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Bureau of Urban Living

 By Travis R. Wright
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Hot Spot: Bureau of Urban Living

The question has been answered. As the seemingly limitless number of lofts from the Wayne State University campus to the entertainment epicenter downtown continuously soars and the dilapidated ruins of '67 come down, Detroiters and suburbanites have been wondering: "Where are people gonna buy cool stuff?" Other commonly heard quotables include: "If there were a grocery market, I'd look at living/buying in Detroit," or "if there were anywhere I could walk to, I'd consider Detroit lofts."



Between Avalon Bakery and Eastern Market, I believe that most of your food needs are covered, though a Whole Foods or something like it, located somewhere on the Woodward strip, would be a major community upgrade.

But rest assured that when it comes to furnishing your hot new Detroit dwelling with home wares and essential office items, bedding, cleaning tools, small furniture, greeting cards, cookbooks, shelves, candles, lamps, soaps and even the hippest looking First-Aid kit these eyes have ever seen, among a thousand other digable tchotchkes, Bureau for Urban Living is, without a doubt, one of the coolest stores ever inside city limits.

For this we have Claire Nelson and Francis Grunow to thank. After meeting in New York, this couple moved to Detroit (Grunow's native city) in 2002 with plans to fully engage the improvement of the town. Heading Detroit Synergy and being an active force in Preservation Wayne, it's clear that Grunow's dedication to the city is unwavering, but with the venture of this reputable, ridiculously cool retailer, he and Nelson are really pioneering a niche.

Walking up to the Bureau's front door, glancing at the simple sign, I began to truly feel as if I wasn't in Detroit, and as soon as I made that step over the threshold and felt the door close behind me, I was certain I was in Chicago, San Francisco or Brooklyn ... maybe even Greenwich Village. With Motor City Brewing Works to the north, Traffic Jam and Snug to the south, the Majestic and Magic Stick to the East and Wayne State student housing to the west, I got this tingly communal sense that I sometimes feel during Dally in the Alley — but it was more real — more permanent.

"It's like a small store you'd find in Brooklyn," said Nelson when I made my first of what will be many trips to the Bureau. Open since April, what you'll find is a store that offers coolly modern goods at reasonable prices. "We wanted to stock items that we could afford. We wanted to bring back the feeling of mom and pop shops — getting back to basics in retail," said Nelson while also championing the cause for urban living. "I'd rather walk to the store than drive if I had the choice. I'd also rather spend money in the city."

Also visiting the store for the first time was one of Detroit's most notable, if not friendliest (and most connected), attorneys, Rose Daher, who had also fallen in love with the Bureau. "This is so weird," she enthused. "I'm finding all the things I need here. It's so wonderful, its beautiful ... I'll be back for the wine rack on Monday."

Daher and I had the same mantra toward the Bureau: "I'm so glad you're here."

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Nelson commented, with a sense of lady-like earnestness, on redevelopment: "It's always a Catch-22: What comes first? Detroit has been underserved for far too long and we wanted to make a change."

And what an amazing change it is. | **RDW**

Bureau of Urban Living is at 460 West Canfield St., Detroit; 313.833.9336 or bureauliving.com