

ROCHESTER BUSINESS JOURNAL

Color analysis is back, and it's smarter than ever

By ANDREA DECKERT - 1/5/2007

New twelve-tone system serves both sexes well

Julie Allen knows that women tend to "beige out."

Busy with families and careers, Allen says, women often turn to their wardrobes as a way to simplify their lives. They pick neutral tones or opt for basic black, which goes with most things but may not flatter the person wearing it, she says.

Allen and business partner, Kerry Stich, are looking to reintroduce color to people's wardrobes with Bella Bleu II, a personal color analysis business. The duo, who also are first cousins, opened Bella Bleu on South Main Street in Pittsford in September 2005 after running it as a home-based business. Allen, 46, and Stich, 42, were certified in personal color analysis in 2004.

The two also share a background in human resources, where image, particularly during the interview process, comes into play. Allen, of Penfield, still works part time for the human resources department at the Summit Federal Credit Union.

She had her color analysis done roughly six years ago. Allen says the experience changed her life.

"I had direction in wardrobing, I saved money and I presented myself in the most favorable manner," she says.

After seeing the impact on Allen, Stich, a Pittsford resident, became interested in the process.

At Bella Bleu, the roughly hour-and-a-half color analysis costs \$125, but Allen and Stich say the cost is quickly recouped when customers no longer purchase clothing that never sees the light beyond the closet. The color analysis offered by the firm is far different from those available in the past, they say, when people were categorized through a four-season method of identifying skin tone as either warm or cool.

The 12-tone seasonal system, which uses a color system developed at Rochester Institute of Technology, includes a greater range of colors, since roughly 85 percent of the population do not fall into those original warm and cool color categories. They are in between them, so the original four-color analysis does not really work.

The color study is done by observing and comparing the effects of placing different test colors next to the skin. To ensure customers get their personal color tone, each individual is draped in a gray cloth and cap. The color analyst, either Allen or Stich, Bella Bleu's only employees, also wear gray.

Once the analysis is complete, customers receive a 64-color canvas swatch book and a full description of the person's profile and tips on wardrobe, hairstyle and accessories.

"This takes the whole question out of what to wear," Stich says.

Once people have the swatch books with their colors, shopping becomes easier and the clothes then enhance appearance, she says.

In addition to offering color analysis, Bella Blue sells jewelry, handbags, cosmetics and other accessories, a number of which are made by local artists.

Many of the store's customers are in the 35-to-50 age group and are a mix of occupations and races. A number of people come in together, such as sisters, friends, or mothers and daughters, with the goal of

enhancing their appearance.

Allen and Stich recommend people over age 18 undergo the color analysis. The firm's service is not limited to women. Roughly 10 percent of Bella Bleu's clients are males and that number is growing. Men receive swatch books with slightly different colors than the women and are also given color options for shirt-and-tie combinations, for example.

Bella Bleu's owners are passionate about the business and its goal of helping people feel better about themselves.

"This can simplify your life and help you save money," Allen says. "Who doesn't want that?"

adeckert@rbj.net / 585-546-8303

1/5/2007 (C) Rochester Business Journal