

interview: pink pump

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While there have been many summer additions to the commercial districts that flank the Diag, heart of the University of Michigan campus, none could be considered as glamorous as the newly opened Pink Pump on E. Liberty Street. Proprietress, Tawny Thieu, has created a fashionista's oasis. In an email exchange with SHEI Magazine, Ms. Thieu displayed her admirable ambition, a keen sense of style, and a knack for recognizing a golden opportunity.



Pink Pump is now in Ann Arbor.
(left) Pink Pump owner,
Tawny Thieu.

SHEI: Your story is inspiring - could you elaborate on your background and introduction to fashion?

Thieu: My family immigrated to America when I was a baby. My mother was widowed with us three girls. She had \$20 in her pocket! Having a very humble childhood meant lots of hand me downs for me, and I hated not being able to choose my own clothes and shoes. As soon as I could I babysat

and tutored to earn my own money to buy new shoes and clothes. This was my first introduction to fashion; being able to pick out things that I liked not being stuck with hand me downs.

SHEI: What prompted you to start your own business?

Thieu: I paid for most of my college by working at, and eventually managing, an upscale hair salon.

Most people don't know this but my first business venture was with my brother in law (amazing hairdresser). We opened Liquid Salon in Bloomfield Hills in 2005, shortly after I graduated from college. The success of this business gave me the capitol to revisit my first passion: fashion. I started Shoe Envy in 2006, later re-branding it to Pink Pump.

SHEI: What's it like to own four highly praised boutiques in Michigan?

Thieu: It feels surreal at times. I remember walking into boutiques and NOT being able to afford things. This is why I am committed to offering great fashion pieces from \$30 to \$500. A price range for every fashionista's budget.

SHEI: How do you balance your time between these locations?

Thieu: By having an incredible management and sales team. Being a part of the Pink Pump team means being dedicated to building a brand and working together to make our stores fun and welcoming. And at the end of the day, it's about being business minded and making smart business decisions.

SHEI: Why did you choose Ann Arbor as the spot for your fourth Pink Pump storefront?

Thieu: My first location was in Keego Harbor. Many people had never heard of this small town. We outgrew this location and I moved to Bloomfield Hills. Within the last year, I opened 3 stores: Birmingham, Royal Oak and Ann Arbor. It's funny that A2 is the last store I opened, but actually the first location I wanted! Distance was my biggest challenge with continuing to run my hair salon, so I kept opening up in Oakland County. Now that I have an amazing support team, I am able to open locations further away, eventually out of state.

SHEI: What is the best reason to "shop Pink Pump"?

Thieu: The Pink Pump experience means customer service and quality merchandise. Our footwear ranges from flats to 5 inch heels. We carry recognizable brands like Michael Kors and Lamb, and new up-and-coming designers like Kelsy Dagger. Our Pink Pump private label clothing is priced under \$100! We mix in designer brands such as Queen of Evil, Brokedown, Kensie, Dome, etc. You could pair a \$58 dress with \$400 Lamb heels or \$50 shoes with a \$400 leather jacket. Fashion is about mixing your pieces in and looking great, not breaking the bank.

SHEI: You have created a very specific brand with the Pink Pump - can you explain how you've come to define your name and image?

Thieu: My best business investment was trademarking the name PINK PUMP and buying the website domain name www.pinkpump.com. Until you own your name, it is impossible to brand it. Branding doesn't happen overnight. It's something you have to market, live and breathe. I want the words PINK PUMP to represent having fun with fashion. The words just kind of roll off your tongue and make you want to shop! It's fun and cool to be a Pink Pump Girl and that is the image our stores represent.

SHEI: What advice would you give to women looking to enter the business world or fashion industry?

Thieu: Always follow your instincts first. Most of my best business decisions have been purely on instinct. Sometimes it leaves my lawyer and accountant scratching their heads, but eventually they say "good business decision!" Listen to your business advisors but never do anything you don't believe in. Many people think being a business owner means being your own boss, but actually you work for everyone around you: customers, employees and yourself. You have employees who depend on the success of the business to make a living, customers to please and at the end of the day - you must remain profitable. The world of fashion is ever changing - a career in this field is exciting but can be exhausting!

SHEI: Who or what influences your style?

Thieu: My style is influenced by comfort. If I'm not comfortable, no matter how "in" something is, I won't do it. It is fun to try new trends but important to be comfortable. However, my definition of comfort is wearing 4 inch heels every day.... So go figure! Lol

SHEI: What are your favorite fashion trends right now? And least favorite?

Thieu: Fave - nude pumps. Extends the legs, goes with anything!
Least Fave - jumpsuits. Not for every body-type, hard to use the bathroom!

SHEI: You've got skills and style - what's next for you and Pink Pump?

Thieu: Our online store will launch this fall and I am looking at offers for out of state locations. The leasing agents keep finding me, and I'm a sucker for a good deal.