



Begone, stretchy pants!

Tights that 'lift the bum' and other delights await at Belly Maternity

By Rebecca Eckler

"I've heard that a lot," says Eva Salem, owner of the recently opened Belly Maternity, when I tell her how vexed I am that her Mt. Pleasant Road shop wasn't around when I was pregnant not too long ago. I can no longer bring myself to look at Lululemon sweatpants, which is all I wore throughout my pregnancy, including to many cocktail parties. Salem, who for five years was a marketing director for L'Oréal in New York, before moving back to Toronto to join her boyfriend, knows all too well the woes of trying to dress nicely while pregnant.

"Almost every week while I was living in New York my friends would call asking me to send them stuff or bring them back clothes from A Pea in the Pod or Liz Lange. There was obviously a need to be met in this city. You should have seen what I was bringing back through Customs. If only they knew."

Open for less than two months, Belly offers rack upon rack of chic and sexy maternity wear that's been unavailable in Canada until now. Along with designer clothing by the likes of Diane von Furstenburg and Liz Lange, the shop has a sizable selection of maternity bras and thongs. (Yes, you can still wear sexy underwear.)

"Every item in the store has been tested out by pregnant friends," she says. "It's stuff that would be acceptable to wear when you're not pregnant as well. You will look at the clothing and say, "I can't believe this is maternity wear!"

Interestingly, Salem has never been pregnant, which she claims works to her advantage. *"This is also my first time in retail, but I've filled the store with what I would wear now, and pregnant women appreciate that. They're so grateful to have found nice clothes. It's an awesome feeling when a customer says 'Thank you! Thank you!'"*

Because *"all my friends seem to be pregnant right now,"* Salem says she can empathize with how pregnant women feel. *"You know, it seems that pregnant women at first think it's only a couple of months that their body is going to change. But it's not a couple of months. It's a long time. And it's not a cheap time. You need a new wardrobe because you realize that you can't just buy larger sizes at Banana Republic the entire time. They don't fit the pregnant body right."*

Pregnant women, she continues, *"no longer want to wear black stretchy pants for nine months. Because, by the end, they want to set them on fire,"* she says. They also don't want to be thought of as *"cute."* *"These clothes are not 'cute,'" she adds.*

Another valuable service at Belly is the on-site seamstress who can transform any article of clothing into maternity wear. *"I wouldn't choose your favourite piece, but if there's something in your closet that you wouldn't mind wearing through your pregnancy, we can add panels into the sides and you'll still be able to wear it."*

Belly also sells tights that *"lift the bum,"* as Salem puts it. *"If you need the help and can get it, why not?"*

Pregnancy, she says, is a frustrating time. *"Your body changes in ways you can't imagine. And you are more aware of your body than ever. If you have to buy new clothing, why be mortified with what you have to wear?"*