



# A Cut above

Lina Shamoun, of Kitchener's Artline Salon, wins gold at international hairstyling competition

BY CHERRI GREENO

PHOTOGRAPHY • CHRIS SETO

**L**ina Shamoun is working her magic as she meticulously adds colourful extensions to a client's hair inside her Kitchener salon.

Well, at least she's trying to.

Problem is, she keeps getting interrupted. People have been stopping by her popular Artline Salon, located on Belmont Avenue, to hug her, shake her hand and offer their congratulations.

"It's pretty overwhelming," Shamoun says with a laugh.

But these sentiments are well earned. After all, this 31-year-old just returned from Korea, where she won gold in the Progressive Cut and Style category at the OMC

Hairworld Championship.

"It's literally known as the hair Olympics," Shamoun says, her eyes beaming with excitement. "Europeans usually dominate these competitions, but Canada has never done so well."

The competition attracts the best of the best and, while Shamoun has competed in the event five times before — in Moscow, Chicago, Paris, Milan and Frankfurt — this is the first time she has won, topping any other regional, national or international competition she has been a part of.

"When something good happens, it's hard to believe it's happening to you," she says.

The competition drew more than 1,500 top hair, nail and makeup artists from more than 45 countries. Ten stylists from across Canada



took part in the event, including local stylist Shamoun, who beat out 40 other competitors in her category, and Deeva Hair salon owner Dee Fortier, who won silver in the Master's category for those 50 years of age or older.

Shamoun, however, is the first Canadian to ever receive the top prize in the category. Her winning "futuristic" design was done on a mannequin on stage in front of several judges. Shamoun said she chose three primary colours — black, red and white — for her design, going for a "less is more" look, while adding some progressive elements to help it stand out. Her design, which was created with some advice from her friend and coach, Winnipeg hair stylist Kenneth Hiebert, has bangs and layers and shaved circles along the back and sides. Topping it off is a long red ponytail that hangs down the back.

Such a look would never be done in a normal, everyday hair salon, but that's not the point of these competitions. It's more about creative self-expression, about pushing artistic hairstyling boundaries with contrasting colours and shapes and about how quickly a stylist can design the look. In fact, stylists get only 30 minutes to shape their mannequin's style.

"All of the competitive experiences create refined skills along with precision workmanship that allows the stylist to work with speed and accuracy," Shamoun says. Her completed design, which included dressing the mannequin, "really stood out on the floor," she says. "I had people from other countries come up and tell me how great it was. That's when we knew Canada was going to do well."

When Shamoun stops and thinks about her achievement, she realizes just how far

she's come since her childhood days in war-torn Iraq during the Gulf War. She never thought about her future; she only thought about surviving.

"I couldn't dream of what I wanted to do one day because I didn't know what was out there. I never had the opportunity to say, 'Maybe one day I want to do that.'"

She still remembers, as a seven-year-old, hearing the loud sirens that would signal a bomb threat. Her father would pack her, her four siblings and his wife up in the car and drive them to open fields, away from any buildings that could collapse on top of them. She remembers seeing balls of flames almost daily.

"I didn't know any different," she recalls. "I didn't know what it was."

When she was 12, the family moved to Istanbul for two years before moving to Toronto in 1998.

On the flight to Canada, Shamoun remembers looking at the female flight attendants and thinking, "In Canada, women can be somebody. I want to be somebody."

The family moved to Kitchener in 1999 and, not knowing much English, Shamoun enrolled in St. Mary's High School. It was here that she found her passion for hairstyling.

"I had a spare class and I knew if I didn't take something in that spare that I may not finish the semester," she says. "I walked by a room and I liked the smell of the hairspray. Everyone looked like they were having fun so I thought I would try it. I didn't know it would lead me to this career."

Her first competition was done as part of a Skills Canada event while she was still a high school student. After that first competition, she was hooked, realizing she had a natural talent for styling hair.

And while she can now call herself one of the best stylists in the world, she never would. She is too modest and too grateful for all the opportunities she has had. In fact, she says she wouldn't be as successful as she is if it weren't for those who surround her — her family, friends, co-workers and clients.

"I came from nothing," she says. "And when you have nothing, you see what a true opportunity is because you've never had one."

She recalls how excited she used to be when her father, who worked in the area as a truck driver, would come home to their Kitchener apartment with boxes of food. At the time, she didn't know where the food had come from. In recent years, however, she realized he had been using the food bank to feed his family.

"He just sheltered us from all of that," she says. "To this day, I call my Dad a hero for everything he went through."

She credits her childhood for giving her the determination to do well in her life. It helped her, she says, pursue her dreams without any fear — leading her to open Artline Salon in 2007, when she was just 23 years old.

"I had no fear. It got wiped out when we started to immigrate and leave everything behind," she says. "It just disappears and you realize that you can't operate out of fear. I just realized that you just have to do what you want."

But getting so much success at such a young age "actually made me feel guilty," she says.

She felt she needed to give back to the place that offered her so much. So she

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Dee Fortier, owner of Deeva Hair salon, won silver in the Master's category at the OMC Hairworld Championship in Korea. The competition is about self-expression and pushing artistic boundaries.

has stopped counting.

But, she says, her silver award at the Korea competition is one of the biggest she's ever won.

"I was ecstatic and thrilled," Fortier says. "Making the podium felt really great. When you work hard, the rewards pay back."

Along with styling hair in her salon, Fortier also teaches advanced hair courses across North America, showing others what she has learned during her years on the competitive stage.

And, she says, she has no plans to stop competing.

"You get to perform your skill," she says.

"It's about turning good hairdressers into great hairdressers. When one competes, it elevates the skills to where a stylist can take another avenue in this industry, like becoming a platform artist."

Shamoun also plans to keep competing, which means finding time to plan new, bold and creative styles to showcase her new-found celebrity status.

"I call it a passion," Shamoun says. "But there is an addiction to it because there are amazing rewards you get from it. Hairstyling is a lifestyle, not a career."

developed Hair United, a charity that sees hairstylists from several different salons get together to raise money for local children's organizations. So far, she has raised money for Themuseum, KidsAbility, Carizon Family and Community Services and, this year, Nutrition for Learning.

She has also worked with the Waterloo Region Food Bank to help bring awareness of its need to the community. Recently, her success and altruism were recognized by the Greater Kitchener Waterloo Chamber of Commerce when she was named Young Entrepreneur of the Year. She was also recently nominated for a WOWtheworld award, which recognizes local residents who do extraordinary things while making a difference in the lives of others.

Shamoun's road to success started with

Fortier, of Deeva Hair. Fortier, who has been a popular and sought-after hairstylist in the region for 36 years, hired Shamoun as an apprentice 13 years ago and remembers helping her train for competitions.

"There's a specific talent that competitive hairstylists have that shows up and I saw that in her," Fortier says.

One of Fortier's passions in life is to train young stylists to be the best they can be. Only a certain type has what it takes to compete, she says, but when they do well, the rewards are endless.

"I love it because you are really only competing with yourself," Fortier says. "You're always trying to get better. You're the only one who can better yourself."

Fortier has won so many medals and trophies during her competitive career, she

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