



featuring  
**“Women in Retail”**  
**Robyn Massey**  
 Owner, “Avant Garde Styles”

By Fran Farrer-Nash  
 THE CHARLOTTE POST

Robyn Massey's keen eye for fashion began in elementary school. To soothe the pangs of missing her dad during his military tour, Massey's mom took her on shopping excursions to boutiques and shops in the Raleigh area. She developed a love for unique fashion, and quickly learned to have no fear of stepping out on the edge with chic but unique clothing. Having mentors like her mom

and aunts, who weren't afraid to tackle obstacles to get what they wanted out of life, just helped to fuel her ambitions. The stage was set.

Disappointment in the shopping opportunities in Raleigh and Charlotte prompted Massey's desire to go into retail. Both cities had an abundance of boutiques with moderate price points, but they tended to gather on a particular side of town. Massey began returning to Atlanta to avoid seeing herself

(outfit) in Charlotte, or Raleigh. She missed having the option of being the only one with a particular clothing item or shoe without paying a fortune for it. "Though working in corporate America has its benefits, I remember how happy my mother was running her own business and having time to enjoy life, and I wanted to be able to do the same," said Massey.

With she and Greg both having the desire to own their own business, Avant Garde opened in 2004. Realizing that a lot of people from the University area were driving across town to South Charlotte, they wanted to offer an alternative for a good shopping experience, and chose Concord Mills. "True to our name, Avant Garde, we've not followed normal store patterns and have outfitted the store with bookcases and comfortable seating to generate a comfortable shopping experience. Our formula is providing unique merchandise at moderate price points," says Massey.

The initial merchandise selection criterion was to use shoe brands featured in upscale stores, such as Mezland, Giorgio Brutini, Urbano, Sandro Mascoloni, and Robert Wayne for men. They partner with DW Designs to offer an alternative location to accommodate needs for tuxedo rentals, custom shirts and suits. The same hold true for ladies. You'll find names like BCB Girls, Charles by Charles David Apeazza, J Renee and Franco Sarto. They've closed out brands such as Nickels and Carlos due to their availability in traditional retail stores. The mission of Avant Garde is to be unique and chic. In addition, you'll find one of a kind jewelry, and hand-picked purses that make fashion statements.

Massey's corporate America experiences have been a source of character development reminding her of the constant requirements to prove your wor-

thiness to be a player in the industry. Going through years of testing strengthened her resolve in dealing with the challenges of small business ownership.

A native of Raleigh, Massey was the only child born to Gladys Smith and the late Albert Smith. She graduated from Enloe High School, received her Bachelor's degree in mathematics from UNC Charlotte, and later earned an MBA from Wake Forest University. Shortly after graduation Massey accepted a position with IBM which gave her the opportunity to work in Raleigh and Atlanta.

Massey returned to Charlotte in 1988 after marrying her college sweetheart, Gregory Massey. Seeking a diverse background, Robyn joined Microsoft. Working in information technology and financial positions was an experience that afforded her the opportunity to learn operations of a company from human resources to procurement. This information has proven to be valuable in setting up a small business.

Massey was brought up in an environment where God, family and friends are most valued. She and Greg keep their spiritual connection fulfilled through attendance at Friendship Missionary Baptist Church. "Greg and my mother continue to keep me going from day to day despite challenges I've experienced," Massey said. Greg and I are blessed with friends without whom we would be lost. The store has been a blessing that has provided an opportunity to expand our circle of friends, and we try to establish a connection with each and every individual that comes into the store."

Visit Robyn at 8605 Concord Mills Blvd, Concord, NC 28027, call 704-979-1070, or email: [avantgardestyles@aol.com](mailto:avantgardestyles@aol.com).



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Robyn Massey

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