



1342 Queen St. West, Toronto, ON M6K 1L4

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Shopgirls is 10!

Parkdale fashion store's success is thanks to neighbours, customers, designers

TORONTO, ON — It wasn't easy. But it was worth it.

When Michelle Germain first opened Shopgirls in Parkdale in 2007, there were obstacles to overcome. Several, actually.

Germain was a new mom looking to get out of fashion marketing and into a retail business of her own. She wanted to work close to home and chose Parkdale as Shopgirls' headquarters, but the neighbourhood had not yet developed as a retail destination.

Still, banking on potential, Germain signed a lease on Queen St. W.. It was a large space with room to grow. But she was starting with a small budget. On opening day, her store was half empty.

To top it off, Germain was a new mother, with a one-year-old at home. Sleep was hard to come by.

Still, despite the obstacles, Shopgirls grew. And grew. "We're 10!" says Germain, now a mother of two daughters. "The fact that we're still here is something to be celebrated."

These days, the store's walls are fully lined with sophisticated Canadian fashions. Local customers have become old friends. And visitors come to Parkdale from across the country, even around the globe. An online store at Shopgirls.ca launched in 2014.

Shopgirls' success is thanks to feedback from customers, says Germain.

"My office was right behind a wall near the change rooms," she says, recalling the early days. She could overhear women in distress at the prospect of simply finding a pair of jeans and a top to go with them. "I'd sit here and hear people crying because of how they feel in their bodies. It was

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heartbreaking. Especially with new moms. They're sleep deprived, and their bodies are not their own."

Listening to that cry for help, Michelle decided to fill her store with clothes that would fit and flatter *any* body, no matter the shape, age, or lifestyle. She bought with six distinct body shapes in mind and trained staff to help customers find the styles best suited for their shape.

"We really don't have a typical customer," says Germain. "In some stores, you really have the feeling that they're going after a person of a particular age. It's not like that here. We have people who are 18, and we have people who are 75. It's like we're all in this together. We're an inclusive family."

It's true that all customers are welcome at Shopgirls, but not so with the labels it carries. In fact, the store stocks only Canadian designs, and most of them are actually made on home soil. Germain says innovative Canadian designers have been instrumental in her goal of creating a unique assortment that truly works for Canadian culture and climate.

"Hundreds of Canadian designers have been shown here. And we've worked with some designers since they started, since their first collection," says Germain, naming Melissa Nepton as an example.

Canadian designers are ready to take their rightful place in the global marketplace, she adds. Parkdale's rising reputation as a shopping destination has led to more international foot traffic in the neighbourhood, which has helped spread the good word about Canadian design far and wide.

Dec. 7 is the big day, and Shopgirls will be celebrating all month long. Neighbours, designers, and customers who helped make it happen are invited to the party.

For the first 10 days of December,, Shopgirls will celebrate with daily giveaways to 10 customers. There will be gifts with purchases, too, featuring merchandise specially made for Shopgirls, including candles by Swell Made Co., pillows by Sarah Smile, and cookies by Yummy Stuff.

Come and celebrate with us!

ABOUT SHOPGIRLS

With pieces curated to fit and flatter every body, and a focus on making all women look and feel great, Shopgirls is all about body positivity. We stock more than 80 Canadian designers of clothing, apparel, and gifts in our bricks-and-mortar location in Parkdale, and our online shop at shopgirls.ca.

CONTACT

Kim Allin, Online Marketing Manager

EMAIL: kim@shopgirls.ca

CALL: 416.534.SHOP (7467)