The Craft Yeti, mascot of Green With Indie, visits The Foundrie in Chesterfield Mall just outside St. Louis. The Foundrie is one of the rare brick-and-mortar stores that focus on indie arts.

MISSOURI ARTS COUNCIL • MARCH 2014
The Untamed World of Indie Art and Craft
by Barbara MacRobie

“So we’re making an apron,” said Jessi Cerutti, “which is a traditional idea, a woman’s garment to wear while doing things in the house. But we’re going to use funky fabric with skulls on it.”

The skull apron, Jessi told us, has become an emblem of a movement that is rippling through the nation. This movement plays with irony, cares deeply about the environment, and empowers do-it-yourself creativity. It’s so new—it started to jell after the turn of the century—that it’s still going by several different names, though “alternative” and “indie” are becoming the front-runners. Jessi is one of Missouri’s ringleaders. Since 2005, she and a team of like-minded spirits have run the Rock N Roll Craft Show in St. Louis that takes place every Thanksgiving weekend. The show is one of several events in Missouri that identify themselves with this zesty artistic spirit.

We talked with artists who organize such events and artists who participate in them, looked at art from the events, and queried statewide resources to explore the wild new world of Missouri’s “indie” art and craft.

What is “indie”? The Rock N Roll Craft Show calls itself “St. Louis’ original alternative art, craft, and music event.” Alternative to what? Another annual St. Louis event is the Green With Indie Craft Show in early March. “Indie” is short for “independent.” Independent of what?

Both Jessi Cerutti and the organizers of Green With Indie, April Tate and Rachel Shelton, contrasted their shows with what they called “school cafeteria” and “city hall-type” fairs, even while they stressed that they valued such shows and the works sold at them. “I grew up with country crafters—my mother and grandmother—and that was such a great environment for me,” said Rachel. “But even then I noticed the demographic. Indie’s appeal is much broader, an awesome melting pot of ages and backgrounds, from young college kids all the way up.”
The art is also an alternative, said April, to what can be called “fine crafts”—“pieces often with a higher price point, that take a long time and years of very specific training to create,” she said. “I think indie is a bridge between fine crafts and country crafts.”

“Fine crafts” have been championed in Missouri since 1989 by The Best of Missouri Hands, formally known as the Missouri Artisans Association, a nonprofit statewide resource “dedicated to the development and recognition of Missouri artists and artisans through education, interaction and encouragement.”

“Our organization tends to have two main groups,” said Executive Director Andrea Quiroz-Jira, herself a jewelry artist. “There are the older ‘hippies’—socially conscious, caring about the environment. We have another group older than that, devoted to the traditional arts like blacksmithing, being self-sustaining, living off the land. When I think of indie artists, I think of a younger group, people who are foodies, into music, who like steampunk and craft beer and tattoos! In some ways, I think ‘indie’ has become a marketing term.”

The word’s history bears Andrea out. The term arose in the 1920s to describe film production companies that were not part of the Hollywood studio system. By the ’40s, the word was being used for independent record labels, and by the ’80s, for music issued by such labels. The top definition by the number of “likes” in the online Urban Dictionary, posted by “kidAndrew,” is “an obscure form of rock which you only learn about from someone slightly more hip than yourself.”

A year later, a poster called “CraftRevolution”—a significant name considering our purposes—commented: “For many, [indie] has come to symbolize originality and forward-thinking, especially in music and design. By this definition, indie is any business or designer that is not associated with a large company. Indie can also define the consumer who chooses to support small business, independent record labels, and handmade items rather than shopping at big-box stores.”

That very much describes the spirit of the people who make and the people who buy Missouri’s indie art. It also suggests why indie art is intertwined with other 21st-century trends such as DIY (do it yourself) culture and environmentally responsible “green” practices.

“There’s a thing in our culture that is making us want to support more locally and ethically created items,” said Rachel. The name Green With Indie makes her show’s focus explicit, and the description expands on it: “All the wares are earth-friendly, salvaged, upcycled, recycled, homegrown, homemade, revamped, or refurbished.”

A Kansas City-area event that describes itself as “handmade eco-indie” is the Zeleny Arts & Crafts Fair that in 2014 is taking place on the last Friday of every month March through July in Parkville, a historic river town north of downtown.
“Zeleny” is Czech for “green.” “We wanted a name that was memorable and different,” said Alexis Bechtold, who runs the show with Amy Folkedahl. “One day my sister and I got onto Google Translate and just started looking up ‘green.’ When we found Zeleny, we said, ‘Hey, that has a Z in it and we can actually pronounce it!’”

Kansas City’s one-day indie event in early August also has a distinctive title: Strawberry Swing, named for the ebullient song by the British alternative rock band Coldplay. “I woke up one morning with the song in my head,” said founder Heather Baker, “and I thought that was a perfect name for a summer fair.”

From makers to masterminds

The seven indie event organizers with whom we talked all started out simply by making things themselves. “I was one of those weird people who crafted things for no reason,” said Meghan McGlynn, a lawyer who is another of Rock N Roll’s organizers. “I’d take glass marbles with one flat side, cut words out of magazines, and glue a magnet on the back to turn them into refrigerator magnets in groups of four that made little phrases. You see such things everywhere these days, but not so much back in 2005. I never thought about selling them. But when I got involved with the Rock N Roll Craft Show, I saw I was not the only person like me!”

Jessi Cerutti told us that the Rock N Roll Craft Show began when she and three crafting friends “couldn’t find a place that was selling the kind of stuff we were doing.” Jessi makes wallets out of plastic bags. (She also makes fiber art and prints, and teaches printmaking at the University of Missouri-St. Louis and St. Louis Community College at Forest Park.)

Alexis Bechtold makes jewelry and mosaic pictures from discarded gift cards. “I got the idea when I worked at Borders. They had beautiful gift cards. Every day someone would come in, use up their card, and tell us, ‘Just throw it away.’ I’d think, ‘But it’s so pretty!’ Now everybody and their dog—almost literally, PetSmart has cool cards—is saving cards for me!” Her fellow “A-Team” member, Amy Folkedahl, likes to refurbish old picture frames “and a bunch of random stuff.” Heather Baker began by making aprons and children’s clothing from vintage fabrics and now focuses on mixed crafts with upcycled paper.

April Tate combines making dolls and stuffed animals via her company Riley Construction (named after her family’s carpentry business in Kentucky) with a full-time job and pursuit of a teaching degree at Webster University, where her Green With Indie show takes place. Her co-organizer Rachel Shelton spends 40 hours a week with her Sew Good and Trendy business, making handbags from recycled materials. “I have a degree in engineering,” she said, “but I left my job to stay home with my children. When my second daughter was born, I needed to come up with something that was an outlet for me independent of my family. Now Sew Good and Trendy provides our family’s ‘fun money’ for extra activities and vacations.”

Magnet quartet by Meghan McGlynn; glass marbles and magazine snippets

Swimming Sarah by April Tate. The 16” cloth dolls are organic cotton, wool felt, and fleece. Their faces are hand-embroidered. “Sarah is named for my fabulous grandmother,” said April, “who rocked this beachy look.”
Internet jump-start

Zeleny and Strawberry Swing began in 2011. Green With Indie began in 2009. The Rock N Roll Craft Show is Missouri’s prime mover, going back to 2005, the same year a website was founded that would have a profound effect on the growth of indie arts and crafts culture: Etsy.

Etsy’s mammoth precursor was eBay, founded in 1995, which revolutionized online commerce for ordinary people by enabling them to sell to a worldwide audience without having to set up their own individual websites. But eBay covered everything from video games to car parts. Etsy, on the other hand, put a specific twist on the online marketplace model: it focused solely on vintage items, craft supplies, and handmade goods. “Suddenly,” said April, “a lot of people had a wonderful tool to sell their stuff.” (The name was created by co-founder Robert Kalin because he “wanted to build the brand from scratch” and liked the way it sounded like “etsi” in Italian, which means “oh, yes.”)

Many Missouri indie artists have Etsy shops. One is Maha Libdeh in Columbia. She makes picture frames, wall art, and cases for electronic devices such as Kindles and iPads out of discarded hardback books.

“IT started with a blog my friend JC and I saw,” she told us, “about a guy who took a box cutter and cut out the pages of a book called How to Feed Your Man, put a Kindle keyboard inside it, and gave it to his girlfriend. So it looked really offensive, but when she opened it, there was the Kindle! It was primitively done because he wasn’t serious, but I thought, what if you could actually do that—put your Kindle inside a book and read it?”

Maha and JC started their ReAuthored company in 2011. “Our first few attempts were pitiful!” she said. “I remember sitting in my backyard with a scroll saw—we had no earthly idea how hard it was to cut a book! Then we did a ton of research and figured out how to make it work.”

Maha gets her raw materials from the book sales that libraries conduct when they deaccession some of their collections. “In the closing hours of the sale, you can get a whole box of books for three or four dollars,” she said. “It’s great because the library uses the money to buy more...
books or fund their programs. I will get a U-Haul trailer and go to sales in Kansas City and St. Louis and Springfield. I’ve got an insane number of books in my house!”

Born and raised in Joplin, Maha came to Columbia for college 12 years ago and never left, she said. She became sole owner of ReAuthored in 2013. “It gave me a decent income,” she said, “but I recently also got a full-time job with an insurance agent because month-to-month sales on ReAuthored weren’t stable. That made me crazy sometimes and took the fun out of it. Now I’m really enjoying it again because I’m not relying on it. And I’m still making good money from it.”

Maha sells her transformed books on her Etsy shop and her own website ReAuthored.com, at indie shows including the Rock N Roll Craft Show, and at two brick and mortar stores: the Poppy contemporary craft and folk art store in Columbia, and the West Elm furniture and gift store in the Saint Louis Galleria mall.

**Prizewinning photos, functional shirts**

Like Maha, Matthew Hemminghaus sells his work through his Etsy shop, his own website TheFarmhaus.com, and indie shows including Rock N Roll and Green With Indie. He makes hand-printed T-shirts. He creates the designs, hand-carves them onto a rubber block, rolls ink onto the block, and presses the block onto the fabric one shirt at a time. He is also a photographer. In 2013, he won First Place for the work he exhibited at one of the state’s premier mainstream art festivals, Kansas City’s Plaza Art Fair, which was founded in 1932 and now features more than 250 artists from around the country.

“That was quite a shocker, to win as the new guy,” Matthew told us. “I’m new at the art fair scene. I have a group of friends in Hannibal and northeast Missouri who talked me into doing this stuff. I’ve never taken a photo class but I have a fine arts degree from the University of Illinois. I got my first digital camera about four years ago, and I love documenting the farm where I live.”

Matthew’s prizewinning work was his series of photos of chickens he raises on his Vandalia farm. They are no ordinary nature photos: Matthew places the chickens in hand-built miniature sets.

*Bad Rooster* stands on a rabbit skin rug in an earthy background that “hit at this chicken’s conquering nature…just like an outdoorsman survivalist.” *Family* shows a hen and four chicks amidst native midsummer wildflowers plus a railroad spike and biscuit cutter “which represent the two sides of my grandparents’ families.”
Matthew builds the sets in his garage using found and collected objects. He prints limited editions of his photos using archival inks on heavyweight cotton rag inkjet paper, mounts them on acid-free foam core, matts them with cotton rag museum board, and frames them in his recycled barn wood frames.

A native of north St. Louis County, Matthew worked for several years in Los Angeles as an art handler before moving back to Missouri in 2001. He and his three brothers co-own the farm, though Matthew is the only one who lives there, “doing my best to live off the land.” The chicken photo series evolved when Matthew tried to document his chicken breeding effort with a photographic family tree. “It got really confusing really fast,” he said. “But while I was working on it, I started putting the chickens against a back-drop with a couple of recognizable objects. I thought, ‘Wait, I can take this as far as I want!’”

The T-shirts, which have nature themes, also grew out of the farm. “My brothers and I have an annual party on the farm. In 2009, I told everyone to bring light-colored shirts. I made a block, and after we had our fish fry and marshmallow roast, I printed up souvenirs. I was going to do a new block every year, but I didn’t feel like waiting that long. So I started cranking them out.”

Matthew took some of his shirts to Schlafly Art Outside, an annual three-day fair held at the Bottleworks restaurant and beer production location of Saint Louis Brewery™. There he met several members of the ShowMe Etsy group, one of the local online communities that Etsy fosters. Now, he said, the Etsy artists keep him updated. “The shirts are nothing I set out to do, but it’s great that I can go to a show and sell 30 shirts in a day, make a little cash. It’s good to go into the city for a weekend show and over-socialize. Then I come back out here to the farm where it’s nice and quiet.” As he wrote in his blog on TheFarmhaus.com, “This is the life I have chosen and this is the life I love.”

**Telling conjunction of arts and crafts**

With his wall-hung photos and his wearable T-shirts, Matthew epitomizes the philosophical minefields that lurk within the words “art” and “craft,” “artist” and “crafter.”

Jessi laughed when we read her the descriptions we had found of two out-of-state indie shows: the Pullman Memorial Alternative Craft Fair in Albion, New York that features “alternative artists and indie crafters,” and the Detroit Urban Craft Fair that features “handmade crafters and indie artists.”

“Oh yes—if you’re having a show, you have to establish some kind of language!” she said. “We’ve always used the terms ‘crafters’ and ‘artists’ interchangeably. Internally, we just call them all ‘vendors.’”

“Craft” actually has a much older pedigree than “art.” Coming from a Germanic root meaning “strength,” it entered the English language so early that the contexts in which it first surfaces are barely recognizable as English. The first written appearance that the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) unearthed was from the year 888. “Art” came on board from Old French through Latin in the early 13th century. “Craftsman” showed up in writing in 1362, while “artist” wasn’t documented until 1581 (“artisan” beat it, appearing in 1538). The very first meaning of both “art” and “craft” was the same: “skill.” Even in modern dictionaries like *Merriam-Webster*, the first synonym for “art” is “craft”; the first synonym for “craft” is “art.”

“The definition of craft?” said Saskya Emmink-Byron. “That is a loaded question!” Saskya is development and communications director of Craft Alliance, a St. Louis nonprofit that since 1964 has been supporting contemporary craft through exhibitions, education, and community programs. “We don’t have a definition for craft that we use. It’s actually something we ask our guest interviewees in *The Musings*, a part of our newsletter. The question is ‘Craft to me means…’ The answers continue to surprise and inspire me. I am afraid I cannot give you any closure on that question!”

Nobody was more keenly aware of how the definitions we make for “arts” and “crafts” both reveal and crystallize our attitudes toward art in our daily lives than the impassioned reformers who first put the “and” between the two words.

“The description of the original Arts and Crafts Movement really fits the indie movement,” said Alexis. “Those artists wanted to bring art into all parts of everyday life, not just hang it on the walls in the living room.”

As the Industrial Revolution took firm hold in Britain in the first half of the 19th century, people became increasingly alarmed by some of its effects. With most everyday objects being produced by factories, the standards of design, workmanship, and working conditions plummeted. In 1887, a group of friends took action by founding a society to promote the dignity of handmade work in all its forms. One of them, the bookbinder T.J. Cobden-Sanderson, proposed the name “Arts and Crafts.”

Today the coupling “arts and crafts” is commonplace in everything from festival names to summer...
camp activities. But at its birth, it was radical. The language in this statement by Walter Crane, the founding president of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society for its first three years, is Edwardian, but its in-your-face assertion of the worth of craft comes through loud and clear: “We desired first of all to give opportunity to the designer and craftsman to exhibit their work to the public for its artistic interest and thus to assert the claims of decorative art and handicraft to attention equally with the painter of easel pictures, hitherto almost exclusively associated with the term art in the public mind.”

A designer and book illustrator, Crane wrote that declaration in 1905 in his book *Ideals in Art: Papers Theoretical, Practical, Critical*, recollecting how a full-blown movement evolved from his friends’ “fireside discussions.” He continued: “Ignoring the artificial distinction between Fine and Decorative art, we felt that the real distinction was what we conceived to be between good and bad art, or false and true taste and methods in handicraft...while everything depended upon the spirit as well as the skill and fidelity with which the conception was expressed...as well as of the relation of the work to use and life.”

As Meghan put it, “I don’t think art implies something high and craft something low.”

Meghan echoed Walter Crane’s concern for spirit and skill when she said, “We do draw lines for our show. You can’t just glue something together. You have to change the nature of it, put your imprint on it.” Rock N Roll, Green With Indie, Strawberry Swing, and Zeleny are juried; applications must meet quality standards.

Rock N Roll never has trouble finding indie artists that meet those standards, Jessi said. “There must be a couple of hundred people doing indie crafts in the St. Louis area alone.” High quality does not have to translate into expensive, and Missouri’s shows all feature a variety of price points. “We don’t want to hear people saying, ‘That’s a beautiful piece but I can’t afford it,’” said Amy.

The indie movement has unleashed creativity, enabled artists/crafters to earn money with their work, and put that work directly into people’s hands. “It’s about getting awesome art to people who want it,” said Alexis. “It’s about bringing art into places in our homes and lives where we don’t usually think about it.”

Trophies by Chris Lucas, St. Louis, at Rock N Roll. Chris is one of the show’s organizers. The wood is shop scraps, cut with a scroll saw. The heads—“at least the ones his 8-year-old son doesn’t feel he has to ‘save’!” said Jessi—come from thrift stores.
Our indie sources

In chronological order, these are the four annual indie events that were our main guides. Their Facebook Pages are very active and function as mini-websites.

**Green With Indie Craft Show**
2014: Saturday, March 8, 10 AM–5 PM
Webster Groves (St. Louis) | Webster University Grant Gym
- greenwithindiecraftshow.com and Facebook Page
- stlouiscraftmafia.com and Facebook Page

The one-day show features more than 65 vendors of handmade and vintage eco-friendly items, food trucks whose goodies can be taken back inside to be consumed in the Yeti Café, a sit-down “lounge” set up by The Refind Room furniture store, music by a DJ from independent community music station 88.1 KDHX-FM, a photo booth “where people can take silly pictures with props,” and free admission. “We are family-friendly,” said April. “The show is very much for all ages, and tons of people bring their kids.” The show takes place on the campus of Webster University in the century-old suburb of Webster Groves. “I love the gym,” said Rachel. “It has that vintage throwback craft fair feeling.”

**Zeleny Arts & Crafts Fair**
2014: Friday, March 28, April 25, May 30, June 27, July 25, 6-9 PM
Parkville | Parkville Artisan’s Studio
- zelenyfair.org and Facebook Page

For 2014, Zeleny is changing from a single annual one-day show to three smaller shows on the final Friday of March through July at a downtown Parkville that holds many art and craft classes. “We wanted to do more shows so we could bring together more artists and build a network and community,” said Amy. “The indie scene is very inclusive. We talk with Heather at Strawberry Swing all the time. People are more than happy to share how they make things—there’s no sense of ‘I want to keep my trade secrets to myself.’ And most artists love to interact with the people who are buying their goods.” In 2013 Zeleny also mounted a show in Alexis’ hometown of Springfield; Amy and Alexis are looking for a new location there for 2014. All the profits from Zeleny’s shows (what is left from vendor fees after expenses have been met) benefit two non-profits that celebrate the outdoors: Heartland Center in Parkville, which runs summer camps and outdoor adventures for children and families, and Graydon Springs Outdoor Legacy in Polk County.
Strawberry Swing
2014: August 3, 10:30 AM–4:30 PM
Kansas City | Alexander Majors Historic House, State Line Road
• thestrawberryswing.org and Facebook Page
• Coldplay’s video of their Strawberry Swing

In the barn and on the lawn of the restored 1856 home of the creator of the Pony Express is Kansas City’s free midsummer indie event. The show has grown every year since Heather Baker founded it in 2011, with more than 65 artists in 2013. “We have live music, and this year we’re adding a kids’ vendor area where kids can apply to sell for free, so they can learn what it’s like to be an entrepreneur,” she said. The internet that has fueled the indie art and craft movement in so many ways also makes it possible for Heather to organize Strawberry Swing from her home in Estes Park, Colorado. She’s in the West with her husband and children for the sake of her husband’s job, but she still loves Kansas City and comes back the week before the show each year. “I have family in Kansas City so I do have people who’ll pick up flyers from the printer!” she said. “And the artists in the show help out.”

Rock N Roll Craft Show
2014: Friday-Sunday, November 28-30, 11 AM–6 PM
St. Louis | Location TBA
• rocknrollcraftshow.com and Facebook Page

“We picked the name just for the fun of it,” Jessi Cerutti said. “Then it hit us— ‘Hey, we can have bands!’” Missouri’s largest indie show now features a dozen bands and more than 120 makers. “We create a festival atmosphere,” Jessi said. “We know that people want to be with their families on Thanksgiving weekend and that not everybody likes to shop, so we try to entertain everybody.” Admission is low, $10 for “Red Carpet Black Friday” and $3 for Saturday or Sunday. The crafts are not displayed booth by booth per artist, but are grouped by type of item such as clothing, housewares, jewelry, and holiday, like a department store. Buyers take their purchases all at once to one of six registers. “The departments are a lot of work to set up, but I think it helps our vendors sell a lot more stuff,” Jessi said. “Because we have no booth fees and only a $35 application fee, we are accessible to crafters just starting out, who may have only a shoebox full of stuff.”
Other Missouri shows

The indie arts scene is so new, lively, and fluid that “it’s hard to keep up!” Jessi said. “In St. Louis, you see more people out there exhibiting at more venues than they used to.” In our search, we also encountered these 2014 events whose descriptions had distinctly indie implications.

Upcoming

- **Arts Rolla: Going Green.** March 7-31, The Centre. Arts Rolla’s first-ever exhibit of “works of art that are computer generated, incorporate used or found items into their works, or are made completely from recycled or items that would ultimately end up in a landfill.”

- **Gypsy Market Royale.** April 4, Bauer Event Space, Crossroads Arts District, Kansas City. Other dates and locations TBA. Pop-up markets by “a collective of local artists and crafters offering hand-made and vintage collections of gypsy-tastic creations.”

- **Schlafly Art Outside.** September 5-7, Schlafly Bottleworks, Maplewood. Established in 2004, “this was part of the inspiration for our show,” said Jessi. The event features “quality art, music, and plenty of tasty food and drink from Schlafly Beer.”

- **Artropy.** December 6, Regional Arts Commission, St. Louis. “An exceptional art and craft boutique featuring handmade goods created by over 30 local St. Louis artists.” Not an official STL Craft Mafia show, but Rachel Shelton is one of the organizers.

Annual? These events may be held again this year.

- **Craftoberfest.** October 17 in 2013, October 18 in 2012, Urban Chestnut Brewing Company, St. Louis. “Lantern-lit night market featuring local craft beer, live music, and the very best handmade and vintage goods in our fair city.”

- **Craft Spree.** December 12 in 2013, Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis. “Top local artists, artisans, and crafters, all dedicated to the handmade,” with live music and entertainment.

How to find more indie

Everyone we interviewed lamented that there were no comprehensive resources, online or otherwise, that provided one-stop information-shopping about artists and events in Missouri involved in indie arts and crafts. “I have had a difficult time finding a calendar, local or nationwide, that lists indie craft fairs specifically,” Heather said. “There was one in 2011, but they have since stopped listing.” But with some crafty searching and artful imagination, you can find your way to indie arts.

Find an art/craft fair. Though a few brick and mortar stores carry work by indie artists, most indie work is found at fairs, either indie-dedicated fairs or more traditional fairs with indie artists sprinkled in. Along with the calendar sections of your local print, broadcast, and online media, these festival-focused websites will help you pinpoint nearby events. Alexis pointed out that general-purpose eco-friendly fairs, which often center around Earth Day on April 22, are especially likely to feature indie work.

- [artsandcraftshows-usa.com](http://artsandcraftshows-usa.com) – has a Missouri section; a small list but covers the entire state
- [artcraftshowbusiness.com](http://artcraftshowbusiness.com) – a mixed bag of shows and festivals; has a Missouri section
- [artfaircalendar.com](http://artfaircalendar.com) – has a Midwest section that includes St. Louis and Kansas City
- [findfestival.com](http://findfestival.com) – all sorts of festivals including art fairs; has a Missouri section
- [missouriartsandcrafts.com](http://missouriartsandcrafts.com) – has resources about craft and a paid calendar of events ($4 per submission)
Look for the lingo. Do any of these words appear in an event’s description? Alternative, craftie, DIY, eco-friendly, eclectic, grass-roots, green, hacker, handmade, hip, maker, modern, original, outlaw, punk, recycled, repurposed, retro, self-taught, subversive, upcycled, vintage.

Notice the neighborhoods. “There are pockets of communities that are ‘hip,’” said Andrea Quiroz-Jira of The Best of Missouri Hands. “Festivals in those areas tend to be more indie-oriented.”

Parse the show for partners. Is beer involved? Independent craft beer and indie craft shows have a natural affinity. Are there signs of social consciousness? Adoptable kittens and cats from Tenth Life Cat Rescue were in the house at the 2013 Artropy, held in December at the Regional Arts Commission in St. Louis. What kind of music is being played? Another example from Artropy: music was provided by Googolplexia, a one-man vaudeville man that advises listeners to “expect screwball theatrics at their most hand-embroidered.”

Vet the vendor names. Admittedly, some Missouri indie businesses have plain, straightforward names. Take reLoved Leather—cuff bracelets made from leather and vintage jewelry. Ruby Francis—simply the name of the artist, a maker of clothing and accessories from “rescued garments and textiles.” But then there’s Red Earth Girl, who makes wallets, coiled fabric baskets, and children’s play teepees. Trifles and Quirks, a Jefferson City creator of paintings, collages, jewelry, and jewelry boxes from upcycled and salvaged materials. And Cthulhu’s Corner, named for a malevolent cosmic entity created by H.P. Lovecraft, even though the company itself is an innocent provider of handcrafted incense and illustrated books.

Seek social media. “Use Google, Facebook, and Twitter to follow groups, handmade businesses, and shows,” Rachel advised. Also follow individual artists you like, said Meghan. “They post the shows where they'll be.”

Investigate Etsy. Etsy has a feature where people of common interests can band together into “teams.” Our search results for Missouri turned up 30 teams, ranging from eight members to nearly 600, such as the Ozark Mountain Etsians, Handmade St. Charles, the North Missouri Etsy Team, and Missouri Etsy Centrics (the Columbia area). Each team listing enables to you to see all its members and link to their Etsy shops.

More resources

Two resources we referenced in this article, plus a few more.

- The Best of Missouri Hands / Missouri Artisans Association, bestofmissourihands.org
- Craft Alliance, craftalliance.org
- Craft & Hobby Association, craftandhooby.org — The national trade association for craft and hobby suppliers. We mention them because they’re the people who, in 1994, dubbed March as National Craft Month.
- Perennial, perennialstl.org — A community workshop and store in St. Louis that offers many DIY classes in creative reuse, such as Rags to Rugs, ReVamp Old Jewelry, and Upcycled Planters.
- Strange Folk Festival, strangefolkfestival.com — Held annually on the last weekend of September in O’Fallon, Illinois. Part of the St. Louis metro area, “it supports a lot of our people,” Jessi told us. The 150-vendor fest is run by Autumn Wiggins of The Upcycle Exchange vintage craft supply store in St. Louis.

Our cover photo

Our special thanks go to the Green With Indie Craft Show team and The Foundrie in Chesterfield Mall for hosting the Craft Yeti on a visit to take photos specifically for our website. The Yeti first coalesced in 2013 from a pile of white furs in April Tate’s sewing room. “We got into the costume and went around St. Louis taking pictures,” April said. “Nobody batted an eye at us!” Because the costume proved tricky to travel in, for 2014 the Yeti has acquired an additional incarnation as a plushie. “She’s an elusive creature—she comes out in public only for craft shows,” said April. The full-scale Yeti roams the Green With Indie show. The Foundrie sells vintage objects and indie arts by many different artists by consignment. Shelah McClymont and Elizabeth Hahn-Lawrence started The Foundrie as a pop-up holiday boutique in 2009 and 2010, and opened the permanent store in 2011.
Photos are courtesy of the artists and events unless otherwise indicated.

The Untamed World of Indie Art and Craft was created in March 2014 for the Missouri Arts Council, a state agency and division of the Department of Economic Development. The Missouri Arts Council provides grants to nonprofit organizations that meet our strategic goals of increasing participation in the arts in Missouri, growing Missouri’s economy using the arts, and strengthening Missouri education through the arts. Contact moarts@ded.mo.gov.

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