

Globe Toronto

PARKDALE » SPARKLE PLENTY

Made You Look – twice as good

BY DEIRDRE KELLY

All that glitters has gone gold for Sarah Hamel. Next month, the proprietor of a hip Parkdale jewellery store will unveil a sparkling \$2-million expansion on Queen Street West near Brock Avenue. “Someone’s gotta do it. Someone’s gotta have the vision,” says Ms. Hamel, who was Sarah Dougall until she remarried in July.

She admits the words “Parkdale” and “million” aren’t usually heard in the same sentence.

Made You Look is a jewellery studio and gallery that she and a number of independent Toronto artisans have occupied for six years in a retail strip ruled by cheap rent and cut-rate real estate because of its location on the “other side” of the Dufferin Street bridge.

But the address has never posed a barrier to a deep-pocketed clientele that has readily bypassed Bloor Street to ogle Ms. Hamel’s one-of-a-kind baubles.

“It was really busy from the get-go,” she says of the 2001 opening of the original store at 1338 Queen St. W., just a bit west of the Drake and Gladstone hotels, and nearby businesses that are bringing traffic to Parkdale as it grows into a centre of chic.

“We were filling a niche for handmade goods. At the time of the opening, there were no other jewellery galleries in the city and this created a buzz. We are not just a store. The jewellery is like art and so we display it in a gallery setting,



Sarah Hamel is expanding her business to a second location on the south side of Queen Street West. KEVIN VAN PAASSEN/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

I’m on a mission to transform the neighbourhood

Sarah Hamel, owner, Made You Look

in backlit display cases that showcase the uniqueness of the work. None of it looks like it came from a cookie cutter.”

Word of mouth spread and soon Made You Look’s gold and diamonds were attracting the likes of Galen Weston Jr., executive chairman of Loblaw Companies, who in 2005 got his custom-made wedding band there, along with that of his wife, Alexandra Schmidt,

of the Bata shoe dynasty.

Actresses such as Meg Ryan and Jessica Alba shopped there when in town shooting. Texan pop singer Kelly Clarkson wore a Made You Look wedding band made of white sapphires and 14-karat yellow gold in the video for *Behind These Hazel Eyes*.

Prices range from \$35 for a funky handcrafted fabric brooch to \$10,000 for a demure one-karat diamond and platinum engagement ring.

“The need to expand has become obvious,” said Ms. Hamel, who studied jewellery design at George Brown College in Toronto. “When we started, we had four in-house jewellers and now we have 12. The client base has always been there, but now we have more product to showcase.”

And there will be 2,600 sprawling square feet of space filling a newly refurbished building, complete with skylights and hand-carved trim. It’s directly opposite the original location, which will remain open.

The second store, called Made You Look South, will serve as the new home of the Metal Arts Guild, of which Ms. Hamel is president, and will also house a yoga studio and two loft-style apartments, one of which has already been rented out to film industry types for \$2,000 a month.

Mini-mogul? “That’s me,” as quiesces the bouncy, entrepreneurial 29-year-old mother of one. “I’m on a mission to transform the neighbourhood.”

Ms. Hamel has not just expanded her business, she has brought sparkle to a block dominated by ragtag convenience stores and cheap restaurants.

She has decorated the façade of the 100-year-old building – purchased last summer for \$900,000 – with tiny marble mosaic tiles that shine like obsidian. Inside, there is new sleek, white modern shelving to better show off the wares of the 50 Toronto independent jewellery designers who sell their work through the store.

The renovation cost \$1-million and Ms. Hamel notes that it was executed with great care “because there is a lot of history on this street and I wanted to respect that.”

“I love Parkdale,” she declares. “And I want the rest of Canada to shop here.”