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NEW YEAR . NEW YOU

Area entrepreneur puts the 'parlor' back into beauty salon

By Linda Bachrack
Special Writer

From the moment Kim ushers you into the elegant surroundings and offers you coffee from an antique china demitasse, you begin to feel nourished and pampered. Just as generations of French-women have retreated to the boudoir for a bit of self-indulgence, Sherri Nicole recreates the classic refuge in her Birmingham salon, Illusions by Sherri, 360 Hamilton.

Nicole's boudoir is actually the *parlor of her full-service salon* and the space she uses to perform her makeovers. But the sumptuous room is to a makeup counter what an exquisite fascon of Chanel No. 5 is to a bottle of Old Spice.

Befitting the nature of a boudoir, the reception room walls are swathed in fabric for intimacy, lace curtains adorn the windows and a graceful divan invites quiet conversation with friends as it is piled with lush, ruffled pillows.

The glass-topped vanity table rests on a floral needlepoint rug and your makeup is applied in front of an opulent etched glass mirror. All of the containers and jars of beauty potions hide behind the doors of a massive antique armoire.

■ 'This place has so much to offer. It's cozy, unique, has lots of atmosphere. And it's not a production line here. Each professional performs a special service.'

Michelle Tadian
Birmingham

And stop the armoire perches an exquisite array of hand-sewn hats. You need only close your eyes to the Birmingham streetscape outside the windows to imagine yourself in a little ville Francaise.

Great escape

Michelle Tadian of Birmingham escapes often to illusions for manicures, facials and hair cuts and color. "This place has so much to offer," she says. "It's cozy, unique, has lots of atmosphere. And it's not a production line here. Each professional performs a special service."

Tadian has treated herself every week for the past year, relishing the quiet one-on-one and appreciating the expertise of Vivian, her manicurist, and Dana, "the best colorist in the state."

Grab a cup of coffee and a scone from the lacy candlelit tea table and join me on a tour of this unique salon. Careful, you'll find yourself lingering for most of an afternoon. You've already been welcomed into Sherri's makeover domain, now stroll down the hall and into Barbara's soothing massage room. The fabric-draped ceiling envelopes you as though you're nestled into a safe cocoon.

Jeri Frizzell offers European facials in pale peach environs. Soft music and dim lighting add to the ambiance. Jeri also specializes in teen facials.

As we head down to the manicure room, peek into the tiny shampoo cubicle where the walls and ceiling are artfully decoupaged with pages from W magazine. Vivian and Alla share a Victorian-look space where they pamper their clients' hands and feet. Loyal customer, Virginia Menzel of Birmingham, has followed Vivian to various locations for the past 20 years. In fact, Vivian is manicurist to four generations of Menzels.

The brightly lit hair salon is the private domain of Dana Ehler, colorist, and Donna Howard, stylist. Dana mixes her own colors, personalized for each client. She is expert in weaving in subtle color and applying a veil for extra shine. "I like warm, see-through shades, a '60s palette with '90s flair," she says.

Kay Singer of Birmingham, who often had her hair cut by the renown Frederick Fekkai in New York, was thrilled to find Donna right in her own backyard. "She does a better job than Frederick," raves Singer.

A Sassoon-trained stylist, Donna's precision cuts are sought after by women and men.

Creating a world

The person who is responsible for assembling this compatible team of specialists grew up in Iron Mountain, one of seven children born to factory workers. Though plagued through childhood with undiagnosed dyslexia, Nicole has learned to compensate for her reading disability. "I created a world of my own," she says. "I do everything in pictures and have developed my creative, visual side."

Before opening her shop, Nicole traveled as a makeup artist for Christian Dior and applied makeup to Gucci models for shows in Detroit and New York. She has also conducted seminars for Delta and American Airlines and periodically teaches classes at Birmingham's Community House. "I love to share ideas," she says, "although most artists don't."

Nicole enjoys bringing out the best in her clients. "Everybody has a problem area, and unfortunately we tend to focus on our flaws and forget about our pretty lips or eyes," she says. "I never even notice the flaw. I simply bring out other areas."

A Bloomfield Hills resident Gail Johns was in to have her makeup done for an evening at the theater. As she worked, Nicole voiced some of her skin care and makeup application tips. She recommends a gentle cleanser and toner, and a good moisturizer. For fragile eyes and lips, she strongly suggests an eye gel, no oil or Vaseline or lanolin which is too heavy.

A powder blush is preferable to a cream that contains waxes and is actually more drying to the skin. And stick with matte colors. "Frosts really age the face," she counsels.

The perfect base for all skin types is Malaysian rice powder. Apply with a big brush to create a nice dry surface to which blush can adhere. Nicole also likes the new veils for definition and a hint of gloss over a matte lipstick.

The result is a natural look, not too made up. "I constantly recommend Sherri to friends and family," says Kathy Shelton of Rochester who opts for a bit of drama for a Buick gala.

Though Nicole never dreamed that she would one day own a successful business with her limited education, she seems to have found the perfect match for her talents. She believes in some advice given her long ago, "whatever you're seeking is seeking you."

■ 'Everybody has a problem area, and unfortunately we tend to focus on our flaws and forget about our pretty lips or eyes. I never even notice the flaw. I simply bring out other areas.'

Sherri Nicole

Victorian corner: *Alla Anzreev, far left, gives Mary Feldman of Troy a manicure as Virginia Menzel of Birmingham gets a pedicure from Vivian Campbell (far right) in the hands/feet parlor.*

Intimate setting: *Illusions owner Sherri Nicole (left) applies her skills to the face of employee Kim Heraghty in front of an opulent etched glass mirror, a needlepoint rug at their feet.*

Self-help books hot item in January cold

By Renee Skoglund
Special Writer

Ask any area bookstore owner or manager, Oakland County residents are determined to improve themselves in 1994.

Their quest for slimmer bodies, more dynamic personalities and sensitive souls boosted sales of a variety of self-help books over the holiday season. Predictably, diet books led the list of best sellers.

"After the holidays, there's a pickup in the diet book sales, the fitcutters," said Joan Laskowsky, manager of Walden Books in downtown Birmingham. She emphasized that "fat" was in as far as new diet books go, rather than the old culprits, sodium and sugar. "Fat does about cover everything, doesn't it?" she concluded.

When asked if she thought any of her diet book-buying customers sabotaged their best intentions by heading over to Merchant of Vino located two doors away, Laskowsky laughed, "Well, I would," she said.

Janice Keramedjian, manager of Barnes & Noble in Bloomfield Township, also reported an increase in diet and fitness book sales "At the holidays, people prepare for what's coming," she said. "January is a huge month for diet and health books."

Keramedjian noticed an increase in the sale of fitness books for men. "Many of these books are geared toward developing a life style enabling them to be more productive at work," she said.

Thomas McBride, assistant manager of Borders Books in Beverly Hills, verified that men tend to be more pragmatic in their choice of self-help books. "Men buy the business self-help books. The 'One Minute Sales Person' was a good seller," he said.

While diet and inspirational books were purchased mostly by women, Deepak Chopra's "Ageless Body, Timeless Mind" was an exception. It sold well to both men and women. Commenting on the book's gender-inclusive theme of aging, Rissa Winkelman, co-owner of Bookpeople in West Bloomfield, said, "If you can do something to prolong the whole thing, why not?"

Winkelman, a petite woman with a halo of short brown curls, volunteered that she wasn't exempt from the post-holiday dieting craze. "Every January I vow to lose weight and reduce my thighs." Obviously, she is not alone. She echoed many other professional book dealers when she said, "We sell a lot of diet books."

Winkelman's partner, Sandy Nathanson, offered a comment on the irony of human nature and its eternal quest for thin thighs. "People were standing here eating our chocolates, waiting in line to buy 'Fit or Fat'."

However, dieting was not the main concern for many customers. Winkelman and Nathanson experienced a demand for a book that dealt with depression. The book, "You Are Not Alone," was mentioned in Ann Landers column in November. "We had a run on it," said Winkelman. "Some of the books were gift-wrapped. Some people had them sent to other people."

Sharron Olds owns Annie's Book Stop, a small store located in West Bloomfield that sells both new and used books (or "pre-read" as she refers to them.) The store has a comfortable reading-room look to it, an atmosphere Olds carefully cultivates. She said that meditation books, like "The Language of Letting Go," while big sellers at the holiday season, do well all year.

Olds confirmed that mostly women purchase self-help books, but she quickly added, "When I have books where the focus is men, they sell." She often displays these books separately, away from a condensed shelf of popular self-help books situated near the front counter. "Sometimes a man doesn't always feel comfortable going to the self-help section."

When asked why she thought self-help books sold so well during the holidays, especially around New Year's, Olds displayed reasons of codependency or poor self-image. Instead she opted for personal growth and said, "Like that old saying, 'We're not getting older, we're getting better'."

Here's what's selling best among self-help offerings

Best sellers:

"Ageless Body, Timeless Mind" by Deepak Chopra, M.D.: Harnessing the dynamics of aging through the power of your consciousness.

"Stop the Insanity" by Susan Powter: Going from fat to fit in a sane manner.

"The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People" by Stephen R. Covey: An empowering philosophy for more dynamic personal and business relationships.

"The Road Less Travelled" and "Further Along the Road Less Travelled" by M. Scott Peck, M.D.: Insights into your spiritual and psychological journey through life and suggestions for confronting the roadblocks.

"You Are Not Alone" by Julia Thorne: Personal and first-person accounts of depression and recovery offering words of hope and companionship.

"Men are From Mars, Women are From Venus" by John Gray: An insightful explanation of the communication differences between men and women.

"Bottoms Up" by Joyce L. Vedral, Ph.D.: Techniques for "sexy little muscles" plus stronger bones and a healthier heart.

"The New Fit or Fat" by Covert Bailey: Realistic, holistic program of diet, exercise and fitness for life.

"Fly Fishing Through the Midlife Crises" by Howell Raines: Words of comfort and advice for men in their 40s and 50s who are going through personal crisis.

Others of note:

"The Verbally Abusive Relationship" by Patricia Evans.

"Outsmarting the Female Fat Cell" by Debra Waterhouse.

"The Language of Letting Go" by Melody Beattie.

"The Dance of Intimacy" and "The Dance of Anger" by Harriet Goldar Lerner, Ph.D.

"The One Minute Sales Person" by Spenser Johnson, M.D.

"Chicken Soup for the Soul" by Jack Canfield and Mark Victor.

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