

L & D

15 A fresh spin on style at Davenport boutique



Photos by Leslie Klipsch
Owners of L&D15, David Balluff (left) and Lopeti Etu.

BY LESLIE KLIPSCH

On a cold, wintry evening last month, a crowd of over 200 stepped out of the frigid air and into the warm and glowing L&D15, a newish boutique in downtown Davenport.

Those assembled ranged from hipsters to academics to creatives to older art enthusiasts, and all seemed to enjoy a smooth vibe and the bright, bold paintings of artist David Houk, all thanks to David Balluff and Lopeti Etu, the two men behind the charming and eclectic L&D15.

The event was the result of the owners' commitment to creating community and nurturing area artists. Each month, Mr.

Balluff and Mr. Etu select an artist and help curate a meaningful exhibition to be shown in the beautiful L&D15 retail space. "We bring in artists that we believe in and who fit in with what we're trying to build," said Mr. Etu, a milliner whose own work has been featured in magazines like Marie Claire, O Magazine, and, mostly recently, the French fashion-publication Factice Magazine. Mr. Etu works closely with artists to produce a compelling exhibition showcasing their talent. "We want them to succeed. We want to help in their journey," he says with a generous smile.

On a weekday afternoon, the atmosphere at L&D15 is more subdued, but the

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hospitality and energy is much the same. When I walked in to browse the shop's eclectic selection one Wednesday just after lunch, I was immediately welcomed and offered an L&D whiskey (whiskey, raspberry, strawberry, and cucumber) to enjoy while I perused the store's fantastic collection of clothing, housewares, hats, jewelry and art, all housed in a stunning space comprised of vintage and modern elements.

"We think there's something for everyone here. Our clientele isn't based on a demographic, it's simply people who appreciate and enjoy a well-made item that is not mass-produced. We feel that people have become so distanced from the products they wear and the products that they use everyday," said Mr. Balluff, a graphic designer who is passionate about the high environmental and social cost of inexpensive, cheaply produced fashion.

"Here shoppers can meet the people making their items and have a connection to it. They can even customize what they really want. Whether it's a T-shirt design or the band on their hat, we can tailor it to a specific person. In some ways that's revolutionary," Mr. Balluff explained.

The owners' favorites

"There really is nothing in here that we don't love," said Mr. Etu, noting that merchandise is ever changing. Part of this is due to the owners' distinctive sense of style and fluidity, and part is their willingness to

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embrace what artists are currently creating. Mr. Balluff and Mr. Etu hold occasional open calls inviting artists, designers and creators to present their work for consideration — a practice that keeps their inventory fresh. "I love the mixture we have of local artists and artists from other parts of the world. We have a great play going on between local artists making quality dress shirts, for instance, and the high-end clothing coming out of New York," Mr. Balluff explained.

My favorites

As Mr. Balluff spoke passionately about the ethics of fashion and Mr. Etu remarked candidly about making the move from NYC to the Quad-Cities while hand stitching a



custom-made hat while we spoke, I started to believe my favorite thing about L&D15 was the owners. But after poking around the store, I found the merchandise to be as charming as the pair of owner-artists who opened the shop in late 2014. I fell in love with a cranberry San & Soni sheath dress, and the understated Me & Ro line of recycled sterling silver jewelry and conflict-free stones struck me as subtle, reverent and beautiful. In addition to admiring the clothing, jewelry, and beautiful handmade journals, the array of colorful, gorgeous hats left me dreaming of a life that required more opportunity for fabulous headwear.



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Why you should visit L&D15

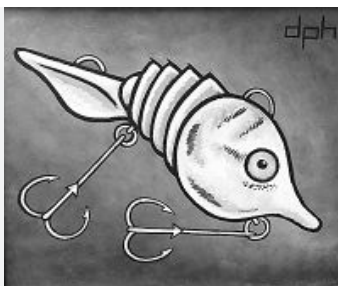
“We want to have people come in and feel welcome ... to feel like they can hang out and have a glass of wine and talk,” said Mr. Balluff, reiterating that what they’ve created is a store housing a new style of retail that everyone can enjoy. It’s also worth a visit to simply check out the brilliant and industrious way the pair uses the space. I love the floors and fixtures, and adore the ever-changing, attention-grabbing window displays, which are art installations themselves.

Mr. Balluff and Mr. Etu both believe that the store’s downtown Davenport location is in an area that’s becoming an arts district of sorts. “It’s on the cusp,” Mr. Balluff, who grew up in Bettendorf, said. “There is so much to offer here. If you’re a bicyclist, if you’re into organic food, if you’re into the arts or theater ... it’s all here in the heart of Davenport. It’s a forward-thinking part of town and has become an incubator for new ways to engage residents and consumers. There are so many beautiful buildings downtown and so many opportunities to be had here.”

And don’t let the downtown parking deter you from visiting L&D15. “There’s unzoned parking on 2nd street. We’ll carry you from your car to the door,” Mr. Etu said with a laugh.

The details

Learn more about L&D15 on Facebook ([facebook.com/LandD15](https://www.facebook.com/LandD15)) or on the boutique’s website (landd15.com), which



The work of two talented local artists will be on display at L&D15 throughout the month of March. David Houk’s painting exhibit, Bind, will be featured until March 15 (a piece is shown above). Mr. Houk is an artist and art educator at Monroe Elementary School in Davenport and the colorful paintings presented in the L&D15 exhibit are steeped in memories of family and childhood.

On March 21, the work of Scott Klarkowski will occupy the space. The opening reception for his exhibit, That What Is Not, will take place on Saturday, March 21, from 7-10 p.m.

features events, photos and online retail.

L&D15 is located at 520 W. 2nd St. in Davenport (not far from Lock and Dam 15, for which it was named) and is open daily from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m.

Each month in The Gold Standard, Leslie Klipsch, a freelance writer and editor based in Davenport, shines a spotlight on the gems of the Quad-Cities area — for Gold Book readers. She enjoys reading, cooking, spending time with her husband and three young children and exploring all that the Quad-Cities has to offer. Read more of Leslie at leslieklipsch.com.

