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Cover story: Salons go boutique Shop for clothes, jewelry and knickknacks till you dye

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By: Stacy Downs - special to ink

If you're looking for a guitar, dog clothes or wine biscuits, you might find them — and much more — at your hair salon.

Yes, you read that right. You can shop where you get your hair chopped. Sure, buying bags of coffee beans or a special-occasion dress in the same place your mane gets tamed initially seems a bit hairy, but it's actually sheer genius. But salon boutiques/boutique salons are turning up these days across the nation, including in Kansas City. In fact, we wouldn't be surprised if hair salons become the convenience stores — and even the mini-malls — of the 2010s.

As a client, you might visit a salon every five weeks or so. Instead of reading a celebrity magazine, you could browse for the perfect birthday greeting card between your mani and pedi. Or discover that last-minute outfit after you get waxed. Or find a baby gift before a facial.

And for a business owner, a salon boutique is a clever way to differentiate your business from all the others in a field of many that also sell shampoo, brushes and cosmetics in a serenely designed setting with local art on the walls.

Earlier this year, Hammerpress, the letterpress card and poster shop at 110 Southwest Blvd. in the Crossroads Arts District, added two barber chairs into the mix. Hammerpress owner Brady Vest collaborated with I Love You salon owner Amber Hodgson, formerly of the Darling Room, to convert the space into a general store with a hip yet Old West aesthetic. There you can find lucky horseshoes, feed-sack accent pillows, vintage pocketknives and tumbleweeds whose tumbling days are over.

Sole Salon, 12 N. Main St. in Liberty, contains Catfish & Tater Boutique, which sells handmade purses, tattoo T-shirts, one-of-a-kind baby items and vintage accessories.

"I don't know why more hair salons don't do this," says Audra Webb of Lee's Summit, a 33-year-old office manager at a steel-supply company who found a "super cute" necklace with charms while she was getting her hair styled at Salon Adiktd in Blue Springs. "It gives customers something to do instead of just sit there. And it's nice to get everything in one place."

A creative outlet

Twenty-three-year-old Shauna Markley is owner of Salon Adiktd, sandwiched in a strip mall between Home Depot and Walmart off the southwest corner of Interstate 70 and Adams Dairy Parkway. But don't let the suburban chain-store mecca fool you. The boutique salon looks chic and unique.

For starters, cutting stations are vintage carved wooden dressers juxtaposed with sleek concrete floors. Grandma's Victorian settee has been reupholstered with hip chartreuse fabric.

"I want to prove artsy and fashionable aren't limited to downtown," Markley says. She's wearing a sweet khaki strapless dress tied with a satin ribbon belt. I ask her where she found it.

"I made it," she says, laughing when she sees my surprised expression. She shows me a rack of similar dresses, all of which she made, too, from recycled cargo pants. In fact, most of the merchandise is made by her hands, the same ones that cut and color her clients' hair. She makes necklaces and bracelets with chunky charms (she lets customers customize) and fabric-flower hair barrettes. Markley has sewed since she was 6, and she knits, too. In the winter, one of her popular sellers was a wool cuff that buttons around necks, a more efficient warming device than a scarf and equally stylish.

Most of the wall art is also by Markley, including painted female silhouettes. She also makes collages out of old magazines and vinyl records.

Clients, sometimes with their hair wrapped in foils, can shop the boutique in front. Markley's sister, Natasha North of Higginsville, also makes jewelry for Salon Adiktd. Her dad, Mike Markley, crafts modern birdhouses out of reclaimed barnwood, salvaged metal and door pulls.

"It's a creative outlet for me and my family."

Revolving boutique

Across the metro area on a recent Friday night, James Pillatzke curls models' hair for a fashion show in front of his salon, Pinkie Couture. The theme at the downtown Overland Park shop is vintage, celebrating the city's 50th birthday. Clothes and hairstyles evolve through the decades, so Pillatzke is busy.

There's a sizable runway and stand for the DJ/drummer collective DRMX in front of the tiny salon. Pinkie Couture might consist only of a jewel-box-sized room, but it's jam-packed with style. Sinks are shocking pink and so are the stenciled walls, with their clever toile pattern of combs and scissors designed by local graphic artist Sarah Nelsen. Pink is 30-year-old Pillatzke's signature color: His nickname is Pinkie, derived from the pink faux-hawk of his younger years (he's currently a dirty-blonde).

The boutique salon was a labor of love for Pillatzke and his friends, who spent 380 hours in January remodeling the salon with vintage mirrors and reinterpreted furniture from Target.

At the fashion show, there's a rack of vintage clothing for sale. Pillatzke hosts similar events with a pop-up boutique in front of the salon on the third Friday of each month for the area's art walk. On a daily basis, the salon offers a few clothing items, clutches and jewelry, including pieces designed by Nelsen. But why is Pillatzke taking on retail when the economy is in the toilet?

“The whole get-rich-quick thing is no longer within reach,” says Pillatzke, who collaborated on fashion shows and the performance group Quixotic before opening Pinkie Couture. “So you team up with your friends, have fun, promote high-quality artistic awareness and hope you make a little money along the way.”

Local, local, local

Skyline Downtown Salon is located on the fourth floor of the old Firestone building on Grand Boulevard and offers a great view of Kansas City’s skyscrapers. Along the south wall is the largest and most varied salon boutique in the Kansas City area — there’s even a pooch-products section. And much of the merchandise, including skin-care products by Derma Doctor, is locally made.

For starters, there’s clothing by Tomboy, a fashion-design studio a few blocks away from Skyline. And Caleb Nathaniel creates “basement fashion,” reinterpreting clothing with paint and bleach for his NathanielREN3WAL line. And there’s brilliantly colored beaded jewelry made with embellishments local artist Erin Dennis of O & O Bead Craft culls from around the world.

But there are also handmade guitar straps by Jayko, made by Patrick Deveny and his mother, Janet Beasing, in Johnson County. High-profile performers including Wilco and Neko Case have purchased Jayko straps. There are handmade guitars, too, acoustic and electric — the bodies created from cigar boxes studded with Boulevard Beer bottle caps — made by James Summers of Mississippi Mud Box. CDs and bumper stickers of the Kansas City-based kid-friendly rock ‘n’ roll band the Doo-Dads also are for sale.

Need something for the cocktail party after work? You can even buy wine biscuits and pepper jelly by Suzanne Frisse of Meadowlark Acres in Stilwell.

There’s also a large section by MyARTS Screen Printing Studio in the Crossroads Arts District, which employs artists between the ages of 15 and 19 to create a variety of printed products and learn craft and entrepreneurial skills. It’s a mentoring program funded through Jackson County for at-risk teenagers, acting as a springboard to post-secondary education and opportunities. MyARTS artists make baby onesies and tees printed with fashion-forward designs. But what also catches my eye is a hand-marbled paper journal. After taking a course in the ancient craft of marbling, I know how time-consuming and difficult it is to make attractive marbled paper.

“People don’t expect for a salon to have retail,” Skyline owner Carmen Gramajo says. “But there are all kinds of artists looking to get their names out there, and there are all kinds of different clients. We try to appeal to everyone.”

Gramajo says the vendors are brought in on a consignment basis. Hair stylists and clients bring new artists and products to her attention. “We’re always looking,” Gramajo says.

Resource for a niche

Chop Tops began with a boutique when it opened its doors in 2005 in Merriam. It sells clothes and accessories that appeal to the “Kustom Kulture” lifestyle: greaser guys and pinup-style gals who drink yard beer, listen to rockabilly and alt-country and appreciate hot rods with custom pin striping.

Initially, the clothes didn’t sell fast enough at the salon, so they made the boutique side smaller. But Chop Tops owner Cilla Holopter is ramping up the boutique again at both the Merriam and Westport locations.

“All this stuff is selling like hot cakes at car shows, so we know it’s not limited to just our handful of friends,” Holopter says. Among the corrugated steel accents at the salons, customers can browse novelty switchblade combs, parasols, sunglasses, ashtrays, iron-on patches and buttons (one to note: the \$1 pink Elvis). Sometimes you’ll find baby onesies and eating sets.

Holopter is getting the Living Deal Souls line of clothing from London. Other brands include Sourpuss, Lucky Mules and Lugnut.

“The lifestyle is attractive to all sorts of people now. There are bachelorette parties that go all out for a fun, vintage look.”

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