

PEOPLE WHO DO COOL THINGS



Crafting might conjure up images of Aunt Marge's old crocheted Christmas confections, but there's a much wittier world of handmade goods, made by a new generation of hip design-conscious types with a tongue-and-cheek take on the domestic arts. A sizable community of Twin Cities talent has been forming, quietly and steadily. But the problem had always been where to find them, until now. —Megan Kaplan

Who: Project manager Tracy Parker, plus pals Trish Hoskins, Ellen Mauro, Willa Martinez, Kristen Himsl Hunter, Eireann Lorsung, and Chrissy Barr. The crafters met at Hoskins's Northeast Minneapolis shop Crafty Planet (2318 Lowry Ave. NE, Mpls., 612-788-1180) last year to organize what they tout as the "Twin Cities only indie craft fair." They've since become the de facto group at the hub of the burgeoning local scene.

What: Their No Coast Craft-O-Rama was a smashing success and the enterprising women have formed two official groups: Crafters Local 612, which plans the fair, and the St. Paul Craft Mafia, one of thirty-four mafias across the country modeled after the original Austin Craft

Mafia, a Texas crafter collective built on a strength-in-numbers approach.

Why: "There was no place for us before," says Lorsung, a clothing and accessories designer. "There were the high-end art fairs, but not everyone can shell out \$1,500." Parker, who says she failed miserably at selling her vintage-print cards amid the "country-cute stuff," asked Hoskins to organize No Coast with her, and soon after, the others joined. "The success of the Austin Craft Mafia was a Cinderella story," recalls Himsl Hunter, who sells patterned totes. "Those girls were quitting their day jobs, and I thought, 'Oh my god, I want to be on the ground level of this. I was so on board.'"

Philosophy: More consumers want to buy locally, and they want handmade items. "It's progressive to support arts businesses," says Lorsung. "People think, 'If it's made by hand, it's made for me.'" Hoskins agrees: "Sure, consumption is great—I still spend half my paycheck at Target—but handmade gifts are more meaningful."

The Scene: When Crafty Planet

opened in 2003, Hoskins wondered if the town was big enough for alternative crafters. Now, local retailers like Quince on St. Paul's Grand Avenue and the Design Collective in Uptown are all about featuring handmade goods; another fair, St. Paul Craftstravaganza, debuted in July 8, and there's even a Minneapolis branch of Craft Mafia.

Up Next: The group is working on Craft Mafia membership (new members are elected and have to be the sole owners of independent businesses). "We want to create a one-stop web shop," says Tracy. "Buyers probably don't want to talk to all seventy-five of us individually—they want to go to a website and browse first." Himsl Hunter sums up the prospects: "The sky's the limit as far as what we can accomplish as a group. It's when you work together that good things start happening."

NO COAST CRAFT-O-RAMA
December 2 at Midtown Global Market;
seventy-five vendors; nocoastcraft.com

CRAFTSTRAVAGANZA
Summer 2007, craftstravaganza.com

saintpaulcraftmafia.com
minneapoliscraftmafia.com