

NAILING IT

BY MEGHAN MCSHARRY

E

ntering To and From is like stepping into a high-end day spa, with bright lighting and a sleek modern décor. The product display is minimal and a chic, deep-blue velvet couch welcomes guests to sit and wait for their service.

On a recent visit to the salon, To and From co-owner Jeanne Bloom greeted me while having her nails painted.

"I'd shake your hand, but..." she said, gesturing to her nails. As someone who has repeatedly dinged manicure moments after they're finished, I laughed.

Her co-owner and partner, Henri Helander, finished up with a client before introducing himself. I asked Henri how he and Jeanne had met, and he said, "When did we fall in love, you mean?"

Right away, you could see how close they were. They really make the perfect pair.

Henri and Jeanne met in fashion school before becoming roommates in Manhattan for two years. Henri, a Pennsylvania native, would visit Jeanne at her family's home in Connecticut. After spending a few post-college years working on their individual careers, the two decided to come together yet again for a new business venture — To and From.

They opened their business in downtown Darien in October 2017. The salon — which offers beautiful manicures and pedicures, nail art and more — uses clean products for everything from polishes to skincare.

"There really is a growing market of mothers concerned with clean health," explained Henri, noting that local moms (and others of all ages) are moving toward eating clean and using clean household and beauty products for the safety of themselves and their children. And these clean products are safer to use on pregnant women and people with cancer or autoimmune diseases.

Henri stressed that when selecting products, they "find the best alternative that works in the safest way." Customers can choose polishes from the likes of brands such as LVX, Deborah Lippmann, Jin Soon, Habit and Kure Bazaar — many of which are exclusive products not typically available in salons. These products are



Henri Helander and Jeanne Bloom, the minds behind To and From. Photographs courtesy To and From.



Jeanne's leopard-patterned tips are a subtle way to incorporate animal print into your look.

considered higher-end and are up to 10- or 12-free, meaning they have eliminated a number of harmful chemicals from the formulas.

To and From chooses to omit the soaking of the nails during the manicure process. Henri explained that much of the bacteria found in nail salons comes from the water. Additionally, pedicures at To and From use large bowls rather than salon baths you would typically put your feet in. These baths are almost impossible to completely sanitize, which can cause infection for the client, he said.

Not only does To and From have the health of the customer in mind, but also that of their employees. Jeanne and Henri repeatedly stressed the importance of providing employees with a safe work environment, fair wages and fair hours. Because the products are clean, employees don't have to worry about breathing in toxic fumes during their shifts.

The business goes the extra mile by paying for To and From employees to become licensed nail technicians. Connecticut is the only state in the country that doesn't require nail technicians to be licensed and, while legislators are working to change this, it's important to choose a nail salon that is up to health standards — employees included.

The manicure experience itself was relaxing. My nail technician was gentle with my nails and cuticles, being sure not to nip too much at my cuticles (which can introduce bacteria) and trimmed and filed my nails just enough. She took her time painting on a trendy color-blocked pattern. I was shocked at how steady her hand was, even when using a tiny detail brush. The salon offers a menu of chic yet minimalistic nail art options, which is something that is surprisingly hard to find outside of a major city. Once again, To and From fills that void in the Fairfield County market.

Jeanne, who may as well be a hand model, chose to showcase two animal-inspired nail art options for our animal-themed issue. A zebra pattern was painted on her left hand, while the right featured muted gray nails with leopard-print tips. Animal print has been trending lately, and this is an ultra-classy (and subtle) way to work it into your everyday style. **WAG**

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