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Downtown's new divas; Retailers are taking a shine to 104th Street's city centre location and historic buildings; [Final Edition]

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Abstract (Document Summary)

Kyla Knight founded this business in St. Albert in 2005, then moved downtown to attract more Edmonton clients. "When I walked into the Saddlery Building I became obsessed," she says. "There was a tin ceiling, hardwood floors, and I was caught -- hook, line and sinker."

"Everything from casual to corporate and formal to funky," [Kelly Kleiber] says. "I opened this store because downtown is becoming so vibrant."

"The street is crazy busy," [Pamela Miller] says. "The rest of the week is steady but our Saturday sales are four or five times any other days."

Full Text (634 words)

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EDMONTON - Just north of Jasper Avenue, along the tree-lined sidewalks of 104th Street, some of Edmonton's oldest buildings are enticing young women entrepreneurs.

"We have a whole bunch of new divas of the downtown," says Nora Martin of Lizotte Real Estate.

These women expect their small businesses to succeed on 104th Street, which is downtown -- but not overshadowed by office towers, Martin says.

"We wanted a New York feel with high ceilings -- industrial but modern," says Alyssa Kanhai. She and sister Corinna Ha recently opened Pure Bridal in the 96-year-old Saddlery Building at 10137 104th St.

They finished their space with "a cosmopolitan look" including hardwood floors, oversize change rooms and a catwalk that suggests a New York fashion show.

Pure Bridal sells gowns and accessories for wedding parties.

As a complementary coincidence, The Scroll Shop -- specializing in wedding invitations -- also has moved into the Saddlery Building.

Kyla Knight founded this business in St. Albert in 2005, then moved downtown to attract more Edmonton clients. "When I walked into the Saddlery Building I became obsessed," she says. "There was a tin ceiling, hardwood floors, and I was caught -- hook, line and sinker."

The Scroll Shop sells fine stationery including paper, cards, envelopes, wax seals, calligraphy sets and hand-lettered invitations to weddings, parties and events.

Kelly Kleiber opened C'est Sera and Chemistry Clothing on 104th Street with business partner Dwight Dupuis after seven years in Old Strathcona, where they continue to sell women's and men's apparel.

"Everything from casual to corporate and formal to funky," Kleiber says. "I opened this store because downtown is becoming so vibrant."

"I love the independent feeling of Whyte Avenue and this has the same eclectic nature. It feels very familiar. It also reminds me of Old Montreal."

Her new location is in the 95-year-old Armstrong Block at 10125 104th Street, with 15-foot ceilings and maple floors that "squeak in just the right spots." Pedestrian traffic is good and will improve, Kleiber says, when the 35-storey Icon condominium opens on the street and the Sobeys' grocery store opens -- with a Starbucks outlet and outdoor seating on Jasper Avenue.

Pamela Miller started Strada Streetwear last November after looking around Old Strathcona.

"There are so many other shops on Whyte Avenue," she found. "And I think downtown is getting more trendy."

The neighbouring condo residents -- in modern buildings and old warehouse conversions -- have been underserved by retail, she says. "There is nothing except City Centre mall."

Miller's men's and women's clothing is more offbeat than most of what's in the malls. Some lines are European, some are locally made and most are casual with occasional skater influences.

Once she decided to open downtown, the choice of 104th Street was easy. "I love the brick buildings. It's kind of a European look."

The Saturday market -- right out front of her store -- is a big draw.

"The street is crazy busy," Miller says. "The rest of the week is steady but our Saturday sales are four or five times any other days."

New buildings and businesses will broaden the attractions of Fourth Street and extend the hours of activity, Martin says.

"The Icon will have three floors of retail and professional space," she says. The Sobeys and Starbucks outlets will attract pedestrian traffic, day and night, creating more activity on 104th Street -- and throughout the downtown.

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[Illustration]

Colour Photo: Jason Scott, The Journal / Pamela Miller owns Strada, a funky new clothing shop on 104th Street. ; Colour Photo: John Lucas, The Journal / Kyla Knight, left, and Heather Murdock own The Scroll Shop. ; Colour Photo: John Lucas, The Journal / Kelly Kleiber, co-owner with Dwight Dupuis (seen in mirror) of the ladies wear shop C'est Sera and Chemistry Clothing. ;

