

CUSTOM CREATIONS WITH AR WORKSHOP

BY MONICA ALBERS

"IT HAS BEEN SO FUN TO WATCH EVERY PROJECT TURN OUT SO DIFFERENTLY. EVERYONE'S PERSONALITY COMES THROUGH. THEY ALL TURN OUT SO WONDERFUL, BUT THEY'RE ALL SO DIFFERENT. AND THAT IS SO FUN TO WATCH FROM START TO FINISH EVERY NIGHT."
- MANDY LIDEL, AR WORKSHOP INSTRUCTOR.



A NEW SIOUX FALLS STUDIO IS CHURNING OUT WORKS OF ART WORTHY OF ANY PINTEREST BOARD, WITH A PERSONAL TOUCH.

AR Workshop near 41st Street and Western Avenue launched this past September as the latest success of the DIY craze. Awake at all hours with a new baby, owner **Tracy Hinkkanen** got the idea last summer to bring the franchise to the area after stopping on a friend's Facebook post during some late-night scrolling.

"Someone in another state had posted this picture of this beautiful sign," said Hinkkanen, discovering that her friend had made the décor through an AR Workshop. "People can make that?" she asked. "Could I do this?"

Before she knew it, she and her husband **Caleb** were bringing the workshop to Sioux Falls.

Hinkkanen describes the business as a boutique DIY workshop, where guests can create handmade home décor, holiday ornaments to throw pillows.

"We literally start people with a raw piece of wood, and we teach them how to create it into something beautiful that they're truly proud to display at their home," Hinkkanen said. Instructors are there to guide creatives through sanding, staining, and distressing, all the way to assembling and painting.

Rows of tables in the cozy studio are filled with six to eight guests, with an assistant at each table there to walk participants through every step of the

process. Guests can enjoy beer and wine during a session, which usually lasts a couple of hours. Hinkkanen says she wanted guests to feel less like they were working on a project in a garage and more like they were spending time in a friend's dining room. No experience is required to join a session, and guides are there to help make even the most stunning projects feel approachable.

"Some people are overwhelmed," Hinkkanen said. "And so it's nice to have somebody who can help you laugh through it and get through it together."

The new franchise stems from a graphic design, DIY blog, and online shop called **Anders Ruff**, founded in 2010. By June of 2016, the group launched the workshop format to get people creating their own projects. Now, Hinkkanen says her spot on Western Avenue is just

one of more than 50 locations across the country.

What's responsible for the growth that projects like AR Workshop are seeing?

"People love the feeling of satisfaction they get when they complete something that's truly beautiful," Hinkkanen said. "We sit at our computers all day, but people want to work with their hands and tap into that creative side."

Also a realtor, she says she's always had an interest in the things that help make a house a home – home décor, design, and personality. Previously a teacher, she says she's glad to be back in front of a classroom of sorts, combining those interests.

"I've always been a teacher at heart. I get to go back to teaching. I can teach people how to make beautiful things that

they're thrilled to bring home," she said. "This is just the perfect combination of all the things that I've ever enjoyed doing in life. It's so awesome that I get to do it every day."

Thus far, they've gotten a big response as sessions fill up. Especially as the holidays approach, Hinkkanen says a lot of customers like the idea of giving a special gift, and being able to tell their friends or family members that it has added meaning – that they made it themselves, just for them.

"They're keepsake items. Not only is it beautiful and fun to have, but the story behind it is as well. 'Someone I love made this with their own two hands for me?' I think people are excited to give those sorts of gifts."

Part of the convenience of scheduling with AR Workshop is found online. Individuals and groups of friends can visit the business's website for a calendar of all available classes – even the amount of seats open in each one – and select the project they would like to create during registration. Though reminiscent of a **Wine & Canvas**-type class, no two people in a session have to make the same piece.

They've also started booking private sessions for large groups (an ideal class size of 30) and tables at a public session for a group of friends. Youth classes and birthday parties are offered, too. Costs range from \$35 to \$100 based on which project you choose.

Hinkkanen says it's more than just the end product that's valuable about the class.

"It's a dual blessing, because they not only get to come and have a fun time, but they get to walk away with something that will hopefully bring back those memories for years."

FOR MORE INFO, VISIT ARWORKSHOP.COM/SIOUXFALLS.

AR WORKSHOP

2101 W. 41ST ST. STE. 29B

SIOUX FALLS

(BETWEEN HUHU
MONGOLIAN GRILL AND
POTBELLY SANDWICH WORKS)

