

lab: New coffee shop on East Liberty in downtown Ann Arbor offers urban setting

By ERICA HOBBS (/USERS/PROFILE/?UID=153)

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Patrons enjoy coffee, yogurt and free Wi-Fi at lab, which officially opened Tuesday in downtown Ann Arbor.

Ryan Stanton | AnnArbor.com

When the owners of **Ann Arbor's** newest coffee shop and yogurt bar were students at the University of Michigan's Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning (<http://www.tcaup.umich.edu/>), they said they wanted to create an urban space for young professionals and graduate students.

Now, after nearly a year in the making, lab (<http://labcafe.tumblr.com/post/237231803/hours>) (yes, that's all lowercase) has opened at 505 E. Liberty St. in McKinley Towne Centre in downtown Ann Arbor.

"We wanted to create that third place, the escape, the place where you chill," co-owner Joanna Hong said. "We love Ann Arbor but we thought something was missing."

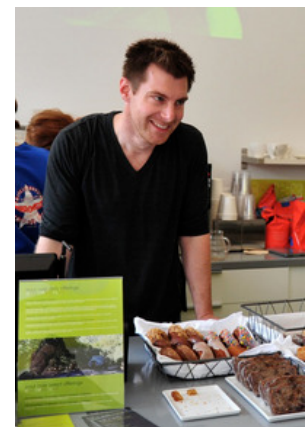
Hong said she and co-owner Tobias Wacker wanted to create a modern, hip hangout such as the kind found more often in big cities such as Hong's native Chicago or Los Angeles, where Wacker attended undergraduate school. William Chang, a third co-owner, lives in New York and helped develop the business' financial plan.

"He's very much an entrepreneurial spirit," Hong said.

Hong and Wackers' modern design is full of sharp angles, open spaces and an overall sense of simplicity. It was designed by Karl Daubmann and Craig Borum of Ply Architecture in Kerrytown. Alex Timmer, also with Ply Architecture, built the furniture.

The shop's big windows are some of the few things that break up its empty white walls, while custom-made square, wooden furniture provide sleek seating for customers. The café's lime-green ceiling and subtle accents add an element of color to the otherwise very basic décor.

"Even if it's dreary outside, it's bright in here," Wacker said. "If you come to lab, you should be a little bit happier when you leave. That's the premise of what we're trying to do."



Co-owner Tobias Wacker stands behind the counter of lab, which opened Tuesday in downtown Ann Arbor.

In addition to a full range of coffee, tea and espresso drinks, lab offers a frozen yogurt bar of four rotating flavors complete with an option of up to 16 toppings ranging from granola, fresh fruit and candy.

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Lab's yogurt bar includes 16 different types of toppings including fresh fruit, granola and candy.

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In the morning, lab features a cereal bar including childhood favorites such as Lucky Charms and Cinnamon Toast Crunch, as well as a variety of granola.

"We've got both the sugary and the healthy," Hong said. "You can totally customize it to your taste."

Hong said customer service is an important aspect of lab, where patrons are able to not only choose their coffee but also the degree of graininess and amount of beans used in the brew.

"We want to talk to them about our products and store," she said. "We want to take our time with them."

Hong and Wacker also want to help promote local artists and businesses. Most of their yogurt toppings and baked goods come from local suppliers, including products from Barry's Bagels, Tasty Footprints, Caf  Japon, Taste Our Goods, Frog Holler Produce and Washtenaw Dairy.

The owners also hope to feature community and student-made films on a movie projector, which displays images directly behind the barista counter.

"We just want to promote media and art," Hong said.

Still in its beginning stages, Hong said she and Wacker were still experimenting with the shop, hence its name "lab."

She said the shop is open from 8 a.m. to 11 p.m. but that could change, depending on demand.

"It's a first business for us all," she said. "We're definitely looking forward to learning and getting better. It's a growing process for us."

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