

StrangeWays, 908 Whalley Ave.

Essay by Markeshia Ricks from *Getting Strange in Westville* published in the *New Haven Independent*, Oct 23, 2015 and used with permission



Alex Dakoulas could have set up his shop of carefully curated, indie accessories, retro finds and oddities in any remotely hipster-friendly neighborhood from Baltimore to Boston. The former graphics and footwear designer for Puma and Converse decided to take a chance on New Haven, with hopes that the city would take a chance on him.

Dakoulas, 31, moved with his boyfriend from the Boston-area, where he lived for a decade, to New Haven last year with plans to open a physical outlet of the online business that he'd started called Strange Ways.

With a nod to pop-culture at its most irreverent, the store, which now calls Westville home, lives up to its name in more ways than one. The store is in the heart of the commercial "village" at 910 Whalley Ave.

From its old-school arcade game at the back of the store, to its assortment of iron-on patches and pins designed by sometimes local, and almost always independent artists and craftmakers, Strange Ways is unlike anything that exists in New Haven, let alone Westville. Dakoulas likes it that way.

"I don't want to have to be stuck to this kind of product or this kind of image," he said. "I figure Strange Ways works because strange means kind of unique and different. But it can be the type of product—the way it looks—but also, we work with a lot of artists. We're not trying to rip them off. I think that that's unique. We do try to support local artists. We try to support 'Made in the USA', and in that sense, it's strange."

In addition to patches and pins, Strange Ways carries jewelry, T-shirts, a small selection of vintage clothing, retro candy, Avery's Soda from New Britain and cold brew coffee from New Haven's own, The Coffee Peddler. He also has everyday merchandise such as handmade soap and beard oil. And though he specializes in unique items, they are priced to move in a New Haven market where merchandise is either quite expensive (think Broadway, or quite inexpensive (think the Dollar Tree). Strange Ways aims for the middle.

Dakoulas said New Haven is on the cusp of something big with its commitment to economic development and the arts, and he wants to be a part of it.

"New Haven has this really cool potential," he said. "There's a lot of stuff going on and I think it fits within my consumer base, but I also think that it's just going to grow in the next couple of years. I just keep hearing about new creative things happening, and I feel like there is a new fresh energy coming in."

www.projectstorefrontsnewhaven.com