

Dundas West revisited



Gone Shopping

Kelly Gadzala

With the launch of *Gone Shopping* a year ago, I wrote about the Dundas West strip between Bathurst and Ossington.

And, just as my column has grown in the last 12 months, so too has this 'hood, morphing into a hip, artsy zone, with older Portuguese shops and continuing on its tangent to neighbourly coolness.

There have been some notable changes. Skirt and Clandestino, two shops I visited last year, have closed.

Others have sprouted up, though, like the vegetarian eatery Cafe 668, which has relocated from its Kensington digs to its swanky new locale at 885 Dundas West.

Also, a design collective, Thout Design, is setting up a retail space at 825 Dundas. It'll be a nice complement to MADE, the shop-gallery featuring contemporary Canadian design and furniture that has been on the street for about a year.

As I troll the strip for stories and shopping stars, I hear a local designer and a 1980s vintage store are poised to set up shop soon.

For stylish vintage hounds who frequent the vintage shop Sunshine Deli, two new shops of a similar ilk will have the most discriminating of shoppers looking for regular fashion fixes.

Melanie's Closet has been on the

strip for only six months, but owner and vintage vamp Melanie Janisse has been on the fashion scene for years, selling her sought-after wares in her Parkdale studio apartment to vintage buffs, New York designers, stylists, film stars and the like.

Janisse specializes in high-end vintage pieces for women, from coats and beaded boleros to jewellery and dresses. She tells me she carries the labels and styles all vintage aficionados look for: a bit of 1940s, a few 1930s glam gowns and labels like Diane von Furstenberg and Lanvin.

Though you can find a dress for \$39, the real gems are the decidedly different and rare designer duds, like the long Pucci skirt Janisse has priced at \$4,500.

Another Pucci number Janisse is repairing, a collared 1960s dress made of lightweight, diaphanous light pink and yellow floral fabric, is so darn sweet I can see a young Hayley Mills sporting it with opaque white tights. Janisse says she'll price it around \$2,500.

A fountain of information about designers, both local and international, Janisse is also a visual artist — her paintings grace the shop — and a writer — she's currently penning a book of poetry.

Janisse prefers to think of Melanie's Closet as a salon-like living room where artistic people come in, talk literature and just hang out.

Big on selling wearable contextualized pieces, Janisse loves the stories behind the goods, an ethic I admire and share as a fellow thrift shop maven.

The necklaces she makes, vintage chains linked with old charms and

other vintage findings, are dainty-dreamy.

The charms are leather bits, pendants and pieces of old poetry chapbooks dipped in encaustic. Janisse says she likes clients to pick out their own charms, so she does the chains on a custom order basis.

For \$49, they're going to the top of my holiday wish list.

Another find: the "poetry cuff" bracelets Janisse commissioned local designer Susie Love to craft. They're chunky acrylic cuffs with feathers and bits of newspaper clippings and poetry embedded in them. A large cuff sells for \$75.

829 Dundas St West (416) 532-4231 www.melaniescloset.ca

Nearby, the gals at **909 Vintage** are in the final stages of merchandising the loot from a recent shopping trip to Los Angeles.

Owners Ria Jones and Elizabeth Gondek have both been picking and wholesaling vintage clothing for over 15 years, but this is their first retail venture.

They took the shop over in August and since then have been attracting a steady flow of customers — if the two hours I spent with them on a rainy November afternoon is any indication.

Like Janisse, Jones and Gondek focus on high-end vintage and are just as knowledgeable. They source items from all over the world and focus on labels like Dior, Valentino and Burberry.

Their shop is jam-packed with boots, leather jackets, coats, skirts, dresses, jewellery — even glassware and the odd piece of furniture.

But the sheer vintage volume doesn't mean they're not discriminat-



KELLY GADZALA/TOWN CRIER

A GIFT WITH A STORY: Melanie Janisse's pendants, made with vintage findings like old poetry chap books, can be found at her store, Melanie's Closet, for \$49.

ing. Gondek tells me each piece must meet a certain criteria and have quality detail — a characteristic many 909 customers look for and appreciate, she says.

I'm a coat fiend, so Gondek shows me a 1960s grey and orange plaid by Aquascutum for \$200 — it's similar to Burberry.

The tag inside says, "Made in London", a marker of its quality and rarity.

Though there are ladies' dresses and separates on high racks in addition to men's clothing, I gravitate towards the accessories.

An alligator Pierre Cardin clutch behind glass is around \$300, while an inky blue velvety cloche hat, made by Marida for Lord and Taylor in London, is only \$65.

Another little treasure, a black silk velvet purse with a geometric shape made in the 1940s by Garay, has red Bakelite handles. If I had \$250, I would consider it.

A magazine clutch purse selling for \$195 is my fave in this store. Made of fashion magazines from the 1960s and '70s, these purses are highly collectable and hard to find.

Gondek shows me a dress from her recent LA trip, a '60s jersey silk long-sleeved Pucci dress with hot pink and orange swirls against a white background. It's classic Pucci and the mod glam-pot in me wishes she had the \$1,200 or so they're asking for it.

Gondek says the prices are somewhat flexible. Though the pieces are priced at market value, she doesn't want to be too pricey.

"I want to be accessible to a working girl. I know how important it is to have one nice thing," she tells me.

Jones tells me the strip is an artist's haven and is becoming so well known for its vintage goods that locals are calling it "The Market".

909 Dundas Street West, (416) 998-5510.

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Kathleen Timmis, a partner in the personal injury law firm of Linett & Timmis, has been practicing accident and insurance litigation in Toronto for over 16 years. Her firm has established a solid reputation, representing thousands of injured victims and their families throughout Ontario.



Kathleen Timmis

Linett & Timmis
Personal Injury Lawyers

1867 Yonge St., Suite 1004, Toronto

416-366-5100
1-800-363-5100

ktimmis@linett-timmis.com

Q: I have a disability plan which is supposed to pay me a monthly benefit if I can't work. About 6 months ago, I experienced a major depression and I had to go off work. I am seeing a psychiatrist and taking medication. The insurance company has refused to pay me my benefit. The adjuster says there is no objective evidence that I am ill. Can they do this?

A: By their very nature, psychiatric illnesses such as depression are not capable of such "objective" evidence as an x-ray of a broken bone. However, they can be as or more disabling than physical illnesses or injuries. Insurance companies often seem to apply different or more rigorous standards when confronted with a psychiatric claim. Depending on the wording of the insurance contract, this is likely inappropriate. It will be important for a lawyer to look at the terms of your specific policy to determine the test of disability you are required to meet and the type of evidence necessary to meet that test.

Bra boutique supports more than cleavage

KELLY GADZALA

Town Crier

The bra may be a century old, but for Secrets From Your Sister lingerie boutique owner Jennifer Klein, it's anything but a bust.

Just settling into her new retail digs on Bloor St. West, west of Bathurst, Klein is big on educating women about the right bra size.

"Many women are in denial," Klein said two days after her grand opening event on Nov. 3. So much so, she continues, that they wear the same bra size for years without knowing if it is the right fit.

Even after women are properly fitted, Klein says many have trouble accepting their actual size.

"They hear the letter (cup size) and they get scared," she said. "The letter really doesn't matter."

The former costume design student, in business now for almost a decade, says women come into her shop saying they've never had a bra fitting.

That lack of education, combined with images of women in magazines that "just aren't normal", creates a negative female body image, Klein says. Many of the women Klein sees don't feel good about their breasts and their bodies in general, she adds.

The North American approach to bras doesn't help women celebrate their bodies. Canadian and American companies, she explains, simply "aren't interested" in producing garments that fit different body types.

The industry is cutting down on smaller cup sizes, and the largest size in many mainstream markets, she says, is a double D cup size — not that large when you consider Klein has



FRANCIS CRESCIA/TOWN CRIER

A MUST FOR BUSTS: Jen Klein shows the skimpy attire in her new store, Secrets From Your Sister.

seen nine-year-olds with a G-cup.

The end result is women have less choice and must rely on mass marketed bras that don't fit well.

By contrast, the European markets cater to different sizes and produce better quality pieces. Klein makes a point of stocking such bras, offering a selection of hard-to-find labels from places like Britain and France. She even holds after-hours bra-fitting parties for groups of up-to-10 to make the fitting process a little more fun.

The issue is one of self-confidence, she suggests. Once women see how proper bra size enhances their body, Klein says they often feel better about themselves.

And the benefits can be physical

too. "Bras are structural garments" that can alleviate back and neck pain if they are the right size. Klein tells the story of one woman whose back pain disappeared a day after wearing a bra that was fit especially for her.

Recently, Klein sponsored a Miss Canada Plus Pageant contestant who ended up winning. And Klein ended up inviting all the contestants back to her boutique for a bra fitting.

"Accept yourself. You are who you are."

The new 1,400-square-foot boutique is double the size of the old location. It sports six change rooms and a lounge for husbands and kids. The space is also wheelchair and stroller accessible.