



Denim dream: Borys Fridman content to be forever in blue Jeans Jeans Jeans

BY DAVID SHERMAN, SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE OCTOBER 22, 2012

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STORY PHOTOS (1)



Borys Fridman and employee Ardavan Rounagh tackle a giant pile of denim at Jeans Jeans Jeans in Montreal Saturday.

Photograph by: Vincenzo D'Alto, Montreal Gazette

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MONTREAL – Sometimes the jeans fly in a graceful arc, like a gentle pop-up. Other times it's a line drive, thrown overhand, two or three pairs at a time.

This is *Jeans Jeans Jeans*, where location, location, location is not a factor. What matters here is denim, denim, denim and a few other minor fabrics, and, of course, Borys Fridman, 57, the major domo of denim — the man for whom jeans and how they look and make you feel, is a calling.

Jeans Jeans Jeans, on Casgrain and St. Viateur Sts., is not a store, it's a 6,000-foot basement and pilgrim's journey, overflowing with jeans and tops that shape the rear and make you feel younger and sexier at a price remarkably lower than what you'll pay most places downtown. And shoppers also come for a touch of Fridman — a handshake, a hug, a slap on the back and, of course, advice.

"You want dressy dressy, you don't want super dressy?" he asks a young woman admiring her rear in the mirror as 10 other women are staring over their shoulders at their rear ends in the changing room mirrors. "Go with that." He smiles, off to the next client.

Fridman is offering pants and tops and happiness, self-assurance, even actualization. "Yes you are beautiful and those jeans make you look even better" is a sentiment that oozes out of every Fridman pore. He'll tell you that you look great, the jeans are perfect. And he believes it. If not, he'll find something that does. He's got thousands and thousands of pairs, on the floor and on the racks that encircle the cold concrete floor on colour-coded hangers 10 feet in the air.

And unlike the other men who stand around waiting for friends and partners who can't help but also check out the rear ends of the women that exit the changing rooms checking out their own rear ends, Fridman is looking at faces.

"I want to make sure they're happy," he says.

For Fridman, who began selling jeans almost 40 years ago at the age of 19 when he grabbed 12 pairs of Road Runners and sold them at a flea market and found his calling, selling jeans is life itself. And he does it six days a week.

"Haven't worked a day in my life," he says. "I love it. Indigo got right into my veins. It was an immediate love affair."

Fridman points to man coming out of the changing room, looking puzzled.

"See, his problem is he's not feeling it," Fridman says. "Men have to feel right in their clothes. Women want to feel hot, look good."

And if you're not feeling it, Fridman will grab the pairs you didn't like and toss them to one of his 15 staff — the pop-up or the line drive depending on the day and the crowd and call for, "Same colours, size, skinny leg, please," and bounce on to the next customer.

"We don't make sales here, we make customers," he says, calling for water and immediately a half dozen bottles appear and he hands them out to clients clustered around his 15 changing rooms.

Hunting through Guess and Wrangler and Lois and Nudie and Fidelity and Garcia and True Religion and Levis and Benson, in green and red and blue, washed or faded, stiff or soft, studded or plain, can work up a thirst.

As Adrian Proszowski, a young man in from Toronto who couldn't miss a pit stop at Jeans Jeans Jeans, says: "It's overwhelming. The quantity of stuff, and the guy's great."

Here, you don't pay for décor or Fridman's lifestyle. "I'm not greedy, I don't go on extravagant vacations, I don't drive an extravagant car" — he pilots a 2011 Ford Explorer to haul clothes around. You pay bargain basement prices, cause you're in a basement far from the hype and high rents of downtown. And besides, Fridman lives to sell jeans.

"We fly under the radar," he says. "We do good business and we don't have to be greedy." But he won't tell you how much he sells or how much the store brings in. Here you can find brand name denim for \$50. Downtown it might be closer to \$100.

Donna Amsterdam, 55, comes to Montreal from Tenafly, N.J., to shop and that means an inevitable stop at Jeans Jeans Jeans.

"We love Borys," Amsterdam says. "Borys made me come back. He recognizes you and makes sure you feel good."

Like a shrink?

"Better than a shrink," she says.

Says Michel Sedag of Buffalo Jeans, who's been supplying Fridman for 30 years, "Borys is a mensch. You know exactly where you are with Borys. There's no bull. He comes and makes an order and doesn't even take the order slip. He trusts. He's a honest man with the customers and with the suppliers."

Fridman buys and Fridman sells and in between he schleps.

In the madhouse that is Saturday afternoon, with lineups for the changing rooms, jeans flying through the air, staff maniacally putting pants back on hangers, is Monika Rak, a transplanted Winnipegger who is a PhD student in chemistry but has quickly fallen for this stark, grey airplane hangar.

"The chaos has sense and purpose," she says. "And I love this place."

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