

# East Bay RI

Warren  
**Times-Gazette**

**New Warren shop specializes in handmade, 'elevated' household goods**



**Torsten Mayer-Rothbarth, who opened Inhabit at 450 Main St. (formerly Space Cadets), holds up a piece of wood furniture that he made by hand. Along with being a skilled woodworker himself, he has forged relationships with many artisans, whose handmade items are displayed elegantly throughout the shop. RICHARD W. DIONNE JR.**



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## **By Ethan Hartley**

If the last time you stepped into 450 Main St. was during a browse of Space Cadet's eclectic collection of every different category of secondhand goods imaginable, you're in for quite a surprise should you go back and visit now.

Inhabit, which opened on Feb. 1 and is owned by Barrington couple Torsten and Megan Mayer-Rothberth, is about as far on the other end of the galaxy from Space Cadets as one could imagine.

Upon walking inside, the first thing you'll notice is the warmly lit, inviting atmosphere; completely clear of clutter, with high ceilings and a completely renovated interior that shows off the scale of the historic Sequino Building. A look around at the offerings inside might conjure a question in the curious browser: Is this stuff for sale, or is it like a museum for houseware products?

According to Torsten, that impression is sort of the point of the shop.

"We are trying to make it a little bit of a different experience to other retail shops by presenting the work differently," he said. "Bottom line, it's a retail shop, but we wanted to make it look and feel like a gallery just to have a different shopping experience."

Instead of shelves or glass display cases showcasing the wares for sale, each collection of items is elevated on pedestals, arranged thoughtfully, and accompanied by informational cards that provide biographical information about the artisan who made them.

That's the other hook of Inhabit; nearly everything inside was made personally by hand. From a set of elegant wooden kitchen utensils made from a variety of reclaimed wood to chic pottery dish sets, and handcrafted brooms from Kentucky, the shop strives to straddle the line between providing items that every household needs, while also giving those same items a chance to become talking points after being added to any room.

A native German, Torsten is a skilled woodworker, learning the trade through an apprenticeship program offered during his primary schooling (he offers bespoke, handmade wooden furniture on sale towards the back of the shop). He went on to study graphic design at the University of the Arts

in Bremen, going on to work with an agency that did high-level corporate branding work for household names like Audi, and Volkswagen.

By chance, Torsten met his wife, a teacher, when she was vacationing in Germany over the summer of 2010.

“She rented my next-door neighbor’s apartment through AirBnB, which was one of the first years that AirBnB was in business,” he said. “And now it’s 2024, and here we are.”

After spending some time in D.C. and California, the couple landed in Barrington in 2020, leaving California behind during a time of incessant wildfires and the onset of COVID-19.

“We looked for places least impacted by environmental hazards,” he said with a grin. “And we see New Zealand, number one; too far. Number two is New England. Oh, that could be interesting.”

Torsten explained that the shop had been a dream for many years.

“There was always this idea of, ‘Oh wouldn’t it be nice to have a little shop selling these exquisite things that we like?’” he said. “It was always lingering, but never concrete in terms of like, ‘Okay now let’s search for the right location.’”

Through a twist of fate, they were headed home after a visit to see the lights at Blithewold Mansion in Bristol during the holiday season when they noticed that the 450 Main St. spot was available for lease — represented by the same agent who had sold them their home in Barrington.

Now that the shop is open, Torsten said that the business community in Warren has already welcomed them with open arms. They hope to give back to the community by offering a variety of free, monthly events, such as the one coming up on March 15 with artist David Hazlett.

Torsten said he hoped that people in the area would identify with the shop’s mission; to sell normally unassuming items that are individually crafted with love, in sustainable ways, that can turn something as simple as a table setting into a conversation starter.

“You don’t need to drive to IKEA if you don’t want to,” he said. “You can find everything that you need right in your neck of the woods.”

