

ARTS + CULTURE, CULTURE

Peacham's Middle Son Tattoo Studio Invites Tattoo Tourism

To facilitate tattooist Caleb Colpitts' multi-session artworks, recipients will be invited to stay in his new studio's cabin and explore the Northeast Kingdom.



by **Suzanne Podhaizer**
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Caleb Colpitts working on a tattoo COURTESY

By the ruins of an old rake factory, chanterelle mushrooms glow gold among the creek-bed shrubbery. Nearby, a wattle fence, the kind made by weaving slender branches around staves, keeps wandering chickens in line. And in a shady nook not far from a classic Vermont farmhouse and vegetable garden stands the newly built Middle Son Tattoo studio.

The tucked-away location, reached solely by a narrow and bumpy Class 4 road, matters. Mostly in Peacham but partly in Danville, nearly brushing the Barnet border but with a post office address in St. Johnsbury, this rustic 22-acre property is

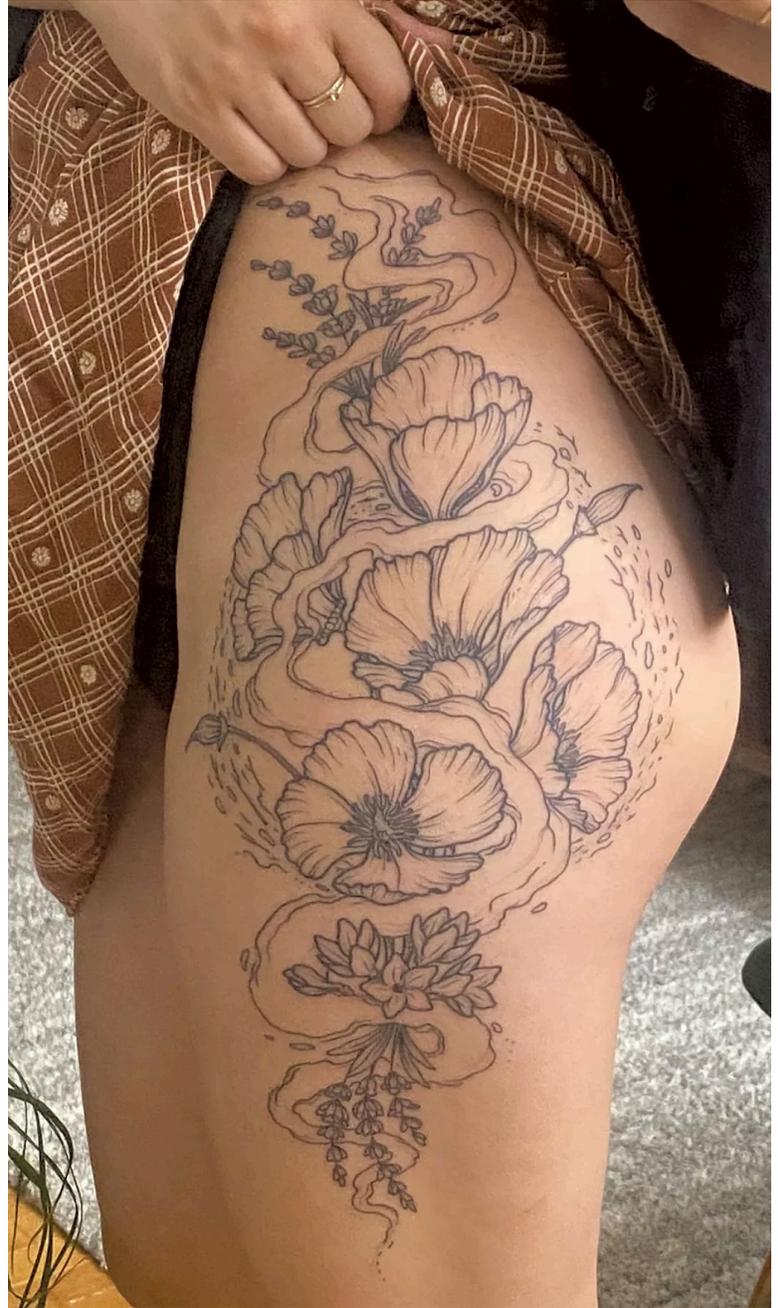
intended to be an overnight destination for community-centered tattoo tourism.

Tattoo customers will be invited to stay in a yet-to-be-built cabin on the property or pitch tents near the poultry and fungi. From there, they can explore the Northeast Kingdom, visiting the “different shops, breweries and restaurants,” said artist Caleb Colpitts, 34.

Long-haired and bespectacled, Colpitts presides over Middle Son in a Cape-style cottage built primarily with timber from the property, which he owns with his brother and sister-in-law. A goldenrod-colored door stands out from dark slats, and the paint in each room echoes shades from the William Morris wallpaper in the entryway. The studio proper is intricately tiled with black and white hexagons and features polished brass lights repurposed from ships.

On Saturday, August 23, Colpitts will open Middle Son’s doors to the public with a ticketed party that includes musical performances, an art fair, self-guided trail tours, local food and beverages, and tattooists offering quick “flash” pieces. To further his goal of contributing to the local economy, he’s asked an artist friend to make a curated guide to area eateries and shops for out-of-towners.

Colpitts is a classically trained illustrator and painter who has been honing his craft since childhood. Growing up in the Northeast Kingdom, he was initially homeschooled alongside his brothers; at St. Johnsbury Academy, he was president of the Intaglio Society printmaking club. He began studying tattooing in 2018 and got a job at Lucky’s tattoo studio in Boston the following year.



Tattoos on Rachel Luu COURTESY OF RACHEL LUU



Tattoos on Franky Cannon COURTESY OF FRANKY CANNON

Colpitts offers ink of all kinds, but his favorite type of work is large pieces sketched directly on the wearer's skin rather than applied via stencil. "It's illustrative blackwork tattooing with inspiration from etchings, woodcuts and engravings," he said. Common subjects include delicate botanical drawings, creatures from fantasy and myth, and architectural flourishes.

He prefers freehand illustration because "it's really easy to make the tattoo move with the person's body," Colpitts explained. "It feels more collaborative. I'll draw a layer and have them look at it. I'll darken it and darken it as they're watching me. It's very intimate."

And time-consuming. The opportunity to spend a night on the property, or several, would facilitate the intense, multi-session artworks that Colpitts most enjoys — and which, at about \$200 per hour, keep the lights on and the tattoo needles humming. (He hasn't yet set the cost of an overnight stay.)



Inside Middle Son Tattoo SUZANNE PODHAIZER

“He was always very meticulous in his work,” recalled Kim Darling, a St. Johnsbury Academy emeritus art teacher and multimedia artist with a focus on drawing and printmaking. “He was slow and methodical — slow in a good way.”

Each year, beginning in 2006, Darling and her husband, Bill, also a St. Johnsbury Academy art teacher and artist, took Intaglio Society members on two-week trips to Florence, Italy, where they studied the masters and created their own work. Colpitts was one of the rare students who took the trip all four years of high school. He financed the travel by working at Poulsen Lumber in Littleton, N.H., “every summer, for the whole summer, for those two weeks in Italy,” Colpitts said.

On two of those trips, Colpitts overlapped with fellow academy student Franky Cannon, now a professional artist and author. Cannon is the recipient of one of Colpitts’ tattoos: an image of a bloodroot plant, blossom to roots, on her left forearm. From 2020, it’s the most recent of her 10 tattoos.

“Each of my tattoos is [by] a different artist,” Cannon said. “I draw each one, and I encourage them to reinterpret or change [it].” While most artists don’t stray far from the drawing, she added, “Caleb made it his own style ... a totally new drawing. It’s my most precise tattoo. It’s my favorite tattoo.”



Colpitts outside the studio SUZANNE PODHAIZER

For Jesse de Alva, a blacksmith, metalworker and machine shop assistant at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the Colpitts tattoo was his first. And it's a big one.

While his partner, Rachel Luu, was getting a tattoo on her thigh and hip that combines California poppies, lavender and Massachusetts mayflowers, de Alva couldn't keep his eyes off a drawing by Colpitts that hung on the wall. During Luu's six-hour appointment, he snuck a photo of the image, and he found himself staring at it over the next few months. Finally, he called up Colpitts and booked his first session.

The resulting piece, which took about 25 hours to complete, features a bear skull surrounded by deep black ink on de Alva's chest, with ferns skimming his collarbones and guiding the eye to intricate floral patterns on his shoulders. On his upper back is an iris, mirroring the skull and also bordered by black, surrounded by additional flowers.



The exterior of Middle Son Tattoo SUZANNE PODHAIZER

“I’m excited about creating a garden on someone’s body,” Colpitts said.

Luu, an MIT PhD candidate in materials science and engineering, said she and de Alva are considering getting more of Colpitts’ tattoos and love the idea of taking a Vermont vacation in the process.

“It’s such a special and unique experience,” Luu said.

“It creates even more intimacy with Colpitts and his work,” de Alva added. “His style and personality leak through everything.”

For the moment, Colpitts is splitting his time between Vermont and Massachusetts, where his partner, Genevieve Cohn, is a visiting lecturer in art at Wellesley College and he teaches visual art at the Cambridge School of Weston, a progressive boarding school. He also continues to tattoo at Lucky’s.



Tattooing equipment COURTESY

“I gain energy from spending energy,” Colpitts said. “I don’t take a lot of downtime.”

Whenever he can, he’ll be in Peacham offering his signature larger pieces, along with smaller tattoos he calls “pick-your-own.” The plan is for him to immortalize in ink what guests have foraged in the woods and fields.

Over time, Colpitts hopes to take on apprentices, perhaps other St. Johnsbury Academy alums who would prefer to stay in the area. He’ll also help his older brother, Nathan, and sister-in-law Andrea Otto, who live on-site, develop a sheep farm and orchard. Together they’re exploring the idea of opening other studios and shops on the property, which as a whole is called Rake Factory Arts.

Their efforts aim to answer a question, Colpitts said: “How do we get artists in the NEK to be in community and also [attract] artists to come to the NEK?”

With a dedicated following and gorgeous locale, [Rake Factory Arts](#) could make a mark.

Grand opening of Middle Son Tattoo, Saturday, August 23, 10 a.m. to 10 p.m., at 1297 Rake Factory Rd. in Peacham. \$35.88.

The original print version of this article was headlined “Tattoo With a View | In the Northeast Kingdom, a new ink studio aims to become a destination for tattoo tourism”

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ARTS

How this Vermont tattoo shop is celebrating the state and revolutionizing the craft

Caleb Colpitts's Middle Son Tattoo helps tattoo enthusiasts to find inspiration — and new ink — in the Northeast Kingdom

By **Gitana Savage** Globe Correspondent

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VERMONT TATTOO PARLOR MIDDLE SON TATTOO INVITES INK ENTHUSIASTS TO EXPLORE THE NORTHEAST KINGDOM. • PROVIDED

Surrounded by rolling creeks and lush greenery, immersive tourism takes a new form at this Peacham, Vt., studio.

[Middle Son Tattoo](#) isn't your ordinary tattoo parlor, tucked away on a Class 4 road, the location offers guests the opportunity to stay overnight and explore the flora and fauna of the Northeast Kingdom.

Founded by Monroe, N.H., native Caleb Colpitts, Middle Son opened its doors in August 2025 after five years of construction. His hope was to not only create a unique experience for customers but to become a hub for the Vermont artistic community as well.

"I really wanted to create something where the experience of [Middle Son] and the experience of getting the tattoo were enmeshed somehow," he explains.

During their visit, guests can access over 500 acres of walking trails. Caleb provides a hand-illustrated guide (drawn by his friend Clover Ajamie) of things to do and adventurers are encouraged to craft their tattoo design inspired by found materials.

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Artist and tattooist Caleb Colpitts at his Peacham, Vt., studio, Middle Son Tattoo. PROVIDED

Caleb discovered his love for tattoo art while studying print and jewelry making at the Rhode Island School of Design. Particularly interested in body adornment, he saw tattoos as the perfect intersection of his interests.

Though Caleb left the Green Mountain State to attend college, he knew he'd always end up back home. With much of his work featuring the botanical imagery of his youth, Caleb's hometown played a large role in creating his artistic identity.

"I feel like it's the landscape of my heart up there. Growing up there, walking around in the woods and the streams, that was the source of my artistic inspiration," he says.

In addition to the natural beauty of Vermont, Caleb's family played a huge role in the inception of Middle Son, in particular his two brothers, Nathan and Andy Colpitts. (As the studio's name implies, the owner is the middle child.) The trio grew up on a sheep farm and were home schooled together until high school. Only a few years apart in age, the Colpitts brothers, all artistic in nature, had always dreamed of opening a creative space together.

Nathan, the eldest of the three, is a blacksmith and worked alongside Caleb to oversee the construction process of the Cape-style cottage. The house on the property, remnant from its time as a rake factory, sits off to the left with the studio and cabin the brothers are building for clients off to the right across the field.



A sample of Caleb Colpitts's nature-inspired tattoo art. PROVIDED

“We hadn’t really done anything like it before,” Caleb explains. “I think there was hubris going into it. It took longer than expected but looking back I think it makes all the sense in the world. We did everything from the clearing of the area for it to the finish, trim, wallpaper, and tiling inside.”

The 22-acre property is designed to feel frozen in time, a retreat from the overwhelm of the present-day. Aiming to evoke the feeling of a 17th-century New England farmhouse,

the Colpitts brothers strive to stay as truthful to the architecture of the period as possible, putting wainscoting on the walls, adorning the house with William Morris wallpaper and wrought iron nails.

Though the Colpitts brothers spearheaded the construction process, they leaned on friends and community members when they needed help.

“If we knew somebody who had a skill set that could help us we really tried to bring them in and ask for help,” says Nathan. “We had lots of people come and help us just because people wanted to be involved; they loved the idea.”

Built on not only a love for the Northeast Kingdom but the people who live there, Caleb hopes to increase access for Vermont-based creatives through the studio with a future apprenticeship program for locals looking to pursue tattoo art.

“When I graduated from high school I felt like I had to move to the city to become an artist and I didn’t see a lot of openings for artists in the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont, so I’d like to, on a very small scale, offer that to a couple kids,” Caleb says.





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Inside the Peacham, Vt., tattoo studio Middle Son Tattoo. PROVIDED

Adrian Clonts, who received a 47-hour winged back piece from Caleb at Lucky’s Tattoo and Piercing in Cambridge — Caleb’s studio when not at Middle Son — traveled to Vermont to attend the studio’s opening in August.

Clonts was initially attracted to Caleb’s work for his “old-fashioned,” style, a style that transcends his art and imbues Middle Son with its cozy charm. Clonts, who lives in Boston, felt they were going back in time when they visited Middle Son for the first time

“I went off the highway and drove down these beautiful pastoral roads and I thought I was going into Narnia. I mean, it was just so magical,” Clonts says. “[Caleb] is a peaceful guy. He’s very gentle and his property reflects his personality.”

Gentleness, serenity, and a sense of magic are just the feelings Caleb hopes to foster at Middle Son.

“Tattooing itself is such an intimate experience already, which is one of the things that drew me to it. I really love how closely you’re working with the clients,” Caleb says. “The whole place is built around sharing the [Northeast Kingdom] with the clients and just believing in the area so much that people who come there are going to fall in love and come back.”

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