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# COUPLE TO OPEN CARGO BIKE SHOP IN DETROIT

 By [Erica Hobbs \(@erica\)](#) | April 10, 2013

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DETROIT—Those hanging around Corktown or Midtown the past few weeks may have noticed a new couple in Detroit with smiles bright enough to match the large, odd-looking, neon orange bicycle they're riding upon.

That's Kyle Wiswall and Leslie Wacker with their "Schooner," a utility-based cargo bike they plan to sell in their forthcoming "Freighty Cat" bike shop to encourage cycling as a viable alternative to cars.

"Not only have hard economic times maybe forced people out of cars, but people are also finding that living car-free can be liberating in a way," he said. "I hope our bikes are going to help people do that, find that you don't need a car to do things."

The Schooner is a Long John style cargo bike built to transport up to 300 pounds. The 55-pound road bike is made with an extended steel frame that provides space between the front tire and the seat to hold a metal crate, which Wiswall said can be customized and replaced with a bench, lockable box or other features, depending on the need. The vision, he said, is to build something that can be used to transport a variety of items ranging from groceries to band equipment to people and more.

Wiswall, 38, knows a thing or two about bikes. The New Jersey native spent six months as an apprentice at the Center for Appropriate Transport in Eugene, Oregon where he learned to weld cargo bicycles, including the one he rides today.

His skills were immediately put to the test as Wiswall, who said he hasn't owned a car in about eight years, biked cross-country from Oregon to New York to set up shop there. Previously, Wiswall worked as legal counsel for a non-profit transportation organization that advocates reducing dependency on cars. He also worked as a bike mechanic and helped start a non-profit community shop in New Jersey that helped kids learn about bicycles and bike mechanics.



"Bike advocacy gave me sort of the philosophy that I'm basing a lot of things off of, but I spent a lot of time getting very intimate with the parts of a bike and that has given me a better understanding about what I want out of a cargo bike and what is functionally necessary on a cargo bike," he said.

Wacker is also no stranger to the bicycle scene, though ironically a late-bloomer. The 31-year-old said she had bad balance as a child and didn't learn to ride a bike until age 21, but quickly fell in love. Since then, the Chicago native has lived all around the country, including Portland, Seattle and New York, working as a pedicab driver and managing pedicab companies. She has also worked as part of a bicycling puppet show and as a cafe bike delivery rider. She has also been active in bike advocacy, alley cat races and bike carnivals.

When the two met in New York, both knew they wanted to move somewhere new where they could be part of a growing community. Wacker thought of Detroit, a place she had already visited several times and a place she described Wiswall as having an "imaginary crush" on.

"[I want to be somewhere] I'm not just taking advantage of an easy life," she said. "Somewhere where there's people that I could get involved with and do really good things, and where I can afford to live more comfortably than where I lived in [New York] and people are nice and into community involvement and projects."

The couple visited several cities in the Midwest but it was Detroit that hooked them.

"Everyone we met was so excited and welcoming and nice and within an hour we had an offer for a place to live and an offer for a possible job," Wacker said.

Since their arrival just three weeks ago, the couple has been settling in, making friends and looking for space to set up their business. Wiswall said they're flexible about space and location, just as long as it's capable of holding welding machinery. In the immediate future, Freighty Cat aims to make cargo bikes on order and hopes to produce their first bike within the next two months.

Down the road, the couple would like to create a multi-use space, including a living area, retail space and possibly room for a coffee shop, community meeting area or music venue where local musicians can play. Wacker said they are open to new ideas.

Cost-wise, Wiswall said they haven't set prices yet, but the cargo bike should be less than \$2,800, their retail price in New York City. He said the quality steel material and extensive welding work contribute to the bike's high price tag, but his goal is not for the bike to become a luxury item.

"I want this bike to be used and accessible to as wide an audience as possible," he said. "I want this bike to be useful for people and for people to replace their cars with this. As much as I can get that price down I will."

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