



# A Small Collective *With Big Ideals*

By Tom Bentley

There are Airstreams that are used for the occasional camping jaunt. There are Airstreams that are homes, home offices, businesses and wheeled advertisements. But there are few that are a combination of these elements, and are also a mobile philosophy.

Lauren and Travis Hardy run—and live in—the Small Room Collective (SRC), a '63 Airstream Globetrotter in which they've been criss-crossing the country selling vintage clothing and curated artworks. Through time they've gained a deeper sense of art, collective vision and creative living.

Lauren Hardy explains what the "open road" has done for them: "It speaks to the transformative nature of a great adventure. The road is the physical embodiment of the people's desire to relate—a giant connective pathway—and SRC aims to connect people, and connect with and support local businesses and independent artists on a national level. One of our founding goals is to share and connect through the universality of art and the return to earnest, thoughtful, independent movements."

Lauren and her husband Travis had been nomadic for several years before formally establishing SRC, based on her work as a travel nurse and his flexibility as a freelance graphic designer. Lauren being an avid collector and seller of vintage clothing as well brought them into contact with other artists and craftspeople in their travels.

"We were inspired by people who were doing this wonderful work in their cities, creating warmth, community and positive impact—whether it was an individual artist or a local business. Because we were investing a lot of time in selling my vintage goods we decided to make it more dynamic and also to showcase curated works that we not only loved, but really believed in."

And the dynamic part of that decision centered around the purchase and refurbishing of the 19-foot Globetrotter, which took a year to find. After a few false leads, they ended up buying the gutted trailer via eBay. Travis, who has an

undergraduate degree in industrial design, built out the rig, putting in a pull-out bed, clothing racks for display items, and even an acrylic clawfoot mini-tub. They had to hustle to get it ready for their kickoff, at the South by Southwest (SXSW) event in Austin in March of 2013.

"I had been travel nursing for two years before we took off on the road with SRC, and Travis was already very well-adjusted to a mobile work lifestyle. So in a way it was like training for being on the road full time. I had been selling vintage and writing for music publications on the side and had met wonderful people through that as well. But the core collective—who we started out carrying and in a way took the risk with us—are the people who really enabled us to make SRC work," says Lauren.

The Hardy team partners with artists of every stripe, many of them offering their handcrafted goods on consignment to SRC. Music venues are a popular site for a stop by the SRC, as well as small arts businesses with which the Hardys have a cooperative relationship. "Without the help of others we would not exist," says Lauren. They stay in some areas for select periods: recently they were in Southern California for three weeks, Chicago for two, soon on to Denver for three, and then going back to the Pacific Northwest—it being one of their favorite areas—for perhaps a month.

The collective part of the small room is that they house the work of between 15–20 independent artists at any one time, on a dynamic, evolving basis, and some goods are also available online. Lauren also uses some of her stopovers in their travels to replenish the vintage goods that she sells out of the Airstream by going to antique shops, thrift stores and estate sales. "It's a blast getting to do that in cities all over the country," she says. "We play this game—Travis gives me a time limit and I have just that amount of time to get in and out."

"We really try to focus on working with independent businesses and cultivate a sense of intimacy and community wherever we

**OPPOSITE PAGE:** Lauren Hardy sets up the goods at the 80/35 music festival in Des Moines. **THIS PAGE:** The Small Room Collective hosts a variety of intriguing artworks by artists in various media. The art tree holds laser-cut birch jewelry in its branches.

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post up. We want people to hang around and share in an experience. I love being able to incorporate live music as much as possible—because I think music in an unexpected venue can transform the perception of what a space should be. I think the Airstream has been a haven for this sort of thing. We want to present a space that transforms the idea of a small room—it can be so much bigger than how simple it is,” says Lauren.

Of course, running a business and living out of a small trailer—which includes their 55-pound “lab hound”—isn’t a situation for the faint-hearted. Lauren notes some distinct advantages—living simply, being forced to be creative with limited space, the connection with the open road, nature and people—but she’s clear on the challenges as well: “We have to be really vigilant about cleaning; one spill or wrong move can be epic. Everything is in such close proximity that knocking one thing the wrong way can cause a domino effect of colossal proportions—you knock the broom over and somehow your computer falls off the shelf clear on the other end of the trailer, or something to that effect.”

They try to slow the dominoes by spending time at relatives’ homes in Texas and California, and taking up residencies at local businesses. But for now, their home is the open road. They attended Alumafandango in Oregon last August, and are planning a long East Coast tour in the summer of 2014.

One of the sweatshirts they carry says “Enlightenment through abandonment,” a concept Lauren loves. “Not ‘abandon’ in the sense you just drop all responsibility and relationships, but I think more the weight of all the stuff.” These are indeed responsible people: a percentage of their sales goes to Pablove, a childhood cancer foundation, reflecting Lauren’s pediatric oncology nursing.

Their philosophy might seem weighty, but they are traveling light, and light-heartedly in their Globetrotter, described by Lauren as, “a timeless, effortlessly cool, surprisingly spacious and endearing home for wanderers.” If you see them wander by, stop in and say hello. You’ll be welcome. 📱

*You can learn more about SRC and their partners online at <http://smallroomcollective.com>*