

[The Barnum Factory's Triple B \(Breanne Barnum Blog\)](#)

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Why. WHY did we do it? Breanne breaks it down.

I often say (Aaron) Barnum and I fell into the Barnum Factory. I mean, we're doing what a lot of startups do - we found a need and we're filling it: DSM artists and makers need space to work, infrastructural support, and community; The Factory provides those things.

But why a hulking, abandoned, mid-cold-war paint factory on DSM's industrial, time-worn north side?

Well first of all, we love the River Bend neighborhood. We not only call it home; Barnum and I have devoted a lot of blood, sweat and tears to preserving historic homes and structures in this neighborhood, from 1942 Arlington Avenue to 1243 9th Street, both once at the top of the city's demolition list are now homes to families rather than empty lots.

But what makes a structure worth saving? Julie Rocchi at the National Trust for Historic Preservation says "historic" means "old and worth the trouble." She lists [Six Practical Reasons to Save Old Buildings](#) and they're damn good ones.

We need look no farther than DSM's East Village to see these reasons played out, and I wonder how long it will take for the city to regret imploding the Riverfront YMCA, which was the most iconic example of [The International Style](#) of architecture in Iowa. But I digress.

Technically what we're doing at The Factory is called "adaptive reuse," and you can find some beautiful examples from cities across the US [here](#). We also have some pretty cool examples in our own back yard, from the [Des Moines Social Club's](#) renovation of and residency in the historic fire house on downtown's south side, to [Mainframe Studios'](#) audacious and [stunning reimagining](#) of the former Qwest Communications office on Keo Way. Both contribute profoundly to DSM's burgeoning cultural fabric.

"Old and worth the trouble" is somewhat subjective - and all of these architectural adaptations require imagination and belief. The transformation of The Factory relies heavily upon both. But our imagination and belief come from a sense of the environmental conditions that many creatives want. Old spaces feel alive; there's a vibe that resonates from their history. Many creatives really dig that (and so do we).

Artists and other creatives have long been portrayed as interlopers whose gravitational pull toward gritty spaces was a [result of limited funds](#) rather than aesthetics. I don't believe that's true.

I once read an article – man I really should start writing this shit down because my mind is more like a sieve than a steel trap these days – anyway I'd share it if I could find it. The premise of the thing was this: Built environments that have been subjected to the ravages of time and weather have serious positive impact on our psyches.

The author cited research showing that when we're in these environments we subliminally imagine ourselves in the time and space in which that structure was built, like some dreamlike temporary time warp.

We feel that way about the Factory, and we believe our artists and makers do too. In fact that spirit of culture – of the men and women who for decades worked their fingers to the bones within these walls *to bring color to life* – is the answer to the question of *why this place? Why here?*

The quiet ravages of abandonment, empty spaces, and time enriched the patinas, textures, fractures and shadows of The Factory. It's like what [draws us to ruin porn](#), which "offers an escape from excessive order," according to Tim Edensor, a Manchester Metropolitan University professor who studies "the appeal of urban ruins."

Although we continue to create the phases of The Factory's interior to repurpose the spaces, we've intentionally left the ravages intact. There are artists and makers who are drawn to pristine spaces - the stark white and polished surfaces of more traditional "gallery" type studios – and that's cool.

It's just not us.

We are workers. Artists, creatives, makers for sure. But we share the identity of the workers who inhabited these walls all those years ago.

Soon The Barnum Factory will unveil the names of our gathering spaces, which reflect that identity, and we can't wait to see people continue to fill those spaces as we bring this big crazy dream to life. Thanks for coming along for the ride; we'll see you around The Factory.

Peace,
Breanne