

The Gen Z Vinyl Boom

Vinyl records are back in big ways.

By Lia Faenza

Nick Iadeluca was 13 years old when he bought his first vinyl records. He purchased two Alt-J albums, *This Old Dog* by Mac DeMarco, and a turntable from Amazon. He stacked them in a small cube shelf and considered it a collection.

Now, at 21, he has over 120 records, ranging from used Weezer albums, to limited-edition indie pressings.

Iadeluca, a student at American University, does not consider himself a music expert. “I just like collecting stuff,” he said in an interview, referring to his vast collections of various video game-related trinkets and a prominent display of LEGOs in his bedroom. “And music was kind of my thing, so it made sense.”



Nick Iadeluca with his record collection (Photo credit: Lia Faenza)

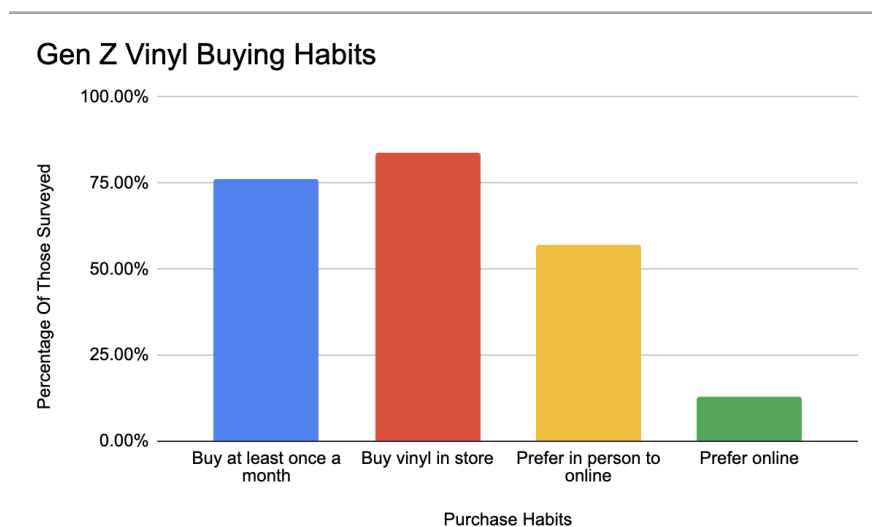
A VINYL REVIVAL

Iadeluca was ahead of the curve, as vinyl records are booming, largely due to Gen Z. According to a new report from [Vinyl Alliance](#), self-described as “the leading authority on vinyl’s place in

the 21st century,” Gen Z has become a leading force in the vinyl resurgence, with 76% of fans purchasing records at least once a month, and 29% considering themselves “die-hard collectors.”

But it’s not only how often they buy, it’s how they buy and interact with the records. The majority prefer browsing shelves in-store, with 84% saying they purchase vinyl in person and only 13% opting for online shopping. The in-person hunt of digging through crates is part of the thrill.

“I love going to a store. I would drive past and I would be like, ‘Oh, well, let me stop in and buy some records,’” Iadeluca said.



Bar graph displaying Gen Z’s vinyl purchasing habits (Data from Vinyl Alliance).

Despite streaming dominating the music industry, vinyl has quietly pulled ahead of other formats. According to the Recording Industry Association of America’s 2023 [year-end report](#), vinyl outsold CDs in the U.S. for the second time since 1987. It’s a sign that vinyl is no longer a niche trend.

WHY VINYL?

When asked why he prefers records over streaming services, Iadeluca shrugged his shoulders, saying, “They just feel cool. It’s something you can hold and look at.”

The physical connection is something that is vital for many Gen Z fans. “I wanted some way to express [my love for music] or have some representation of it I could look at,” Iadeluca said.

Understanding why vinyl resonates so deeply requires a glimpse into how it's made.

Furnace Record Pressing in Alexandria, Virginia, is one of the leading pressing plants in the country. Inside the facility, the process of making a record is as hands-on as the medium itself. Various colors of vinyl wax pellets are melted into puck-shaped balls and dispensed into pressing machines. The wax is flattened, grooves are stamped into it using metal plates, and the center label is applied. To add a personal touch, Furnace engraves a small "FRP" into each record. The machine then trims the excess wax that gets built up on the outer perimeter. The records are cooled, inspected by hand, and moved into packaging.

Ali Miller, CEO of Furnace, compared vinyl to farm-to-table eating. "...it's very authentic, like it's visceral, it's not digital. It's tangible," she said in a phone interview.

Miller believes that vinyl offers the younger generations something that they are missing in a world dominated by streaming: "There's something very grounding about something that is a physical representation of the artists you care about, particularly for generations who were born [in] and grew up in a world that's completely digital."

Streaming offers listeners access to millions of songs at their fingertips, but some younger audiences believe that it lacks emotional weight. A 2024 [MusicRadar](#) article confirms this idea, noting that vinyl records help Gen Z disconnect from the digital overload. The process of cleaning a record, flipping it, and playing it all the way through helps to create a sense of focus that algorithmic playlists can't replicate.

According to the Vinyl Alliance report, that immersive experience may explain why so many Gen Z vinyl fans are paying \$30 to \$60 per record, despite limiting factors such as inflation and personal budgets.

THE PANDEMIC SPIKE

During the height of COVID-19, vinyl sales soared. With concerts cancelled and everyone stuck at home, records became a way to reconnect with music and fill the silence.

Gen Z was a large contributor to that spike, as younger buyers turned to something physical in a time when everything felt uncertain. In fact, according to the Luminate [midyear report](#), mass merchant vinyl sales rose by 361% between 2019 and mid-2022.

Miller stated that the demand caught the vinyl industry off guard. “We were insanely busy during the pandemic. We were working overtime to press records because people were buying so many of them.”

Iadeluca did not buy as many records during the pandemic, as much of the appeal for him is going to the stores and flipping through the selections. However, he saw why others did.

“A lot of people spent a lot of time alone with art [during COVID], and started to form this really intense connection with it,” he said. “Which I imagine led to people to kind of explore vinyl a little bit more.”

RECORD STORES

Smash Records is a small, independent record store tucked away in a block of Adams Morgan, D.C. It first opened in the 1980s, and catered almost exclusively to the city’s punk scene. These days, it’s not unusual to see artists like Joni Mitchell or Linda Ronstadt sitting front row on the shelves, as Gen Z’s tastes span a wide array of genres.

Matthew Moffatt has owned the store since 2007, when he revived it after the founder stepped away. “The store started off as punk rock,” Moffatt said. “But now the vinyl record itself is an alternative - an alternative way to listen.”

Like many record shops, Smash had to adapt during the pandemic. With the store closed for three months, Moffatt shifted to online orders, posting listings of the extra stock he had lying around. “At least we had the option to sell stuff online,” he said. “The guy who ran the pizza shop up the street couldn’t mail pizza.”

By the time the store reopened, the shelves were fully stocked, and the customers flooded back in.

Today, Smash is a true neighborhood store. Moffatt said that his customer base spans from teens coming in after school to lifelong collectors and middle-aged residents from around the area. He’s noticed that while the shop once catered to the local punk scene, today’s customers come in for everything from mainstream pop to classic rock, often drawn more to the format than a specific genre.

For many young collectors, records serve not just as music, but as their decorations, memories, and identities. “When you’re setting up your place- your bed, your bookshelf- records are a part of that,” Moffatt said.



Record display at Smash Records (Photo credit: Lia Faenza)

John Henry, who works at Crooked Beat Records in Alexandria, Virginia, has noticed a similar generational trend. “Gen Z, they’re fascinating record buyers,” he said in a phone interview. “A lot of them come in looking for stuff that always surprises me... *Rumors* by Fleetwood Mac is one of our top-selling albums every month. We can’t keep it in stock.”

Henry said that their curiosity spans across decades. “They’re buying a lot of 70s and 80s music, and of course 90s music too. It always takes me back a little.”

WHAT KEEPS GEN Z COLLECTING

For Gen Z, vinyl is more than nostalgia. It's an active culture with new reasons to stay engaged. Events like Record Store Day contribute to the excitement with limited edition pressings and artist exclusives, drawing fans into local record stores for drops that sell out within hours.

This year, Record Store Day took place on April 12th. At Crooked Beat Records, the first customer lined up for the drop at 9 p.m., 13 hours before the store opened. By 8:30 a.m. the next morning, there were about 300 people wrapped around the block, and the line was out the door until 2:00 in the afternoon.

While several of the most in-demand releases came from Gen Z favorites like Taylor Swift, Gracie Abrams, and Charli XCX, many record stores received generous quantities of each record. The real pressure came with limited pressings- like the *Wicked* soundtrack, which only had 2,000 copies available worldwide. “We tried to get more of [them] but we were only allocated a couple copies because they were so limited,” said Henry. “We would have sold them all day long.”

Even with the competition in the air, Record Store Day was less about rivalry and more about shared enthusiasm. “A lot of happy people,” said Henry. “There’s a camaraderie between them- comparing what they wanted, what they got.”

Online platforms like Discogs keep that energy going year-round. The platform allows collectors to track pressing details, resale values, catalog their collections, and purchase new and used records.

“It’s fun to see which of your records have exploded in value,” said Iadeluca, who regularly updates his Discogs library. His most valuable record is a deluxe blue edition of Lorde’s *Melodrama*, which he paid only \$20 for, but now resells for as much as \$350.

At Crooked Beat, Henry set up the store’s Discogs account two years ago as a way to remove inventory that wasn’t selling in person. “Maybe our clientele is not interested in certain titles or artists, but [if] you put them on Discogs, it has a worldwide audience,” he explained. “Somebody somewhere has probably been looking for that album forever.”