

June 16, 2022 05:45 AM | 3 HOURS AGO

Sip a cocktail on a 1920s leather chair at Architectural Artifacts' new shop

After a yearslong closure, the 35-year-old Ravenswood antique store is reopening next month in the Near North Side with food and beverage offerings.

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Courtesy of Architectural Artifacts

Architectural Artifacts

Architectural Artifacts, the globally sourced antique shop that occupied a space in Ravenswood for decades, is reopening next month in the Near North neighborhood. And this time, there will be cocktails.

The new location at 1065 N. Orleans St. will have a cafe and wine bar, serving beverages, pizza and light bites for customers to sip and munch on as they peruse the antiques. It is set to open mid-July.

The building was once a school and has a midcentury gymnasium that can be rented out for weddings or other events. The rooms that were once classrooms can be rented out as well. They have been outfitted like individual shops, and customers can pop in and sit on an antique chair while having wine. There will also be auxiliary bars throughout the building.

“You can order your latte (or) a beer and a pizza and go eat it on 1920s leather French club chairs. . . .Or, you’ll eat it off an 18th-century Dutch farm table,” said founder Stuart Grannen. “You can go sit in a cafe. We just bought a cafe in Munich, with all the cool chairs and table and everything.”



The hope is that a new cafe opening in Chicago will come buy those sets and use them in their own establishment. That keeps the inventory rotating.

Grannen is working with Robby and Debra Baum of Bedderman Lodging on the business. Robby Baum said he and his wife used to visit Architectural Artifacts' old location on the weekends, walk around and get inspired. But sometimes they'd get hungry or thirsty as they browsed.



Courtesy of Architectural Artifacts

Having food and beverage offerings is way to expand the customer base, too, Grannen said.

“Architectural Artifacts became a destination, not just for the stuff. Not everybody wants to spend \$10,000 on something, but everybody did like to come and check it out,” Grannen said. “We want to continue that—and keep them there a little bit longer with pizza and beer and coffee.”

Architectural Artifacts has been selling furniture online since it closed its former 80,000-square-foot location at 4325 N. Ravenswood Ave. about two-and-a-half years ago.

An archaeologist by training, Grannen founded the company in 1987. He said he spent childhood weekends in the 1960s and '70s frequenting antique shops on the East Coast and loved it, but he always found their ambiance a little stuffy. The old furniture should be sat in and enjoyed, and children shouldn't have to worry about not touching an item, he said.



Courtesy of Architectural Artifacts

Now, Grannen travels the world sourcing items for his shop. He goes to South America, to markets in Buenos Aires. He visits Europe five or six times a year, frequenting antique fairs like the one in Parma, Italy. The antique markets in Europe are “not anything like anybody in America can imagine,” he said.

“A flea market in America to me is a bunch of old tube socks and some crabby old guys with an old pickup truck. The industry here is really pretty sad. But in Europe, it’s a real thing, and it’s very intense and high stress level, high value,” he said. “We just go around with a suitcase full of cash and buy stuff.”



At Architectural Artifacts’ new location, QR codes will show customers videos about where Grannen found the item, and how he got it back to Chicago.

With less space at the new place—it’s 40,000 square feet, with an additional 5,000 outside—Grannen said he “really upped the inventory game.” Now the items on sale will be “cooler, bigger, more outrageous, more design oriented,” he said. People want items they can’t find anywhere else, and Grannen thinks he can

deliver.



Courtesy of Architectural Artifacts

The shop will have more than \$10 million worth of inventory, Grannen said, and it is working to hire a team of about 30 people.

Supply chain issues have become a problem—Architectural Artifacts has had containers full of inventory sitting in Italian ports for three or four months now. But those same supply chain issues, coupled with increased pandemic demand, have also [driven up antiques sales](#) stateside.

“With supply chain issues, production of furniture, people amazingly have been turning to older pieces, antiques,” Robby Baum said. “People are really leaning into buying things with meaning to them.”

Other business partners include Luke Blahnik, owner of Avondale Bowl. Andrew Holladay, executive chef at Lula Cafe in Logan Square, will head up the kitchen at the cafe, which will be open from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. It’s a cafe and wine bar. Pizza and small bites start at 11 a.m. The building will also have a pickleball court and two outdoor patios, one of which connects to the gym for private events. In the fall, a speakeasy-style bar is set to open downstairs.



And no worries if there’s a spill on a centuries-old product, Grannen said.

“Nobody needs any of these things. It’s all a luxury. Who are we to say, ‘Oh, you can’t sit in that, you can’t touch that.’ It’s fun. It was sat in and touched its entire life. It might as well be now,” he said. “If you spill some pizza on it, we’ll just clean it up. Whatever.”