



Exploring the Mercantile

By Sophie Braccini

Construction never goes as fast as one might hope. The Lafayette Mercantile on Mount Diablo Boulevard is no exception, but the few stores already open are making a difference. Your intrepid reporter went exploring two of the new stores, JoS A Bank and Lavande.

"It's nice to have a quality men's store in Lafayette," says Michael Schneider, a satisfied Lafayette resident. "This place is nice, friendly and they offer good quality apparel at a reasonable price." He adds, "It's refreshing to be able to shop locally." The store opens to both Mt. Diablo Blvd. and the back parking lot and is full of light. It offers a beautiful selection of silk, lamb's wool, and cashmere outfits for all occasions and ages. The tie selection is extensive and the warm coats befit the season. I couldn't resist buying a gift for my husband; when he received his new silk sweater he was happily surprised. "Since when do we have a Jos A Bank here?" he asked. "Well, just read your newspaper and you'll find out everything about new businesses around town," I answered.

The next stop was quite a treat: a "mother-daughter" manicure/pedicure package at Lavande, the new spa. Jennifer Leung and her husband have opened their 4th store. The first one was an immediate success in San Francisco. Leung attributes the success to her concept of manicure and pedicure: a whole spa experience complete with massage, exfoliation and pampering.

When I arrived with my daughter, we were invited to sit in adjacent pedicure chairs, our foot baths were ready, warm with rose petals, rose scent in the atmosphere. In fact "rose" was the theme of our treatment, everything smelled of roses but the chocolates we were offered, along with relaxing tea.

The salon is full of light and decorated in soft colors, hues of yellow, green and brown warmed by an occasional touch of orange. Treatment is executed very professionally with the extra smile and soft touch that made me feel at home in Provence. "I love to travel and I enjoy the south of France," says Leung, "I want my clients to get that extra spa treatment and touch of luxury when they come for a manicure/pedicure, without having to pay a fortune." When asked why she decided to choose Lafayette as her East Bay location, Leung explains that it was in fact Steve Cortese, the Mercantile's developer, who visited her and convinced her to join the site.

Once our treatment was over, we were given a tour of the spa. Entering that side of Lavande is like stepping onto another



Jennifer Leung in the lounge of Lavande's Spa Photo Sophie Braccini

continent. "The spa is of Asian inspiration", says Leung, "materials, design and colors have all been assembled to promote relaxation and peacefulness." The first space found upon entering is a large relaxing lounge with chairs and a Jacuzzi. The women's locker offers a steam room and a sauna. The spa comprises different massage rooms: a special one for couple's treatment including a bathtub, an other one with a particular bed for wet treatment, rooms for facials or the different types of massages that the Spa offers: deep tissue, hot stone. Orinda's Cheryl Brewster was having a pedicure at the spa and commented "I came back here today after the massage I had yesterday. I must have pulled a muscle in my back and was in pain; I came here and had such a great experience that I had to come back."

As we left, we were shown the set of manicure and pedicure tools that were now ours and saved in our personal bags at the salon. "Cleanliness and sanitation are very important for me," says Leung, "we want to make sure that our customers feel safe and special." My daughter and I certainly did.