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WICKER PARK & BUCKTOWN Arts & Entertainment Shopping

Too Many Record Stores? No Way: Vinyl Market Booms in Wicker Park

By [Alisa Hauser](#) | February 16, 2016 5:41am | Updated on February 16, 2016 8:39am

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Wicker Park Area Record Stores

WICKER PARK — With Monday's [closure of Jazz Record Mart](#) in River North and [Shake Rattle & Read's final days](#) looming in Uptown, Chicago is losing some of its beloved record stores.

But in Wicker Park and the surrounding area, something completely different is afoot. Instead of scaling back and closing, record stores are sprouting, growing, adding on.

A Vinyl District of sorts is booming, giving shoppers many options within walking distance from the Damen and Division Blue Line stops. There are five stores in the cluster: Reckless Records, Shuga Records, Permanent Records, KStarke and Dusty Groove — and hints of more to come.

Shuga Records at 1272 N. Milwaukee Ave. is not even a year old and it's already growing. Owner Adam Rosen is [planning to double its size and add an entire wall for cassettes](#).

Reilly Gill, a [Reckless Records](#) clerk, said she's heard "rumblings" of yet another record store coming to Milwaukee Avenue.

And Gill says she'd welcome it.

"We all recommend each other. People ask us where else they can go next. They like the idea of having a central spot to go to, a whole strip of record shops that they can walk to from one train stop," Gill said.

The desire to buy 7-, 10- and 12-inch records is coming from multiple generations of music lovers as online streaming replaces CDs and a new breed of customer will spend between \$50 and \$100 on one rare album, said Dave McCune, general manager of [Permanent Records](#), 1914 W. Chicago Ave. in Ukrainian Village.

"No matter how deep you dig, there's always a new thing to discover," McCune said.

According to [Nielsen's year-end report on the music business](#), sales of vinyl hit 12 million units in 2015, the tenth straight year of growth. Independent record stores were responsible for 45 percent of vinyl sales, according to Nielsen. Of the 241 million albums sold in 2015 some 126 million were CDs and 103 million digital. National Audio Co. says it produced some 12 million audiocassette tapes in 2015, with fans saying they are a cheap way to distribute tunes.

On Friday, Lori Felker, a local filmmaker, was browsing movie soundtracks at Permanent Records as Dan Fiorio — who'd made a trip into the city from the far south suburbs —

dropped \$53 on three albums: Belle & Sebastian's "[Girls in Peacetime Want to Dance](#)," pop rocker Mikal Cronin's "[MC III](#)" and a cassette of Girls' "[Broken Dreams Club](#)."

At [Reckless Records' new Wicker Park "mega store,"](#) which opened last spring at 1379 N. Milwaukee Ave., Daniel O'Donnell, a Nashville, Tenn. resident, was buying Neil Young's "[Harvest Moon](#)."

O'Donnell said he'd landed in Wicker Park after researching online to find the best spot to buy records during his weekend visit.

An online buy led John Jurek, a Ukrainian Village resident, to become a frequent in-person shopper at [KStarke, 1109 N. Western Ave.](#)

A few years ago, Jurek bought "[A Tribute to Company Flow](#)" by hip hop artist Mr. Len through online music [database discogs](#), but after noticing that the album would be shipped from KStarke — a store he'd never heard of until then — Jurek got the shipping fee waived and arranged to pick up the album.

Known for selling dance music through its own label but also out-of-print rock and jazz albums, KStarke's owner, Kevin Starke, often greets regulars like Jurek by name.

Since opening his store 10 years ago, Starke said the concentration of Wicker Park area shops has become "convenient" for younger shoppers.

"They want the vinyl but are not willing to dig as hard," said Starke, who strives to offer more personalized service.

"I'm going to acknowledge your existence. It's not contrived or fake. I didn't open this record store because I wanted to get rich," Starke said.

Dusty Grove at 1120 N. Ashland Ave. has figured out a way to lure Milwaukee Avenue shoppers around the corner: they've been advertising on benches for about a year to let vinyl lovers know "one of America's best record stores" is nearby.



Rick Wojcik, owner of Dusty Groove, said the [bench campaign](#) is "kind of a revival" of bench ads that his East Village shop ran many years ago.

"[Benches are] kind of a nice "fixture" to invest in — rather than an ad that might just appear once in a paper," Wojcik said.

When asked if the approximately 3,000-square-foot Dusty Groove could be expanding, Wojcik said, "We're totally happy with what we've got," adding, "We never want to get so big that we're just stuffing junk in a big space. That's kind of what happened with the big stores that have now all gone by the wayside."

Like Reckless Records, [which bought its building two years ago](#), Wojcik also owns rather than rents, enabling him to recently knock down a back wall to add more crates on the first floor and dedicate the basement to "bargain bins."

Wojcik said the expansions by his nearly 20-year-old company were "partly in response to the growing trend of in-person shoppers."

Since moving two blocks south of its longtime digs last spring, Gill said Reckless Records can hold bigger crowds for events or in-store performances.

Charles Taylor, founder of Reckless Records, has not yet seen more sales from the larger quarters.

"Sales are about the same as before the move. I anticipate they'll increase as we slowly move into the extra space upstairs and downstairs, but for the moment we're focusing on making the ground floor as appealing as possible," Taylor said, adding there is no time frame yet for the expansion.

At 5,000 square feet, Reckless Records is still the largest record store in Wicker Park even with using just one of three floors in the vintage building.

While the boom in vinyl-buying has been [happening for awhile](#), the [cassette tape revival](#) has surprised record shops.

Reckless recently moved its cassettes from the back of the shop to the front.

"It's unexpected. Now it's a thing again," Gill said of cassettes.

Taylor said Reckless is selling "quite a bit" of cassettes, mostly in the \$1.99 to \$2.99 range.

"So it's not a huge money spinner, but they're fun to have around," Taylor said.

At [Decibel Audio](#), 1429 N. Milwaukee Ave., a shop that sells audio systems and mostly turntables, a cassette tape and turntable system was featured in the front display window.

Tucker Harper, a Decibel sales clerk, said he was surprised when cassette decks started to sell again about two years ago.

"We maybe sold four CD players all year last year and at least 20 cassette decks. It's growing. ... it's a nostalgic analog thing. Digital is a little colder, analog a little warmer," Harper said.



A collage of five local records stores; all photos snapped in Feb. 2016. [DNAinfo/Alisa Hauser]

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