

# Cambridge Chronicle

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## Ready for Fabulous antiques? Absolutely

By Deborah Eisner  
CHRONICLE STAFF

Mara Loeber wants to invite the entire city into her house.

Well, not really, but when her new antique store, Absolutely Fabulous re-opens Tuesday, it will be set up like a house, with customers entering through the kitchen then proceeding to the living room, bathroom and bedroom.

The "rooms" will be filled with a mix of new and old merchandise, from handmade bathroom soaps (new) to refurbished antique furniture (old).

"I love mixing the old and new. I guess that's what people do every day when they go shopping. They have their older pieces and they're dressing them up," she said.

Even without all the merchandise set up, it is apparent that Absolutely Fabulous — which was not named for the popular television show of the same name on the BBC, but Loeber said she almost wishes it had been — is not your grandmother's antique stores. The walls are painted bright hues of yellow, pink and brown, exquisite vintage clothing hangs on a rack and every piece seems to scream out at its uniqueness.

"I definitely like loud and eclectic pieces," she said, adding that vibrant colors are her "big thing."

Loeber, 27, closed her original store at 8 Beacon St., Somerville, two months ago in favor of reopening in a space three times the size in Inman Square. The new store, located at 1309 Cambridge St., is the former location of

Sarah's House of Books, which was owned by a friend of Loeber.

Keeping her store in the neighborhood, where her regular customer's routines will not be affected, was important to the entrepreneur.

"A lot of people in the neighborhood count on me to buy stuff from them. It's really like recycling in the neighborhood," she said.

When Absolutely Fabulous opens Tuesday, Loeber hopes to make a splash in the neighborhood, one of the few places she feels her store will fit in naturally.

"I definitely think I fit into the neighborhood," she said. "I definitely don't kiss anybody's ass. I could never work on Newbury Street."

While her store will make its Inman Square debut next week, Loeber is no stranger to community. Four years ago Loeber quit her cushy job in the graphic design and advertising department at a day trading firm on Wall Street in favor of serving coffee at the 1369 Coffeehouse.

"I have no regrets. I think I was the only one on Wall Street with a purple suit and fuzzy pocket book," she said, decked out in trendy vintage clothing.

Armed with a bachelor's degree in business and several credit cards, Loeber decided soon after moving to Cambridge that she would open an antique store and set out on her quest. A talented artist, seamstress and furniture refinisher, Loeber spent one summer working at 1369 and accumulating an inven-



Absolutely Fabulous, an antique store, is preparing for its Inman Square debut.

tory. She traveled to antique stores and circled neighborhoods on trash day to find old furniture in need of attention. She then painted, stained or otherwise prepped the piece for sale on her small balcony.

At the same time, she made gloves, scarves and acrylic paintings to augment her inventory.

When she had enough to fill a small store, she found the Beacon Street storefront and opened two and a half years ago.

"It was great. It was awesome, it was so much fun," she raved about her early days as a retail proprietress.

In the beginning, Loeber said, she

spent more time creating inventory; now that she has built up a steady clientele and a reputation, she has less time for that. Instead, she visits estate sales and antique auctions to find pieces for her store.

Now, Loeber said she is attracted to the history and research aspects of her job. "I love learning about different cultures, the history," she said. "There's so much history in antiques. Every piece I purchase, I have to research."

Absolutely Fabulous will also feature the works of about 20 local artists who make everything from stationary to the aforementioned soap.

Having lived in the East Village dur-

ing her time on Wall Street, Loeber said she takes her cues from that community. She does not want a store that is too pricey or that caters to an upscale clientele. Instead, Loeber wants students and average citizens to walk into her store and find elegant and extravagant pieces that are affordable to more limited budgets.

Hailing from New Rochelle, N.Y., Loeber comes from a family of entrepreneurs. Her parents own a steakhouse in Bridgeport, Conn., her three brothers, including her twin, are independent day traders, and her sister is a private practice doctor.

Loeber and her husband, Russell Loeber — an MD/Ph.D. student at Boston University — live in Somerville and travel to Croatia, where Loeber is a dual citizen, once a year to visit her grandmother. While over there, Loeber finds local craftsman and purchases items to sell in her store. Now that the business has grown, Loeber plans to take targeted business trips Mexico and Turkey to find new pieces for her store.

For now, though, Loeber is concentrating on getting the store ready for its grand opening. Last week, the ceiling tiles were still being painted — bright red! — and none of the merchandise was on the shelf.

"It's crunch time," she said. "It's exciting, but I'm a little bit nervous."

*Absolutely Fabulous opens April 1 at 1309 Cambridge St.*

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