

Dying to Make World More Colorful

Jeremy Carlson's universe is rich with rubber bands and a rainbow's worth of dyes that have touched countless blank cotton canvases.

What originated as a means to follow the Grateful Dead across the country later prompted a shop where he could share his deep appreciation for tie-dye, one the most recognizable looks of the '60s.



Jeremy Carlson sells colorful clothing, accessories and household items at A Brighter World, where he provides tie-dye lessons.

Carlson's downtown Santa Cruz shop, A Brighter World, is a testament to his knack for layering color and patterns into baby onesies, adult long johns, shopping bags, pants, socks and more.

Carlson also relishes schooling customers in the art of tie-dye. For no more than you'd pay for a ready-made shirt, customers can create their own at the do-it-

yourself station. He teaches basic to advanced classes and has passed along his knowledge to people ages 3 to 90.

"It is a lot of fun. ... It seems to denote happiness," says Carlson, 56, who with his wild gray beard looks a little like Jerry Garcia.

"It is playing with colors and designs."

At the workstation, he soaks cotton items in hot water and explains a variety of folding, pleating and rubber-banding techniques.

Want a spiral or a swirl? He'll meticulously demonstrate how to create one by gently folding, then oh-so-carefully rolling the item. The same goes for any other effect, a rainbow, heart or something more abstract.

He then explains the technique for adding color, which he supplies in easy-to-apply squirt bottles.

And if you ask, he'll throw in a story about following the band.

More than 30 years ago, Carlson and his partner, Eileen Parent, decided to leave their home in the Santa Cruz Mountains and follow the Grateful Dead, paying for their travels by making and selling tie-dye bandannas on Shakedown Street.

The makeshift thoroughfare, named for a Dead song, typically consisted of about 200 vendors and was traditionally set up in the lot before shows as a means to generate income on the road. Over a period of about eight years and 300 shows, Carlson and Parent hawked thousands of bright, handmade bandannas.

When Garcia died in 1995, Carlson returned to UC Santa Cruz to finish his political science degree. He worked on campus as a groundskeeper and later spent weekends selling his tie-dye creations at festivals.

During those years following the Dead on tour, Carlson dreamed up a make-your-own tie-dye shop.

He opened A Brighter World three years ago. “I guess as Jerry would sing: ‘All good things in all good time.’”

“Dyeing for a brighter world isn’t just my company motto,” Carlson says. “It’s fascinating teaching people how to tie-dye. I see their inner kid come out and play, while watching them have a lot of fun being creative, in a way they haven’t done before.”

Carlson teaches for groups and drop-ins, plus on-site corporate events. The price of the garment includes the lesson, dye and instruction. Prices start at \$10 for one of those famed bandannas, but the stories — those are for free.

A Brighter World, 119 Walnut Ave., Santa Cruz. Open 9 a.m.-9 p.m. daily. (831) 469-4393. www.cometiedye.com.

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