Business partnerships are like relationships: you want to team up with people who inspire you, people who remove you from your comfort zones and push you to the next level. Such is the case with the team behind Homecoming, a coffee/flower/homegoods store in Greenpoint, Brooklyn. The original project, then called Spina, brought together the varied talents and personalities of Vanessa Chinga-Haven, Scott Haven, and Paul Tsang-Diaz. They found the space and signed the lease before the concept had fully solidified. Scott, a self-admitted over-thinker, takes no responsibility for the speed; he credits the brazen impulsivity to Vanessa and Paul. As it turns out, it was an incredibly good decision, however fast it was made.

The venture started three years ago under the name Spina, operating as an outpost for a preexisting floral business that Paul was (and remains) the owner of. After a year, the modus operandi changed. Paul left the operation and the store was rebranded as Homecoming. The space and concept remained the same, with Vanessa and Scott solely behind the wheel. Unattached to an established name and free to become its own brand, Homecoming has—if you’ll pardon the pun—blossomed.

Situated on a charmed stretch of Franklin Avenue, Homecoming is a light and airy space that feels like a cross between Los Angeles and New York City. The tin ceilings are painted white, the light fixtures are modern, the wood is light oak. In the front, there’s a coffee bar. Towards the back, there’s a rack of handmade ceramics and curated homegoods. Everywhere else, there are tins of flowers and potted plants. Their goal, the two state, is putting everything they love into one store. It goes without saying that everything they love is exceedingly tasteful.

Here, we talk to one part of Homecoming, Scott Haven, about getting in at the right time and jumping in before you’re ready.
What were you and Vanessa doing for work before you opened the shop?

Vanessa was working with her partner, Paul [Tsang-Diaz], who owns a floral company called Spina. She was working with him to restructure his business and assist in event planning. Paul wanted to do a floral brick-and-mortar shop as the face for the company. Vanessa had always wanted to do a coffee shop. That kind of became the idea: to try and see if it was possible to cram all of this stuff together. Then I got pulled in. My background is in design and art direction.
Bond Street

And how did it become Homecoming?

Scott Haven

How it became Homecoming is a little complicated. In the beginning, it was still named Spina. It was confusing to Paul’s existing clientele and to the people we were meeting and working with in Greenpoint. We basically came up with the idea to let the store be its own thing. I had the name “Homecoming” for a project that I was working on and we thought it made perfect sense, since the space is kind of a gathering of all these things that we really love in one place. Old friends and new friends and people in the neighborhood congregating and coming together. It seemed a perfect fit.
**Scott Haven**

Who was in charge of the design of the space?

This was my first project doing interior design. Before Homecoming, I’d always been in graphic design or art direction. It was one of those things that I would have normally maybe taken too long to think about and then do, but Vanessa’s really good at just being like, “No, we’re opening in two months”–having a very specific, finite amount of time to get everything done. That was a good experience: getting forced to do something and make sure that it was done within a certain time frame.

**Scott Haven**

Did you always know you would open in Greenpoint?

This was kind of it. We really liked the area. As I mentioned, Paul and Vanessa had a studio space on the other side of Greenpoint. so it was kind of an easy thing. They stumbled upon this place while they were taking a break at work. Without knowing really what we were going to do, we locked it down. It seemed like it all made sense, even before the concept was fully materialized.

It was truly the right place. We’re right next to 67 West and the Pencil Factory. From day one, we met all of these cool people, like Helen Levi, who’s one of the ceramists that we carry in the shop. It ended up being a really good location and good timing. The neighborhood has really changed in that three-year span. We’ve seen the other commercial spaces for rent and the prices are so crazy now compared to what they were.
What was the biggest hurdle in getting the store open?

Scott Haven

There were a bunch of hurdles. Like just making sure all this could actually exist under one roof and be okay with the city. We had to do our research. Beyond that, the space wasn’t really built for the cafe element, so we had to deal with plumbing issues–weird things that we didn’t expect. Weird logistical things like that were kind of the toughest things. Besides that, we didn’t give ourselves, for better or worse, a lot of time to open. We had to sink or swim. Anything that popped up like the plumbing we had to just figure out because we had a very specific time frame for when we needed to open. We just tried to push through. It was about solving problems as fast as we could just to get the doors open.

Why Blue Bottle Coffee?

Scott Haven

We were lucky working with Blue Bottle. They were hands-on with looking at our plans for the barista area and our bar, helping us pick the appropriate espresso machine and drip coffee machine and grinders for the limited amount of space that we had. They did a lot of training with our initial staff. That was always important to us to. We really wanted to partner with people that were the best. We didn’t want it to be a gimmicky thing; the store was always about trying to have those things we truly love and the best things that we could provide to other people in that space.

How did you contact Blue Bottle initially?

Scott Haven

We just walked in and asked. We met some of their wholesale people and went from there.
Through them, we met a couple of the guys who helped them with their buildout in Williamsburg who ended up doing ours. I had scribbles on napkins and I would show them images of living rooms that I had found online. It might not have been the “right” way to do it, but it was just about doing it and not worrying about the “right” way.

**Bond Street**

How did you finance the shop in the beginning?

**Scott Haven**

The financing was done through Spina. Spina was the main company, which basically made a separate company that Spina proper then financed. We did it, again, on as much as a limited budget as possible just to get it open. And it’s been an ever-evolving project ever
since. For me, it’s been a normal thing, because I’ve worked in web design. Websites are never done; they always continuing to evolve. That’s kind of how the shop has been. It was first about getting it open, and from there, it’s about making money and putting money back into it and make it better and more refined.

**Bond Street**

Do you find there’s a strong local community of businesses in Greenpoint?

**Scott Haven**

For sure. We’ve made amazing connections with people. In God We Trust is right around the corner. Shana [Tabor], who runs it, has become one of our really good friends. She’s been in business for so long—over ten years. They manufacture everything locally in the US. They do wholesale and have four stores. Leaning on her and getting her expertise on things has been amazing help. It’s a cool little community. Everyone pulls together.

**Bond Street**

How do you go about sourcing products?

**Scott Haven**

I do most of the buying. I don’t have a set method; I’ve only had a taste of doing it. I used to work with friends who had a store called French Garment Cleaners in Fort Greene—it’s a boutique of mens and womenswear. I would assist them with clothing buying. With Homecoming, I’ve tried to stay true to that original intent of bringing in things we like and that resonate with us. It doesn’t matter if it makes sense to anybody but us.
Bond Street

There’s a kind of California element to the shop. Where are you both from?

Scott Haven

We’re East Coast people. I’m from Massachusetts. Vanessa is a born-and-bred New Yorker; she’s from Harlem.

A lot of people say that about the store, though. We have friends in LA that think it would work really well in California; it just has that feel to it. I would love to be able to do that at some point. The build-out of the space was about keeping it minimal and simple, letting the
colors of the flowers and the plants and the product create the palette. I think that somehow gave that feel of Southern California.

**Bond Street**

I read how sustainability and ethics play into how you buy product. Does that remain important to the brand?

**Scott Haven**

It does. The people we work with all have a similar mission: just do the best you can do. I think that stuff comes into play without you even noticing it as much—where it doesn’t need to be a noticeable thing; it’s just the way we want to do business. A lot of the product that we sell is local, but even the people from Portland or Seattle also have a smart and consciousness brand approach. It’s built in. I think you’ll see that more as we go forward; it will just be the obvious way people want to do business.

And the idea of ethics is definitely tied into our coffee. We work now with Sightglass Coffee out of San Francisco. They’re very transparent with the farmers and the process of supplying the beans. They do direct trade with everybody, which is a better situation than even fair trade. It’s good to work with people like that. It’s not just about the highest profit margin; it’s about making the best quality coffee that you can. It’s just a better way of doing business. You taste it in the product.

**Bond Street**

What would you tell someone looking to start their own business?

**Scott Haven**

My advice would be to stay very true to what you love. That sounds cliché, but pick something that gets you excited, that you won’t get bored of, that you don’t mind dedicating all your brain cells and all your time towards. That’s what has worked for us. And that’s why it’s always interesting; it’s a never-ending project for us. We know our work is just getting started. There’s so much more we want to do.
**Bond Street**

Book every entrepreneur should read:

**Scott Haven**

With two small kids and a business, a subscription to Headspace might actually be more helpful than any reading we’ve done.

**Bond Street**

Favorite spring flower at Homecoming:

**Scott Haven**

Poppy

**Bond Street**

How you take your coffee at Homecoming:

**Scott Haven**

Vanessa: Black coffee or an almond cappuccino

Scott: Light with no sugar or an iced Nola

**Bond Street**

Brand we should all have on our radar:
5 favorite small businesses:

1. In God We Trust
2. Dimes
3. Sincerely, Tommy
4. No. 6
5. Supreme