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Shop offers variety in European clothing

By JOHN DRESCHER

Bob Simpson turned around, pointed to a woman looking at his store's casual clothes, and asked her why she shopped at his store, Town and Campus.

"It's the best shop I've ever seen for men's clothes," said the woman, a regular customer from Charlotte. "It attracts a certain customer that can't be satisfied with all that Izod stuff."

For nearly 20 years, Simpson has been closely involved in the everyday operation of Town and Campus, a unique Chapel Hill shop that blends a long Franklin Street tradition with a progressive line of clothing. The two-story building, which houses a women's department on the upper floor, is the only store on Franklin Street that ventures away from the traditional Ivy League style by specializing in European clothing.

Simpson, a 1956 UNC graduate, started working for the store as a sophomore in 1952, when the store was a year old. Except for a two-year stint in the service, he has worked continuously at Town and Campus. He bought a portion of the store in 1967, and now owns and runs the store with his wife Anne, also a UNC graduate.

For years the store sold traditional clothing. "We were just like everybody else," he said. "We changed about eight years ago, in the early '70s, to European clothing. We tried to get out of the general run of everybody having the same thing."

The women's department continues to sell traditional clothes, but downstairs the latest European and contemporary styles predominate. Yet, even with its contemporary styles, the store, complete with fireplaces, still gives a warm, traditional feeling.

Simpson said his store was the only one in the state that specialized in European clothing. Consequently, he attracts customers from all over the state, and even some from out of state. He said he was glad he had made the switch to the European clothes he now sold, largely because he enjoyed buying the clothes to stock his store.

"It's what I like and it's what Anne likes," he said. "It's fun buying. The other stuff can be bought by phone. How hard is it to buy an Izod shirt?"

The Simpsons traveled to Europe five times to purchase clothes, and have made numerous trips to New York City to stock the store with unique lines.

"It's exciting," Anne Simpson said. "You never know what they're going to have for you."

"I like to go to New York as much as possible," her husband said as he waited on a customer. "It's another advantage of working with small lines — they continue to come up with new styles. They don't stagnate."

In switching to the more expensive European style of clothing, Simpson lost much of the college crowd that used to shop at Town and Campus. But he feels more and more college students, bored with the preppie look and enticed by Simpson's attempt to keep prices down, are again shopping at his store. It doesn't hurt that the store is on Franklin Street, a location Simpson considers ideal.

"I don't like malls," he said. The street's open space makes for more pleasant shopping, he said. "Even with lousy parking, it's still the best place. After football games, do you see people head out to the mall?"

After football games, customers may browse at Town and Campus. But not during games, because when game time rolls along, the Simpsons continue what was once a Chapel Hill merchant tradition of closing down the store and heading to Kenan Stadium. After the game, they return to the store and open again. Even with its non-traditional clothing, Town and Campus, with its long Chapel Hill history, remains a traditional Franklin Street store.



Staff photo by Matt Cooper

Kenny Mann has worked as a cook at the Rat for 32 years

Campus landmark provides good eating and a taste of Chapel Hill the way it was

By LYNNE THOMSON

Before taking the stairs up to Purdy's Friday night, try taking the ones down into Amber Alley and go back to the Ramshead Rathskeller.

The food in this campus landmark is good—but to get the full effect of the Rat's tradition talk to Kenny Mann, the cook who has worked there for 32 years. Or ask Jim Cotten, who has worked at the Rat since it opened in 1948, to reminisce about what Chapel Hill was like then.

"(It was the) only place to go for food, almost," said Mann of the Rat's role in Chapel Hill years ago.

The Rat began serving lunch in 1957, Mann said. Before that time it served just beer and pretzels.

"There was a piano over there in the corner," Cotten said, pointing across the small front room. "Jim Wallace (former mayor and current town council member of Chapel Hill) used to play the piano sometimes." Cotten said that must have been around 1950.

"Opened around 3:30 for Happy Hour," Cotten said. Beer was 10¢ a mug then.

As early as 1951, the first black customer, singer Marion Anderson, visited the Rathskeller, Mann said.

Cotten said Ted Danziger, who started the Rathskeller, was a Jew who escaped from Germany in 1937.

"He didn't care what you were," Cotten said. The Rathskeller was one of the first integrated

businesses in Chapel Hill, long before the sit-ins of 1958 which forced integration on local merchants, he said.

"(It was the) only business in Chapel Hill to use the same bathroom (for blacks and white, staff and customers)."

Mann said the health inspector would take points off of the restaurant's health rating for allowing blacks to use the same restroom.

Customers were surprised and flustered to see a black staff member in the bathroom back then, Mann said. They would go back out and re-check the sign to make sure that this was indeed the public restroom.

Cotten said the Rathskeller was the first place to let blacks work at the cash register and to let them open up the restaurant.

Times have changed. By counting football stars, the two men figured that Chapel Hill High must have become integrated in 1967 while the University became integrated in the mid-1950s.

"Chapel Hill is one of the best places in the world to live," Mann said. "You can go anywhere, live anywhere."

"Students are 'bout the same all the time," he said.

During the late '40s and the '50s, mostly veterans attended the University, Cotten said. They were older than the average student and had seen more of the world.

"No fights," Cotten, but characterized them as rowdy despite their worldliness. It was "more fun then."