

Socially Engaged Practice describes art that is collaborative, often participatory and involves people as the medium or material of the work. *-Tate Gallery*

The apartment was remarkably decorated. Ornate patterns and rich jewel tones covered the walls and ceilings. Symbols of UNC Chapel Hill were displayed in the forms of ram paintings and statues. Velvet sofas were arranged neatly in the living room with a fabulous view of Franklin Street from the towering windows and glass balcony door. With captivating chandeliers and layered textures throughout the apartment, it felt like looking at the front cover of an Architectural Digest magazine.



The Damesek family apartment living room.



Ram statues in the foyer.

The apartment started out as a space for extended family to come visit Caroline Damesek, a junior at UNC-Chapel Hill. It was ultimately cheaper than booking hotels multiple times throughout the year. However, this decadent apartment became more than a lodge for visiting family. Damesek quickly realized the opportunity in front of her, and decided to turn the apartment into an elaborate event space when her family was out of town. With the help of her mother, she named it the *Chic Cave* and opened the doors for events in the fall of her sophomore year.

In a college town event space, you likely envision empty bottles and red solo cups littering the ground of a dimly lit basement, ruminating in the smell of sweat and cheap liquor. Blurred images of dancing bodies surround you, layered with unidentified smoke and dancing lights. You

have class the next day, but you can worry about that tomorrow morning. Tonight is for putting the books aside and making memories you might not even remember.

This is what Caroline Damesek was used to, and also what made her realize a party could be more. It could be an elaborate experience. It could be an opportunity to be creative. It could be engaging beyond the alcohol and the dirty basement of a fraternity, and so, the *Chic Cave* was born.

Chic Cave events were always framed as parties, but never ended as just parties. There was always a twist or a theme that Damesek had planned in detail with friends, or with anyone who would give her ideas a chance. The goal was to bring people together, channel creativity, and make intentional memories. “She brings together different types of people to enjoy each other's company, and of course there’s a theme and artsy invitation too,” said Ashlyn Fortney, a friend of Damesek who helped plan the latest event, “*Chic Cave Revival*.”



Fashion Show Mob Night



Murder Mystery Night

Murder mystery parties, fashion mob nights, kale events, red-light green-light dating events—the list goes on. The *Chic Cave* became a place to explore all of the creative ideas Damesek could not otherwise, at least until sophomore year came to a close. Damesek’s parents intended to sell the ornate apartment after the school year, which they did once her spring semester ended, alongside the physical space of the *Chic Cave*.

When the doors closed to the Damesek family apartment, Damesek realized the *Chic Cave* was always meant to be more than just the temporary space left behind in photographs. The closure of this avenue opened up another and led to the creation of the *Chic Cave Creative Empire*. This

was Carolina Damesek's opportunity to explore and always "try to honor the creative side" on her own terms, not attached to a temporary space.

Damesek started building a [website](#), a brand, and a new space to keep hosting events dedicated to collective creativity. Creativity became the forefront of Damesek's life, and even became the source of income she used to pursue it. "There is such a tension between doing something for the craft and for yourself when you eventually need to make money," said Damesek with a sigh. Damesek decided to open *Chic Cave Cuts* where she travels to clients' apartments and dorms to cut and style hair. She discovered her ability to cut hair on a trip abroad when she was tired of how long her hair was, but could not afford the local salons, so she just did it herself. She quickly realized that with practice she could do it for others as well.

As money came in with haircuts, Caroline Damesek started hosting elaborate events again, starting with the *Chic Cave Revival*. While the money is helpful, the essence of the *Chic Cave* is what really matters; it is about "people coming together to be creative," a practice she learned from artist Simone Leigh called "Socially Engaged Practice." It is about bringing joy to others through creative outlets. It is about community and art. Even during haircut appointments, Damesek is known for giving good discounts because it has never been about the money, but the experience.

In 2026, Damesek is a junior at UNC Chapel Hill with a focus in studio art and English. She doesn't know the answers for her future now, but Damesek knows bringing people together to be creative is her life's calling. Her time at university will soon come to a close, and UNC's *Chic Cave* may end alongside it. To this point Damesek said, "When all is said and done, it will be the death of the *Chic Cave* in one way, but it will be a rebirth in another."

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****Note: all photographs included were taken by the author.***