

SalonNews

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Marianne Strokirk:

Heat Passion

Marianne Strokirk, owner of the Chicago-based Marianne Strokirk Salons, knew at an early age what she wanted to do with her life as a young girl growing up in Sweden.

Strokirk spent most of her teen years apprenticing with her father. When she was 17, she went out on her own, traveling to England and France to work as a stylist. In 1967, she decided to come to the U.S. and work for a year, and she's been here ever since, finding her niche in Chicago's fashionable Gold Coast neighborhood.

"I guess I always knew I wanted to get into this business," she recalls. "My father was in the business, so I was surrounded by it growing up. I always had a passion for it."

She spent 21 years managing other salons and serving as creative director, until she decided she wanted to spread her wings and open her own salon.

"When I decided to open my salon in the late '80s, there were many challenges," she says. "There was a recession going on, but I had a clientele who still expected certain services and amenities when they came to a salon, but this was something I wanted to do."

When she opened her first salon in 1989, she had a large clientele from her 10-plus years working at other salons. When they opened the doors there was a two- to three-week waiting list. In the early days, it was just Strokirk, a colorist and an assistant. Today, she employs approximately 60 people between her two salons.

Strokirk says her salons have grown in part because of her in-depth training program. She personally instructs all the stylists in a two-year training program. Through the entire process, they work closely with Strokirk sitting in on consultations, shampooing or drying her clients. The focus of the program is not only to teach style and techniques, but also to open up the lines of communications to make the new stylists feel comfortable asking questions and coming up with new things.

In addition to teaching her own stylists, Strokirk also periodically holds classes for other stylists outside her salons on a multitude of topics ranging from hands-on cutting and styling demonstrations to new trends.

"It's important to share in education and the learning process," she says. "You have to be more rounded. A lot of people get burned out in the business because of the scheduling and the hours."



Photo: © 2006, Photography by Stephen J. Lee

"I'm a purely visual person. It's all about what I see," says Marianne Strokirk. "I can read all the books I want, but I need to see it."

The sessions allow Strokirk and her stylists the chance to come together and share ideas and success stories, from which everyone can benefit.

"I don't think the kind of training we do is commonplace, which is what separates us from other salons," she says. "About every six weeks, we have a meeting where we all get together and we conduct different sessions ranging from conducting consultations or new holiday trends."

Broadening Horizons

With her husband, John, handling business duties, Strokirk focuses her attention on the creative side, folk her own sense of style and maintains her artistic edge. "When you follow your own style you're never out of step," she says. "The rule of thumb when it comes to emphasizing a client's positive features too often is downplayed by even the best stylists."

Sometimes clients say they have better hair. I always tell them there's nothing as bad hair, just bad haircut."

She also spends a lot of time traveling and experiencing new things. "Creativity is within you, and you have to get it out, express it," Strokirk says. "Personally, I'm a purely visual person. It's all about what I see. I can read the books I want, but I need to see it."

She advises other owners to try as much as they can and get involved with different organizations to meet other owners, share ideas and stay informed about the latest happenings in the industry.

"I've been involved with Cosmetologists Chicago (CC) for as long as I can remember," Strokirk says. "It's a great way to provide education to stylists. We've presented at the Alternative Hair Show, which is a terrific way to get exposure and be exposed to new ideas. There's a lot involved. We've also conducted seminars at the Chicago Midwest Beauty Show which CC presents. Doing that allows us to meet others in the business, share our ideas and learn from others."

"Marianne is a great example of what happens when you give a business person something more to do," says Paul Dykstra, executive director of CC. "Even though she runs two very high-profile, successful salons in downtown Chicago, she always has found the time and the creative energy to help us when we need her."

Whether it's training new stylists or sharing her ideas with other owners, Strokirk always maintains an enthusiasm and passion for what she does.

"I truly love what I do," she says. "I'm passionate about it. Like a lot of people out there, I may not always come to work, but the moment I see the salon I remember that passion and why I'm here. I want to steal what it means to be a stylist and work for excellence. I try to hire people who have that same passion. I can teach them about cutting and coloring, but I can't teach them passion. They just have to have it." Diane Krueger