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Heart and Sola

Sola Salons changes the business of hairstyling

By XAZMIN GARZA
 LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL



Cae Andrews' dream of owning her own salon was lost and then found again at Sola Salons. Photos by [Duane Prokop](#).



Sola Salons is one big salon that houses several little salons.



Carrie Aquino and Lisa Purdy's Studio 5 salon was designed to give the comfort of home.



Anna Chong highlights Daisy Morsey's hair while Morsey's baby sleeps beside them.

The hairstylists at Sola Salons love coming to work. You would, too, if your employer told you how awesome you were the moment you arrived.

The newest location, on The District's east side, greets visitors with a sign on the door that reads "The best stylists deserve their own salon." A nice pat on the back for the stylists and a little encouragement for the client arriving for her highlights appointment.

Sola Salons is a franchise salon concept that lets hairstylists take ownership of their business. It's one big salon that houses dozens of other little salons. Suites go for \$285-\$660 monthly, depending on size and location. Only experienced stylists with an established clientele set up shop here and, judging from the franchise's popularity, they can't do it fast enough.

A few months after the Eastern Avenue and St. Rose Parkway location opened, owner Russell Nordstrom had a waiting list for the second location at Tropicana Avenue and Interstate 215. Rhodes Ranch sprouted shortly after and The District is the latest offering. According to a Sola Salons introduction pamphlet, "more locations will be announced soon."

Apparently, Sola Salons didn't get the recession memo.

"Once (the stylists) move in I never want them to leave," Nordstrom says. "And the more I can help them, the less likely they are to leave."

The "help" comes in many forms. First, Sola buys \$400 worth of product for the stylists to sell through their salon. Most salons grant stylists 10 percent commission of a product sale. Here, they get that plus 90 percent. Stylists get to design their salons to their liking, set the temperature the way they like it and play the music they prefer. The real cherry, though, is the benefits. Sola Salons just unrolled medical coverage and a retirement plan -- foreign concepts in most salons.

For Carrie Aquino and Lisa Purdy, who rent a double suite together, Sola Salons put them in control of the things that were previously



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out of their control. First and foremost, space. Aquino recalls telling her first client at her old salon her plans to join Sola. The stylist in the station next to hers leaned in and whispered, "Really? You're leaving?"

Now, the 200-square-foot space is truly their own. The two 40-year-olds crown molded the ceilings, painted the walls a butter yellow, hung some decorations and tossed a couple plants in for good measure. As Purdy puts it: "We wanted it to look like your house, like your girlfriend is doing your hair" but not from her actual basement.

Rebecca Ramos, 38, was more concerned with personalizing her clients' experiences. The nail tech (Sola Salons also brings in estheticians and masseuses) has a coffee machine in her suite and knows her clients' drink orders by heart. Some take green tea while one prefers hot chocolate. Having beverages ready for clients is one thing, but Ramos can't help but smile when she talks about her client with a walker who now has enough room to easily slide into her pedicure chair.

"I like being able to make people happy like that," she says. She and Nordstrom have something in common.

Whenever Cae Andrews of Studio Cae drives on Interstate 215 past Wigwam Parkway, she's reminded of a dream she lost and then -- thanks to Nordstrom and Sola -- found again. The contractors she hired to build her own salon, Cae Sera Sera, left a light on in the building after she fired them. She can still see the light from the highway. Like her dream, it hasn't quite burned out yet.

After saving for 12 years and maintaining a credit score of 825, she took the plunge and bought a space in Henderson. A year and a half and \$175,000 later, the building was inoperable. Quick buck contractors exploited her naivete, which resulted in one dud job after the next.

Cae Sera Sera may never be, but Studio Cae is open for business at Sola Salons. Her clients sit in a chair across a ceiling-to-floor length wooden mirror she rescued from the building off of the 215.

"I feel like I made my salon -- in miniature form," she says.

Down the hall at The Girls salon, Anna Chong highlights client Daisy Morsey's hair. Morsey has followed Chong through four salons, but enjoys the Sola experience best. With her baby asleep in a stroller beside her, she says, "It's just more personal."

Chong agrees. "It feels good here," says the 32-year-old. "Especially when you see that sign out front."

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