

Published July 24th, 2019

A cut above at RnR Barber and Salon

By Jon Kingdon



Robin, Daniel, Lafayette Council Member Cameron Burks, Roya and Samuel at the store's grand opening. Photo provided

There are many reasons to come and visit Lafayette - the proliferation of so many restaurants, walking around the reservoir and it is starting to become known as a place for tonsorial excellence. In other words, it's become a great place to get your hair cut or styled.

Since last September, located between Gel Nail Spa and the Lafayette Pack and Ship Print Store on Mt. Diablo Boulevard, the RnR Barber and Salon has been run by Robin Graham and Roya Bayat: "We opened the shop together," says Robin. "We are both business partners and in a relationship." Robin and Roya, whose sons Daniel and Samuel both attend Stanley Middle School, have as divergent backgrounds as one can imagine.

Robin grew up in a difficult environment in Sacramento, got married and had his first child in high school, and then got hurt playing football while attending Sacramento State. "I realized I needed a backup plan to pay my way through college and support my family," Robin said. "That's when I went to barber college and

I've been cutting hair for the last 25 years. The barber industry has been very good to me."

Roya was born and grew up in Iran where she graduated from art school, but her work was not appreciated there and the government shut down her exhibition. In 1998 Roya's mother sent Roya, a feminist, out of the country to avoid being killed. "People like me were simply disappearing," Roya said.

Once out of the country Roya was free to pursue her craft and started the Art Center in Dubai and did exhibitions in San Francisco. As their clients walk into RnR, they are first met with one of Roya's sculptures.

Robin has been at the forefront of the evolution of hair cutting: "For a while, barbering had two go-to styles - short and shorter. Now we have more products and equipment. We take care of their hair and skin. I have my clients tell me what they want and I will consult with them about their individual features like their bone structure and hair type to create the best look for them. That's how we have evolved - we stay one step ahead."

In the back is a salon for women to get their hair done by Roya, who studied under Vidal Sassoon in Santa Monica. "We believe that we have merged the two seamlessly," says Roya. "We're part barbershop, part salon and all you. RnR is not only our names (Robert and Roya) but we also want it to stand for rest and relaxation."

Besides hair cutting and styling, Robin is also accomplished with a razor: "To use the blade efficiently is an art form. There is a certain way to do it. When I shave my customers, I use hot towels and essential oils. As I do this, I also educate them on how to prep their skin and how to treat it after a shave and how to shave with the grain, across the grain and against the grain to get a baby smooth feel without the irritation."

Orinda resident Eric Menke, who gets his hair cut once a month, discovered RnR pretty much by accident. "I was walking down the street and I stuck my head in and I was grabbed by the atmosphere, the décor and the vibe," Menke said. "There are sculptures, boxing photos and a racing motorcycle in the shop. Some barbershops, you walk in, sit down and walk out. I found Robin to be a very special man with a very special business. He looked at the way my hair has grown out and the pattern of its growth and then discussed with me about what he thought would be good for me and then asked what I thought would be good. It was all very thoughtful and extremely professional. It's amazing the way that they have operated and grown through word of mouth and people just walking by."

Robin is available for any type of requests: "Once I had a 14-year-old girl who had 12 inch spikes in her hair and she had me shave her head between the spikes with a straight razor to get the punk rock look."

With a belief in paying forward for all the people that have helped him in his career, Robin says they are starting an apprentice barbers program to provide on-the-job training. "They can come in and get the hours they need so that they can take pass the State Licensing exam without going to barber college."

Along with running RnR with Roya, Robin - who was a competitive amateur boxer - is looking to open up a boxing studio for men, women and children of all ages: "People have taken to calling me the Barber Boxer. It's my hope to be able to create the official training center for Northern California Golden Gloves. We're just looking to get the right property here in Lafayette."

Roya speaks for Robin and herself when she sums up their lives in Lafayette: "It's a family community that we love. Everybody looks out for each other and everyone cares. It's a home."

RnR is open seven days a week, from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday through Saturday and 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Sunday. Appointments can be made on their website rnrbarbers.com or by phone at (925) 385-0491.

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