

J. Hathaway Struts on the Scene

By Rachel C. Murphy
Photos by Susan Robichaud



In its unassuming location on Wornall Road, Hathaway Shoe has specialized in providing the midtown Kansas City area with Eurocomfort brands such as Keen and Bjorn for more than 10 years. But sometimes your feet need a little more sass. At least that's the way owner Jill Hathaway felt. So she strolled a little southwest, all the way up town with her newest venture—J. Hathaway Shoe Boutique in the Park Place Center.

Walking into J. Hathaway, there is no mistaking that you're in a haven of fashion. Soft lighting bounces off luxuriously distressed Fry boots and Ann Roth heels. Towering 5-inch stilettos share cubbies with hand worked leather purses by unique designers from Italy and the United States. Deep pewter Venetian plaster cocoons the footwear in velvety luxury and lets the rich neutrals pop out of the walls.

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For Hathaway, the change of pace is welcome. "The Eurocomfort is great, but lately I've had the drive to do fashion. It's always fun to make people feel good, but if you can make people look good with their shoes, it gives me a little more variety of styles that I can work with." Says Hathaway.

In lean economic times, new ventures are often shielded away from, but Hathaway is confident in not only her concept,

but also her product. "There's still women who want to look good, and you have to have shoes. Normally in the fashion market, women will buy shoes more quickly than a new outfit. You can wear what you have on and change your shoes, or change an accessory and have a whole new look."

For the woman who wants a unique look, J. Hathaway is the place to find it. Here, the emphasis is on more than just high fashion, it's about finding a look that isn't walking out of just any department stores. Hathaway is looking to Italy, Spain and boutique designers with smaller collections that aren't carried in larger shoe retailers such as Halls, Nordstrom's, or Von Maur. "No one wants to see their shoes coming and going. What you find here is going to be exclusive," she says.

Keeping up with current trends is her passion and she turns not only to annual shoe markets, but also to her own customers. "Religious research really leads me to great finds. I had a woman from Scottsdale come in the other day and she had great shoes on. I asked her where she got them and then researched it. It's really about finding the image that I want to portray and then researching it."

Coming from a Eurocomfort background, as well as 15 years of experience in shoe buying and selling, Hathaway is confident that she can find the right shoe for anyone. "We're still concentrating on fit, even though our focus is fashion." She says. And while, definitely in a price point beyond your ubiquitous discount shoe chain, the selection is affordable. With an average price point around \$200, her selections are investment pieces, not portfolios.



One thing that Hathaway is not planning on doing is emphasizing ongoing sale marketing. Instead of marking down her merchandise, she's instead going to use semi-annual events to not only clear out merchandise but also benefit the community. "We don't do sales per se, we are very grassroots. Twice a year in January and July we'll have promotions. In January we'll do a community food drive, where if you bring in a certain number of canned goods, you'll receive a discount." Her first food drive at Hathaway Shoe netted over 4,000 cans of food for local food banks. "I love hitting what's in our backyard," she says. In July, she will continue the tradition started at Hathaway Shoe of bringing in gently worn shoes and receiving a discount on a new pair. Old shoes are then donated to local charities or Soles4Souls, a national charity that donates shoes to those in need.

Obviously Hathaway is not only interested in making people look good, but feel good. She's also the mother of 3, and an active member of several local and national organizations. She thrives on multitasking and says that she thinks that it teaches a work ethic and sense of social responsibility to her children. And she still has time to accessorize.

For the spring, Hathaway says that the best investment pieces are those that you can wear everyday. She points out a pair of knee-high black Fry boots with silver details down the side as an instant lust item. "You know, they were great in the '60's and they're great now." She says. While she definitely sees a market for her stilettos, easy pieces like these become a staple of a well-rounded wardrobe. "If it's J.Hathaway, it's classic sophistication." HL