

Shopping is supposed to be fun, so enjoy it



NICOLE STAFFORD

Well, I'm taking a new job with The Eccentric Newspapers and will no longer be writing "Shop Talk."

So, I'd like to thank all the local store owners and retail professionals I've met during the last year. Your help and support has been invaluable, and it's been a pleasure

working with all of you. I'd also like to share a few observations about shopping and the local retail scene.

Something to savor

While metropolitan Detroit may not boast the same kind of retail offerings as places like New York City and Chicago, we shouldn't underestimate our options in Oakland and Wayne counties.

In addition to having several full-service department stores, we're lucky to have a plethora of unique stores and boutiques that provide interesting merchandise and personal, one-on-one service.

Consider, too, all the venues. Downtown Birmingham is almost always hopping in terms of its retail offerings, day-to-day activity and special events. Downtown Plymouth and Rochester also hold numerous events, in addition to providing shoppers with a pleasant and quaint backdrop for window-shopping, strolling, making purchases and socializing.

And, while the Somerset Collection in Troy houses some of the most exclusive retailers in the world, other shopping centers have made room for locally-owned, niche stores, such as New England Home at Livonia's Laurel Park Place and Truth Bookstore, which specializes in African-American literature, at Southfield's Northland Center.

Great Lakes Crossing in Auburn Hills not only puts outlet shopping in your backyard but also significantly expands our local entertainment options.

And, just about every area shopping mall and district provides us with opportunities to spend time with family. Wonderland Mall in Livonia is especially focused on sponsoring events and programs for children and families.

It's also heartening to know one of our local department store chains, Jacobson's, is based in Michigan. Thus, when we spend money at Jacobson's, we know we're supporting one of the state's major businesses, as well as the local economy.

Have a ball

Whether shopping for a new blender, a last-minute gift or a pair of summer sandals, enjoy the process.

If there's one thing that can be said about shopping, we should enjoy it. The fact is, we're spending our money.

True, shopping can be time-consuming, hard on the budget and frustrating. Often, it's nothing more or less than work. But even when it's a task, try to enjoy it.

Look around. Retailers make their stores physically appealing and pleasant for a reason: they want us to enjoy the shopping experience and return. The same holds true with shopping malls and downtown districts. From beautiful window displays to the aroma of freshly-baked cookies, take advantage of the surrounding sounds, scents and sights.

Shopping can also be an opportunity for us to learn. When returning an errand or making a return, make a point of finding out about new technology, design innovations or fashion trends.

The retail scene also tells us about ourselves. What we buy — not to mention, what retailers try to sell us — says something about who we are as individuals and as a culture. Again, look around. What do these items say about our values, needs and lifestyles?

And, while we can't buy every thing we'd like to own, there's no reason we can't look — and dream.

Fits like a glove

Dressing well is easy with a custom hand



Wardrobe at work: Nancy Glass, of Nama Clothing Designs for Men in West Bloomfield, has brought numerous samples of casual shirts and sport coats to Clinton Baller's office in Franklin to help him decide which pieces he'd like to have custom-made. Glass fits and consults with her clients whenever it's convenient for them, since they often don't want or have the time to shop for clothes.

BY NICOLE STAFFORD
SPECIAL EDITOR
nstafford@ec.homecomm.net

There's a load of information about fashion these days: countless lists of trends in magazines and on web sites; reports about which designers are being worn by which Hollywood stars; even updates on the personal lives of fashion models.

With so much superfluous information about fashion and a seemingly infinite number of retail purchase points — catalogs, cable television, the Internet and stores — one subject, the art of dressing well, seems to have fallen into the shadows.

Perhaps that's one of the reasons why more people are opting to take an entirely different route — custom clothing. And, as most shoppers know, dressing well only becomes more difficult when the fashion season is in full swing and clothing racks begin to get picked over.

While hiring someone to custom-make your clothing isn't the cheapest approach to building a stylish and useful wardrobe, it appears to be the only way to get exactly what you want in a given period of time.

And, if you don't like or have the time to shop, that's especially the case.

"It's still shopping," admits Clinton Baller, who buys his custom shirts from Nancy Glass of Nama Clothing Designs for Men in West Bloomfield. "But the thing is, the shirts ... They're way better."

Like many men, Baller doesn't like excursions to shopping malls and clothing stores. What's worse is paying for shirts year after year that don't fit and shopping for them, he said, as Glass measured him for a sport coat in his Franklin office on a weekday morning.

While Baller has broad shoulders for his size, so particularly benefits from custom shirts, he also views the service as a way to save time.

"It's very cool, if you're busy," he said. "While custom shirts range \$50-150, the cost is balanced by value," said Glass. "It's the time, it's the fit, and getting the fabric and color you want — and finding it all together," she said, adding many of her clients wear their custom shirts for over three years.

Once more, Glass acts as a kind of wardrobe consultant to her male clients, dispensing advice about cut and color, as well as building up their confidence about fashion, style and dressing. "I think men are insecure about clothes," said Baller. "They need a wife or a salesperson to help them, to give them confidence, to help them try new things."

Absent his wife, Baller said he appreciates having Glass all to himself to help make selections and develop a wardrobe that suits him. "In stores, you don't tend to have that much of a relationship," he said. And, while you can forge a personal relationship with salespeople, "you don't have other customers around," when you're working with a custom clothier, he said.

The process

Glass, who often receives calls from wives in

search of help for their husbands, fits her customers wherever and whenever it's most convenient for them, so trips to clients' offices and homes are frequent.

Dianna Jellinek of Vervoux Couture also travels to her clients for fittings and consultations, although her Troy studio has two ample dressing rooms and an impressive display of her designs for clients to peruse.

In general, a designer or clothier, like Jellinek, will first want to talk with a client about their lifestyle and current wardrobe needs. After, he or she will take about 20 body measurements and create a general clothing pattern. The information will be kept on file for future reference.

"It's not just the bust, waist and hips here," said Jellinek, adding that she even computes a measurement for a fish-tail, ball gown hem when taking measurements "just in case" the client wants such a dress later.

Jellinek, who studied couture in Italy and attended the Parsons School of Design in Paris, also sketches her designs for clients.

Some clothiers require minimum orders, and prices vary depending on fabric choice, garment type and the amount of workmanship in a piece. Depending on the garment and the clothier's current workload, orders require between three weeks and two months to complete.

Jellinek estimates that her orders take about one month and charges \$750 and up for a dress and \$1,400 and up for a gown.

Barbara Terry of Farmington Hills' BT Couture Design, which exclusively handles female clients and specializes in special occasion dresses, estimates the process to

STAFF PHOTO BY TOM DORFFMEYER

take between six and 12 weeks. Including fabric, her evening wear runs about \$1,000, she said.

Customers can also expect to see a prototype of a garment before it's actually made.

Perfect fit

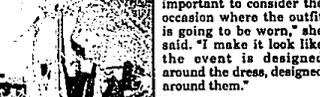
While men typically don't like to shop, women tend to enjoy it. The problem is locating precisely the garments they need and want, and many women are frustrated by the process, said Jellinek.

"They can't find what they're looking for in a store. To find the whole combination — the right color, the right size, the right design, the right sleeve length — well, it is impossible," she said. "And, reasonably speaking, people want to enhance their wardrobe and have pieces that they can get some use of. ... Even getting the little black dress or the right red dress can be difficult. It's like waiting for a car."

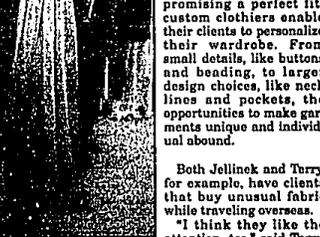
That's why Jellinek primarily creates very classic, European clothing for her clients, like a black, long-sleeved gown with a side slit and interesting neck line. Such a garment, she said, flatters women of all ages and sizes, while being very elegant and sexy.

And, since all of her pieces are custom, they're made to fit the client, rather than a model. "In clothing, not only is important to gear towards a natural size, but it's also important to consider the occasion where the outfit is going to be worn," she said. "I make it look like the client is designed around the dress, designed around them."

STAFF PHOTO BY JOHN STROZEMSKI



Couture craft: Diana Jellinek of Vervoux Couture in Troy, above, examines one of her gowns. At left, beading and a fish-tail hem render another of her gowns a one-of-a-kind piece of art.



Getting personal
Beyond saving time and promising a perfect fit, custom clothiers enable their clients to personalize their wardrobe. From small details, like buttons and beading, to larger design choices, like neck lines and pockets, the opportunities to make garments unique and individual abound.

Both Jellinek and Terry, for example, have clients that buy unusual fabric while traveling overseas. "I think they like the attention, too," said Terry. "It's cheaper than a psychologist, and when they're done they have something pretty to wear. ... It's the individual attention, like when you would go for a massage."

Retail, style and special store events are listed in this calendar. Please send information to: Malls & Mainstreets, c/o Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 805 East Maple, Birmingham, MI 48009. Fax: (248) 644-1314. Information must be received by 5 p.m. Monday for publication the following Sunday.
MONDAY, MAY 1

CHANEL WEEK
Saks Fifth Avenue, the Somerset Collection in Troy, hosts a Chanel "High Summer" event featuring a special collection of the house's ready-to-wear pieces, foot wear and accessories for summer through May 6. Chanel Boutique, second floor. For more information, call (248) 614-3302.
TUESDAY, MAY 2

ECCLADA RUNWAY SHOW
Neiman Marcus, the Somerset Collection in Troy, presents Ecclada's Fall/Winter 2000 Collection to benefit The Children's Charities Coalition, 11 a.m. reception, 11:30 a.m. show and noon luncheon, sec-

through May 7, first floor. For more information, call (248) 643-3300.

JEWELRY DESIGNER VISITS
Jacob's in Rochester Hills hosts jewelry designer John Atencio and his contemporary "Elements" collection, 11 a.m.-3 p.m., Fine Jewelry department. For details, call (248) 651-6000.
SATURDAY, MAY 6

MOTHER & DAUGHTER EVENT
Saks Fifth Avenue, the Somerset Collection in Troy, hosts a breakfast and makeover event for mothers and daughters with a team of makeup artists from Trish McEwey, 9 a.m., Cosmetics & Fragrances, first floor. To make a reservation, call (248) 614-3364.

FARMERS' MARKET OPENING
Rochester's Downtown Development Authority opens their Farmers' Market, at East Third and Water streets. After the market will be open every Saturday through the end of October, 8 a.m.-2 p.m. For additional information, call (248) 656-0060.

ADDED ATTRACTIONS

ond floor. Tickets are \$50. To make reservations, call (248) 332-7173.
WEDNESDAY, MAY 3

READINGS AND SIGNING
Author Arliss Ryan reads from and signs her new book, *The Kingsley House*, at Borders Books & Music in Farmington Hills, 7 p.m. For more information, call (248) 737-0110.
THURSDAY, MAY 4

BEAUTY EVENT
Neiman Marcus, the Somerset Collection in Troy, offers shoppers a signature cosmetic bag with cosmetics or fragrance purchases of \$75 or more and an ample selection of deluxe-sized gift sets as part of the retailer's national program The Beauty Event,