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LAS VEGAS BUSINESS PRESS

Tuesday, February 13, 2007

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Anything but cut and dried

Two Vegas hair salons pursue differing paths to success

BY LAURA CARROLL

The days of the shampoo, cut and blow-dry are long since gone. The Hollywood hairdresser skills flaunted by Warren Beatty's character in the 1975 movie "Shampoo," would probably seem quaint by today's salon standards. For two Las Vegas beauty parlor operators, it's a demanding market out there and they have to set a fierce pace to keep up with the times.

Tonic Salon proprietor Ruben Fisher is doing well enough to have opened his second beauty parlor on West Sahara in less than two years. Apty named Tonic II, Fisher assumed the lease on salon space from the William Whatley Salon, which closed last year at the same location.

"My best advice is to find a salon that is closing or where the owners have left a lease. That way you don't have to build out," says Fisher, describing his strategy. "I bought my first salon for \$1. They left the lease on Friday and I had it by Wednesday."

TAKE YOUR CHANCES

Tonic II's door reads, "Appointment only, walk-ins by chance." It reflects the salon's in-your-face attitude, which may be a factor in Fisher's success.

Costs to open the Tonic salons were about \$150,000 each, which mainly reflected furnishing and redecorating costs. "We spared no expense," says Fisher, who shopped at Pottery Barn for shelving and curtains.

The entrepreneur bought a wooden bar at R.C. Willey and makes use of it as a front desk for Tonic II. "You just have to be creative," he explains.

"I wouldn't have



Marlene Karas | Business Press
Ruben Fisher owns Tonic II Salon, located at 7985 W. Sahara Ave.



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been able to do it if I had to build out," he adds. "This way, you're able to open up and generate money from the opening, but I did take a \$30,000 loan on (Tonic II)."

Inside the salon a lack of counter space is balanced by long mirrors. All storage units are enclosed, so products and tools are hidden from customers.

The *de rigueur* magazines are present, but discreetly placed to the side of the couch and almost out of sight, requiring a second glance to see them. The focus, instead, is on kitschy, coffee table books, including titles such as *1,001 Movies* and *1,000 Tattoos*.

An old-fashioned hotel bell sits on the front desk, and dark brown wood matches the brown-stained concrete floor, making the place feel more homey than salons with a high-tech look.

"As a society we started out all boutique-y and now it's getting back to where people don't feel ownership, they feel like they're just a number," Fisher says. "People lose intimacy. Salons that are more successful now are more boutique-y and the decor is more inviting. People will pay more for comfort."

GOOD TIMING

Nicole Jewgieniew, owner of Moxie Hair Studios, purchased her salon for an undisclosed amount but its sale price was once listed at \$1.3 million. She says that, once the opportunity arose, "the timing felt right,"

"The concept of owning a beauty salon," she elaborates, "that I have come to love as a customer over the years, was an exciting venture I was ready to take on."

"The previous owners recently had a baby and they were looking to spend more time at home," Jewgieniew says of her good fortune. "Ironically, I've been home with my babies for the past couple of years. I'm finally at a place where I can spend more time out of the house and balance work with family."

As far as decor, Jewgieniew agrees with Fisher that customers are paying attention.

"However, high-end luxury doesn't necessarily denote hip and contemporary," she cautions. "The look and feel of a salon certainly plays into the mood of the customer. While some may feel luxurious in a salon filled with granite and marble, others may indulge in a salon that displays modern art."

Jewgieniew's future plans consist of expanding her salon's brand to include locations in Green Valley and inside a Strip casino, possibly within the next 12 to 24 months, she says.

THE ONE-STOP SHOP

As for the future of hair in the valley, according to Fisher, "in five years Vegas will be a totally different market. Clients will be more educated and hair-savvy. They know how to use products and tools, so stylists have to become more educated and the city is pumping out better-educated, more-demanding stylists. It keeps evolving."

"I believe the salon industry is (changing) and will change on several levels within the next five to 10 years," Jewgieniew adds. "First of all, technology is ever-changing and finding its way into the salons."

To move with the times, Moxie Hair Studios has set up computers for its clients to peruse while their hair is being processed. The salon also plans to install plasma TVs for clients to watch.

Besides such technological boosts, "salons are incorporating the 'one-stop shop' concept," Jewgieniew reports. "Today's busy individual needs a place to get their hair done, have a facial and buy the quality products they deserve."

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