six months into his drag career—replacing Chay's position when she left. After spending the last few years working a morning shift in the cafe, glamming, and returning to host upstairs, he's found an exuberant, close-knit comradery with his fellow baristas and bartenders, as well as a second home.

KYKY Mo-Dean, a fellow Dorothy and the Dolls member, recalls nights after shows spent sitting together until the sun came up, Lambyyy wearing her thinking wig, bouncing ideas off of one another.

"Our energy, hunger, community, and sisterhood have been a big part of what's been able to boom the Lawrence drag scene recently, and I'm really happy to see her success in it," Mo-Dean says. "Lamb's a hoot and a half, and she has a really good way with connecting with people, especially in a college town. She's interested in a lot of artists that you maybe wouldn't see perform in Kansas City. She loves the alternative."

While she works the room at a show, bonds with her tight-knit sisterhood, or cheers on other acts and notes their looks and expressions, she's–as the Republicans say–indoctrinating the kids. (The kids, of course, being her mostly 21+ audience.) She wants everyone to feel as happy as she does performing, whether they're coming to a gig to take the stage or take a seat in the crowd.

"There are times when I'm out of drag, and I feel dorky or weird, but in drag, I'm the seducer of the night," Housworth says. "I like to be authentic, but I'm not just doing this for me. Every time I hit the stage, I look at the people watching me. I want to push people into drag like I was pushed into it. Everything changed for me when I finally unlocked this queer freedom and my gayness through drag."

"Homophobia is rampant as hell," he continues, "Our president is a fucking idiot, we're on a rock in an empty void, and we're all going through a struggle or another. We all deserve a show where we can tune it out for an hour or two and just be people together."

If you're in need of a serious confidence booster, you can catch Lambyyy and her infectious energy weekly in Lawrence, either at Henry's Upstairs or Bottleneck. If you've done the night right, your pocket will be emptier, your voice hoarse, the names of at least three more Lawrence-area queens on your mind, and your heart full.

Strut through the weekend, Lambyyy-style. P







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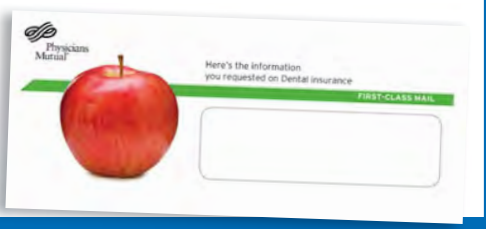
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HURT ME BAD

TAYLOR HUGHES ON THE LONG DRIVE TO PURE XTC'S DEBUT FULL-LENGTH

By Nick Spacek



Photo by Amina Shaw

Over the past few years, Taylor Hughes' musical project pure xtc has been a force to reckon with. We've had the joy of watching Hughes move to Kansas City and build pure xtc from the ground up, and with the recent release of her debut album, *the women I loved, the songs I kept*, she gets to share her full vision with the world.

The album is a 12-track little black book: messy and intimate. Each song traces a different version of love, written in a stream of consciousness and built in pure xtc's home studio, where she wrote, produced, and recorded the record alongside collaborating producers Dylan Jackson Scott (Halsey, lovelytheband), Mikey Canoy, Bryan Czap (The Dangerous Summer), and others. It lives in the blurry space between being seen and being wanted—and the cost of continually confusing the two.

While Hughes has played drums for bands like EXNATIONS and Car Party in the past, pure xtc was her first solo effort. As a musical project, it draws on lessons learned from trickier times, and Hughes, as singer/guitarist/multi-multi-instrumentalist, excavates new ground in familiar spaces. Think of the dark synth sounds of *Euphoria* or a long drive at night—but danceable. And raw.

While some tracks on the full-length have been released individually before—with "Mood Ring" hitting the airwaves several years ago—Hughes knew this was the moment to put it all together.

"I feel like I finally have cracked the code," Hughes explains. "When I was writing 'Fall Apart' and 'Mood Ring' and 'Drive,' I'm like, 'These feel so much different than the work that I've put out previously, and I can tell these are leading me somewhere, and I just need to ride the wave and put out a full body of work.'"

These tracks work together sonically and feel like one unified work. However, they weren't all recorded in one go. Hughes describes herself as "very meticulous" and blames this trait for her slower production output. Even after recording the tracks in her home studio, she immediately sends the files to producers and collaborators to handle the next steps.

"I'm like, 'Hey, I've taken this as far as I can. I think it still needs a little candy on top,' or whatever," Hughes says of her production work. "I also don't trust myself to mix. I'm too close to it, and if I mix it, every song is just gonna be bass-and-drum-heavy. There will be no room for anything else."

Sonically, the album is where early-to-mid-'00s emo would have gone if they had let women have a say. Aside from Paramore's Hayley Williams, this album sounds like where things would have gone lyrically if the songs weren't all by straight white dudes, and we tell Hughes as much.

"Oh my God, high school me is screaming right now," she responds. "I love that, and I love that I've taken those roots with me, as well. I listen to pop music now. I listen to more electronic or indie stuff, and the emo roots are still relevant. They're present for sure."

After such a long wait to put out a full-length, we ask Hughes how she's feeling, knowing people will soon get to hear all these songs together.

Hughes points to the song "killing my youth" as "an open wound for me," then takes a deep breath.

"I've never talked about this publicly," she says, pausing to collect herself. "So, I lost my dad to alcoholism, and that song was like seeing that in someone else that I was in a relationship with—but also, in some ways, myself. I'm like, 'Ooh, I'm liking this a little too much, I need to pull back.'"

Hughes' day job is working for MerchTable, the company people use to order her album. Looking at the back-end data during pre-orders has been kind of wild.

"I'm seeing so many people from different eras of my life purchasing this album. That's crazy. I didn't know they still followed me or paid attention or whatever,'" she says. "I think it's gonna be hilarious if some of the people that the songs are about... pick up on it. Please don't come at me!"

pure xtc's *the women I loved, the songs I kept* is out now. pure xtc also plays the Bottleneck on Sunday, November 22, with Grizz Lee, Terran Rae, and Neon Signs. P



Photo by Maisie VanSlander

Serving Hunt

WHERE YOUR SERVERS, BARTENDERS, AND BARISTAS GO AFTER THEIR SHIFT

By Maisie VanSlander

Behind every plate, glass, and to-go cup is a hand serving it. Service industry workers make up almost 10% of all U.S. employment, with some metro areas nearing 15%. These servers, bartenders, and baristas interact with hundreds, if not thousands, of people daily, collecting stories, perspectives, and horrors.

Working-class industries like medical, culinary, and blue-collar have been hijacked and twisted into lifestyle branding. Shows like *The Bear* and *The Pitt* caricaturize a way of life for millions of Americans. Restaurant kitchen culture is trend-setting cooking utensils and workwear, while blue-collar workers have lost all of their good Carhartt jackets to twenty-something resellers. This new attention to the mundane has created niche clothing and style trends that steal from these industries, commodifying the working class.

This pop-culture gentrification puts these materials out of reach for the common worker. Raising the demand for goods from wholesalers and resellers only benefits the cosplaying populace that wants to play make-believe working class.

People working in these trend-setting fields are influencers in their own way. Unlike social media personalities peddling the same restaurant or bar over and over again, service industry workers are experts in their field at recommending the best spots to visit. Instead of stealing their style or tools, we should steal their knowledge of the industry they work in.

Who better to tell you which cafe, restaurant, or bar is best than the people working in those establishments?

As a cocktail bartender, I lean on my coworkers to expand my knowledge of Kansas City bars and restaurants. I constantly ask fellow staff where the best spots are in the city. If I am sitting down at a restaurant, I try to ask my server where they like to get brunch or where they had their best meal recently.

Across many service-industry staff, we stock up on signature menu items. At a bar, I focus on the seasonal drink menu or how a specific restaurant spins a classic dish. Instead of ordering a boring classic cocktail or the same steak anybody can make, I seek out what each place excels at. That's how you find something truly unique and special.

Sometimes working in this field makes me feel like a vending machine with a soul, pumping out the same drinks over and over again. Developing a connection with a guest by explaining our cocktails, making something custom, or giving them dinner recommendations is the core purpose of my work as a bartender.

When traveling, you ask a local where is good; In Kansas City, you ask those running your food and steaming your milk where they go after their shift to grab a bite or get a drink.

I followed a thread of recommendations by local servers, bartenders, and baristas to find where these early risers and late-nighters go when they clock out.

SCAN TO FOLLOW THE FULL JOURNEY ONLINE.

The red thread tied around the map of Kansas City points to two hotspots with a couple of outlier gems.

The Crossroads and Westport both house some of the most cherished bars and restaurants in the entire metro. A couple of spots fall outside of these locations, though, and they are frequented even more by industry. The big winners among industry staff are Westport Cafe, Dear Donna, and Chez Charlie. The value that each worker placed in their recommendation followed a unique philosophy and was individual to them.

Going forward, talk to your server or bartender; ask them where they get brunch or where they get their coffee every morning. Develop a new, service-focused philosophy for "going out." There is a wealth of knowledge literally paid to talk to you every time you sit down. Let them guide you along your own journey of food and drink discovery.

Check out some of the service industry hotspots, and you will see your favorite servers, bartenders, and baristas from all over the city. You will connect everyone to everywhere, and it will leave you saying…

"Small world." P



Mise en Place

Café Corazón has locations in Crossroads, Westport, and Brookside

Dulcinea Herrera uplifts Latin and Indigenous traditions at Café Corazón

By Alexander Omorodion

At just 26 years of age, Dulcinea Herrera's list of accomplishments is long enough to be an article of its own. From being recognized for her artistry and entrepreneurship in Forbes, PBS, and more, to winning Miss Kansas City Latina 2021, Herrera's influence has been recognized far beyond KC.

Above all, her magnum opus is Café Corazón — a Latin and Indigenous coffee house. What started as a dream that Herrera and her mother had has now expanded to three locations and a roasting headquarters in Kansas City, Kansas. Though she has myriad personal achievements, the most important for her is being a force of good for her community.

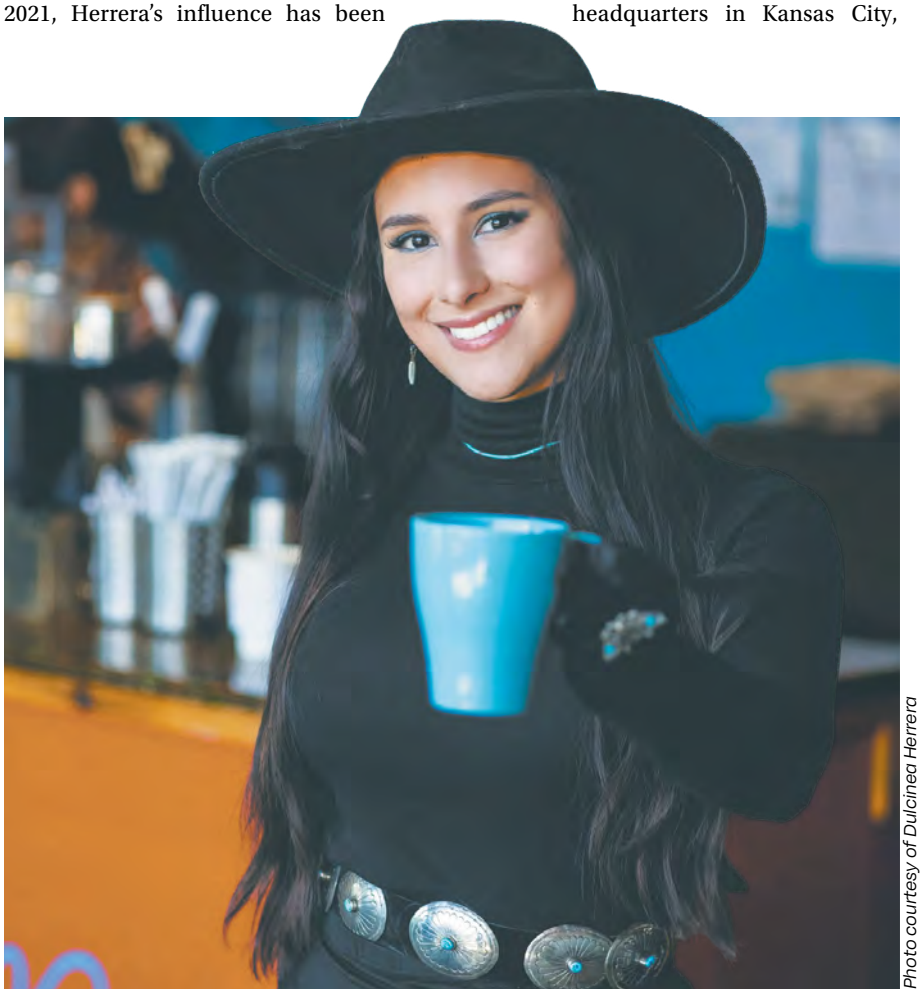


Photo courtesy of Dulcinea Herrera

***The Pitch:* Tell us about yourself.**

Dulcinea Herrera: I'm originally from the Rocky Mountains of New Mexico — born and raised there. We grew up very much the Indigenous way. My dad is Mescalero Apache and Mexican, and my mom is Argentinian.

We moved to Kansas City when I was 14 years old, in 2014, because there really wasn't a lot of work where we lived. My mom always wanted to do a coffee shop and serve yerba mate, so that's when we started to plan Café Corazón.

In 2019, I was going to UMKC at the time, and we had a really good business plan and good credit. Everything was there, but we would bring this concept to spaces to rent their space and no one believed in it. In fact, it took us a year to find our first location. And we only found it because the night before we met with the owner, a car had driven through the building and completely demolished it. But my dad is a fixer-upper, and so are my family and I, so we walked into the place as a family and said, "If you allow us to fix this space, we'll rent it from you." They said yes, and that's how Café Corazón first started.

Café Corazón is known, in part, for its cultural events. Were you always so community-focused, or did it develop with the business?

I've always been a connector and wanted to help people. Growing up, if I knew somebody who made tamales and someone else needed them for a holiday, I would always be like, "Oh, I know this person."

I think it's really one of the reasons why Café Corazón is such a connector space. Because I feel that when we build businesses or anything, our essence is in that too.

That's an interesting sentiment. The business is a representation of your essence.

Café Corazón definitely represents my ancestry. My family, my parents, even my great-grandparents; what they ate and drank growing up — we have a lot of those recipes in the cafe.

But also, something I've noticed is that when I'm off in my personal life, sometimes the business is off too. And I don't mean that in a way that I come into work and I'm angry or upset. It's more that when you have a business like Café Corazón that's more attached to the soul and lineage, I think that the energy is felt.

In these cases, what are some things you do to help come back to ground zero?

So, something about us, since we are an Indigenous-based business, we cleanse the energy a lot. New Age uses a lot of sage, right? But this is something we've used for a really long time. My managers and I will go in and cleanse the energy of the space. We'll use Palo Santo, herbs from our home in New Mexico, and we are setting good energy and good intentions for the space while letting go of the negative or stagnant energy.

What do the words "community care" mean to you?

The moment I realized Café Corazón was just bigger than the dream we had was one day when an older Mexican woman walked into our cafe. We have our stories written on the wall, and she was reading our family's history and our family story. She just started to cry. She came to us and said, "I am so happy to finally have a place where I feel seen, and I feel understood and welcomed." And I remember after that, my heart and my soul knew that we're doing the right thing here.

We were the first Latin Indigenous coffee house in Kansas City. So we do have a lot of responsibility to uplift our Latin and Indigenous community.

Could you describe how the yerba mate experience works?

Café Corazón is the only place in the entire Midwest that serves it traditionally the way we do. You have your loose-leaf tea, usually served in a dried-out pumpkin gourd, but we use silver just for health reasons. Then you have something called a bombilla; it's basically a straw with a filter at the end. It allows you to drink the loose-leaf tea, and you can drink it with milk, water, juice, really, however you want it.

Our baristas will ask you if you've tried yerba mate the traditional way, and if you haven't, they'll give you a tutorial. P

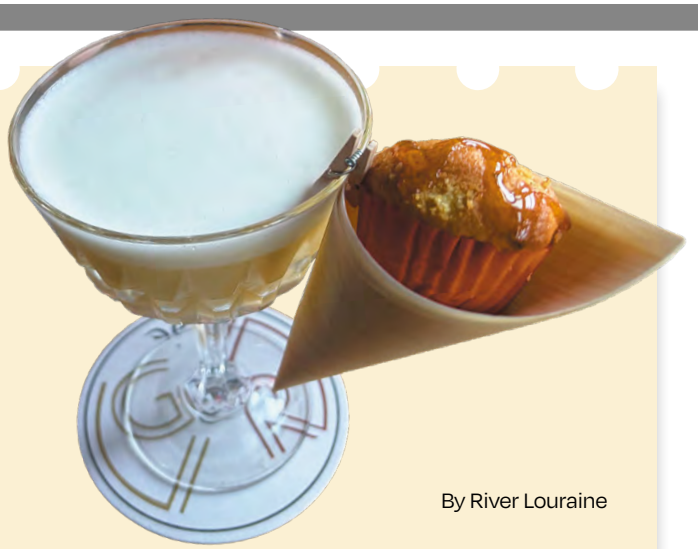


Photo by River Louraine

By River Louraine

DRINK THIS NOW:

CORN TO BE WILD AT GOAT & RABBIT

Goat & Rabbit
1804 W. 39th St
Kansas City, MO 64111

When I saw that Sway Coffee had concocted a limited-edition cornbread latte and I had missed it, I redirected my FOMO and decided to search for more drinks that utilized this unexpected flavor. As a side dish, it's a delicacy for us Midwesterners with family recipes spanning back generations, and I marveled at the idea of turning it into an alcoholic beverage.

Sarah Sipple pointed me to Goat & Rabbit, a cocktail bar from 916 Hospitality on West 39th Street. It turned out that they had an intriguing cornbread-themed drink, "Corn to be Wild," which drew me in.

The Corn to be Wild is made with mezcal, roasted jalapeño, corn and honey syrup, lemon, and egg whites for a velvety foam top, paired with an adorable little corn muffin pinned to the side of the glass. This cocktail was an explosion of flavor, each one fighting for prominence.

On the first sip, it was almost savory, coupled with bright, juicy corn. On the second, the roasted jalapeño joined with a biting reminder that it was in the ingredient list. As it further square-danced on my tongue, the honey and lemon were soothing and sweet. It was a tangy slow-sipper, each element harmonizing with the others in a warm and familiar way. I am not normally a person who orders a savory drink over a sweet one, but this cocktail has opened my eyes to a whole new side of the menu.

It was so unique and complex that I can confidently say I have never had a cocktail like this before. More establishments should be creating beverages using cornbread, or perhaps other cookout sides, as inspiration.

Matsumoto Mari is the brain behind this cocktail—and every other drink on the menu. She and her team work every morning to make each syrup, infusion, and garnish in-house.

The Corn to be Wild was a creative collaboration between her and her lead bartender, Bailey Wilson, after a lively discussion on their shared obsession with jalapeño cornbread. After an accidental order of ten pounds of corn instead of one, quick thinking and a love for Mezcal Vago Elote led to this drink blessing the menu. P

By Sarah Sipple

EAT THIS NOW:

FRESH AND FILLING APPS AT NOUR'S

Nour's
3855 Warwick Blvd
Kansas City, MO 64111

We have entered the time of year when the concepts of home, family, and love are more centered than ever. Nour's, a Lebanese restaurant in Hyde Park, is a spot where love and a sense of home are present—but you can choose how far you want to lean into it.

The restaurant's namesake is chef and co-owner Marwan Chebaro's late daughter, Nour, whose name means "light" in Arabic. Inside, light streams through the windows, lingers in the air, and shows up in the freshness of the food.

Dishes rely on whole grains, fresh produce, well-seasoned proteins, and minimally processed extras like feta and toum garlic sauce to comprise family recipes and seasonal features. You'll likely leave feeling satisfied (not stuffed), and the customizations are endless thanks to the sauces and plating options.

On this visit, I was hungry and in the mood for solid, hot dishes, so we started with baked feta with zataar chips ($14) and batata harra ($11)... I'd worry about veggies later. The baked feta earned a spot as a must-order-every-time dish, providing easily scoopable bites of cheese as substantial as it was pleasing to the eye. The sauced potatoes came in a shockingly generous portion, with electric flavor and just enough heat to warrant the term "spicy" as the menu stated.

Next was the chicken shawarma burrito, but I ordered it as a bowl. It didn't need it, but since I'm a garlic fiend, I added some of the toum that was served on the side—a potent garlic sauce that is fluffy as can be. This dish covered the gamut of textures, and leaned bright, savory, and refreshing.

We finished our leisurely meal with a sweet "flight to Istanbul" ($8.50). Perfectly portioned for two, this pretty little plate offered a sampling of the dessert menu, including two types of baklava and three varieties of Turkish delight, which Nour's imports from Turkey. The "golden kataifi" was the standout, with a chewy coating and nutty crunch reminiscent of a homemade candy bar.

Nour's remains on my cozy list–a place where I know I'll leave feeling nourished, soaking in the light for both stomach and soul. P



Photo by Sarah Sipple



Photo by Maisie VanSlander

Big Max Attack

FRIC & FRAC RACK UP FIFTH DECADE OF SUZY Q'S AND POOL CUES

By Maisie VanSlander

Before the open sign flips into view, regulars file into Fric & Frac's quiet restaurant, chairs still on top of the tables. Moseying in, these grizzled neighbors grab their signature beverage and settle into the afternoon. It's Tuesday, the day the neighborhood men have a pool tournament that's been going on for four years, but that covers only a fraction of the time Fric & Frac has been open.

Some of people who have come to this West 39th Street spot for a drink or bite for decades are the diner's resident electricians, some are couples who have been married as long as the place has been around, and others are folks who made school lunches for the current owner when he was a kid. The regulars hold a deep reverence for Fric & Frac, and Fric & Frac returns it by welcoming them as family.

In a time when popular bars and restaurants shutter every other week, it feels like a good time to acknowledge the importance of regulars, because "regular" might be the recipe for 50 strong years.

Since opening in 1976, Fric & Frac has lived in the same building its entire life, leasing the space since the very beginning.

"We are only on our third lease since we have opened," Max Ross tells *The Pitch* in a recent interview.

Ross co-owns the restaurant with his father, who previously took it over from his father. Family owned since opening, he hopes one day his kids are ready to take on the role.

Ross came to own Fric & Frac as many family businesses are passed down: with Ross starting to work in the restaurant and never leaving.

"It wasn't really what I imagined for my life personally, but I also can't imagine my life without it now. It's a huge part of my personal identity," Ross says.

When reflecting on what keeps him in the restaurant business, Ross cites his family, blood-related or otherwise: "What keeps me here is that I get to work with my dad every day; he is my best friend. Getting to work with him and my family here is what gets me up in the morning."

The neighborhood around the restaurant on West 39th Street changes constantly. With businesses closing and families moving, it keeps the street fresh, but it lacks the sense of stability found in other neighborhoods. Fric & Frac brings that sense of tradition by keeping what works and what has made it a place worth returning to. The Ross family also owns the surreal ice cream shop across the street, Miami Ice. These two establishments have held down the block as much of the area morphs, grows, and loses charm.

One major cause of the rapid change is the incessant expansion around the Kansas University Medical Center on State Line. An influx of young medical students flock to the neighborhood to attend. Revenue for the neighborhood goes up and while that is initially a good thing, it signals to building owners that they can make more money from businesses, pricing people out. Fric & Frac combats this phenomenon by welcoming the young demographic and providing a meal that is affordable to those on a college budget.

"With the hospital, there's lots of strange gentrification going on. These big new apartment complexes are going up. We haven't really changed much; we don't try to reinvent what has made us a place people like to come to. We have developed systems that work, and I think it's helped us stay in business for so long," Ross explains.

As I wandered around Fric & Frac in the early open hours, I met a couple seated near the entrance, nursing identical waters and Bud Lights. They have been married for 51 years, surpassing the restaurant they sit in.

"We have been coming here since it opened," T stated. "They have the waters and our Bud Light ready for us at our spot. We come here at the same time and get the same thing; we get three or four beers, then we leave."

The couple lives outside the

neighborhood after many moves in and out of the city, but they keep coming in and their half-century streak stays going strong.

In the next room over, a ruckus builds near the pool table. Eight men gather around the single pool table, playing a casual team pool tournament. For four years now, this group gathers every Tuesday to overrun the games section and connect with one another. These gentlemen have light rectangles worn into their jean pockets where their wallets live, a testament to their routine.

Scotty (or Scotty The Electrician, as Ross calls him) is one of the pool players who has been coming in since 1984. He serves as the restaurant's resident electrician, fixing problems that have come up.

"I met both of my wives here," he brags. "I started coming in right when I turned 21. I was a union electrician, and this was my favorite spot. I started fixing stuff up around here, and now I just work off my tab. I really feel like I'm family."

John, another pool player, adds, "Before cell phones, this place was where you got your information, the news, the drama."

Both gentlemen live in the neighborhood and feel Fric & Frac is a testament to West 39th Street Restaurant Row's charm.

"It's our secret little neighborhood; it's the best neighborhood in Kansas City," John says.

Being younger and visibly queer, I was nervous walking into a pool tournament with men who appeared conservative and were triple my age. I made assumptions about them, but they all gathered around to tell me stories and history about the neighborhood, excited that someone was there to listen. My initial judgment of them couldn't have been more wrong.

"It's a melting pot of the working class, gay, and Hispanic. These groups have found a home here, and the neighborhood is better for it," Scotty adds.

Scotty recalled a story from long ago, "I took an apprentice here once, and rumors spread in the union that I took him to a gay bar. It's not a gay bar, it's an everyone bar."

Be on the lookout for an official 50-year anniversary gathering at Fric & Frac around Christmas time.

Fric & Frac is at 1700 W 39th St, Kansas City, MO 64111. P

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SLOW YOUR ROLL

SLOW ROLL SUBS BRING EAST-COAST HOAGIES TO KANSAS CITY

By Jordan Baranowski



Sandwiches are a funny food.

On one level, they're incredibly basic; a sandwich is one of the first true meals many people learn to put together for themselves.

On another level, sandwiches are intimidatingly complex—the amount of each ingredient, the order you place them, the type of bread you use, the toppings, the condiments—every sandwich is a unique expression of its creator, meticulously designed for the moment. The flavors meld together but stand on their own, the textures each get their own moment to shine before becoming a part of the larger symphony of each bite, and the last morsel always taunts you from among the crumbs at meal's end. Dare you leave it on the plate, inviting the scorn of all who see it: "C'mon, you couldn't even finish that last bite?"

At Slow Roll Subs, a new pop-up kitchen setting up shop across the metro, chef-owners Christian Castillo and Robin Harvey are perfecting a specific type of sandwich sorcery: the East Coast hoagie.

Castillo and Harvey met and earned their stripes at some of KC's most notable fine-dining establishments, but when they brainstormed their own kitchen, they decided to build a more casual, community-focused concept.

"Kansas City has tons of great sandwich options," Castillo says, "but there aren't many places that do justice to the hoagie roll. We wanted to create something that we couldn't get anywhere else in town."

Creating their perfect sandwich was an endeavor. First, they had to make the ideal hoagie roll, so Castillo and Harvey started R&D'ing different recipes on their own to find what worked and what didn't. Then they worked toward the middle, eventually finding a sweet spot that became the base of every Slow Roll sandwich.

The hoagie roll has a crisp exterior, enhanced with sesame seeds and cornmeal for a satisfying, shattery crunch with each bite. Just under that surface is the soft, pillowy interior, which cushions the tasty ingredients inside and keeps sauces and condiments from running all over your hands.

The name Slow Roll Subs name came from the work itself.

"Choosing this style of sandwich meant that every time we do a pop-up, it's going to eat up time," Castillo says. "We did 40 rolls for our first event, and sold out in about an hour. We bought heavy-duty equipment and doubled it for the next round. From mixing and proofing to shaping and baking, it takes about three days to make 80 rolls. It's intensive, especially because we're working our other jobs, but it's worth it for the quality we put out there."

Slow Roll Subs offers four sandwiches: two "always-ons" and two rotating sandwiches. The namesake Slow Roll is their version of an Italian. It's served cold and packed with mortadella, pepperoni, hot peppers, fresh mozzarella, mayo, and Slow Roll's standard dress of arugula, cucumber, shallot, and chimichurri. The other signature sandwich is the Picnic: smoked turkey, provolone cheese, dill dijonaise, standard dress, and wavy potato chips for extra crunch.

The team draws from an expansive list for its rotating menu options. "We always want to have at least one hot sandwich on the menu," Harvey says. "We want to be able to include as many locally sourced ingredients as we can, and we want to incorporate the identity of our host if possible. There are a lot of variables, but it gives us a ton of room to play with fun, unique, and out-there concepts."

In addition to sourcing as many local ingredients as possible, Harvey and Castillo create the sides, sauces, and condiments on the menu. Castillo says, "Our wavy chips are housemade, and they're perfect alongside or on top of your sandwich. We make our dijonnaise, we make the chimichurri that's part of our standard dress. It's all part of the flow that goes into creating good food. This is all food that we want to eat, and it's all food that we want to share."

So far, Slow Roll has held dinner at Barbacoa on Troost, where Harvey currently works as the sous chef, and at Jade Jaguar in the Crossroads. Their next takeover is scheduled for Sunday, November 15 at Sagebrush in Rosedale.

These nights typically begin at 5 p.m. and run until 9 p.m.—but sell out well before then. Slow Roll offers half and whole subs for $9 and $16, respectively. A side of housemade chips is $3 extra, and they're developing new sides for the future.

"We're trying new ideas all the time," Castillo says. "We create combinations we want to try but can't get here. We try to reverse-engineer flavors we've had and loved. We try to recapture those unbelievable flavors we've had on quick breaks at restaurants, when talented chefs are showing off what they can do. And then we want to share it with everyone."

Now that they've started to get the process down, the team at Slow Roll is cautiously looking ahead. They just had local designer Claire Henry create branding and logo work for the business to help bring it to life, and they're starting to talk a little bit about the ultimate goal: their own location.

"The response to the pop-ups is great, and we're going to keep it up for a while," Harvey says, "but we definitely want to have a Slow Roll Subs shop sometime down the line. Seeing how positive everyone has been about what we're making is really special, and it's definitely made us think that we're in this for the long haul."

Until they find a place to call home, Slow Roll Subs plans to keep hosting pop-ups around town. The duo is in talks with other locations around Kansas City, and they want to continue hosting at their existing stable of partners like Barbacoa, Jade Jaguar, and Sagebrush.

Keep an eye on their Instagram to see if they'll appear in your neighborhood—and get there early. P



Photos courtesy of Slow Roll Subs

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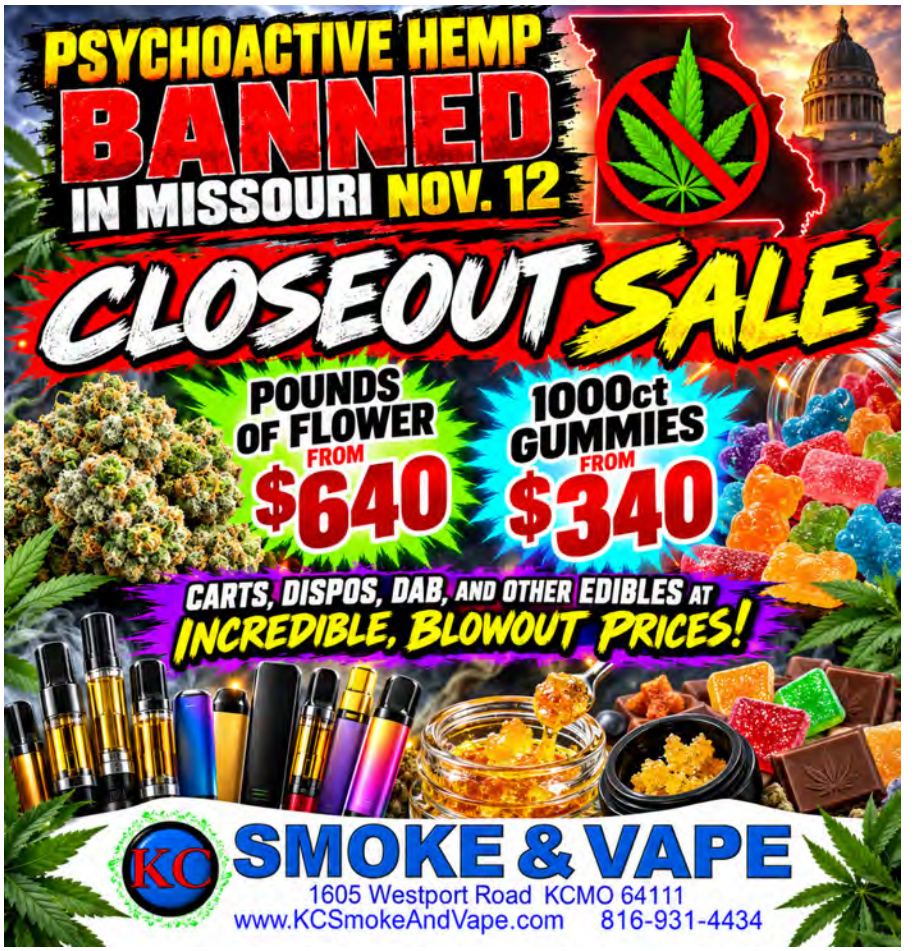
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