

## Dressing for life's little bumps.

Your pregnancy is something to celebrate, but it's definitely much easier to do in clothes that look fabulous on your blossoming body. Renee Poitras, owner of ella Bella, travels the globe to bring the hottest trends in maternity wear, back with her to Calgary.

"When I was pregnant I really didn't celebrate it because the choices in maternity wear back then were so limited. Now I'm celebrating through my customers. I love to see women really enjoying their pregnancies and looking great at every stage."

After moving to Calgary from San Francisco in 1990, Poitras opened her first store – a children's consignment shop she called Lollipop.

"I'm an accountant by trade, but when I moved to Calgary I was ready for a change. I wanted to be on my feet and to be working with people."

Lollipop thrived, and when expectant moms started asking for consignment maternity wear, Poitras decided to bring some in.

"I saw right away that there was a real need for quality maternity wear in Calgary, and there just wasn't enough available through consignment. That's when I started to travel to places like L.A. and Miami in search of the high-end pieces women were asking for."

ella Bella opened at Bankers Hall in the spring of 2007, and has since shown hundreds of thankful working women how Blackberries and baby bumps can coexist. Chaiken, Olian, Ripe, Paige, Michael Kors and Jules & Jim are just a few of the famous labels customers are delighted to see in-store.

"Girls want to keep their fashion style when they're pregnant," says Poitras. "If you're used to wearing Seven jeans when you're not pregnant, you aren't going to feel good in anything of lesser quality when you are pregnant."

Poitras travels 3 or 4 times a year to design houses across North America and Europe, bringing in the latest maternity wear back to her store. She's quick to spot the newest must-have items and has open working relationships with many designers.

"My customers tell me what works and what doesn't, and I relay that back to the designers. They make changes and come up with new ideas based on that feedback."

Even greater than the selection of designer pieces in ella Bella, is the level of customer service offered in-store.

"My staff and I can decipher what cut of pant you need just by looking at the first pair you try on," say Poitras. "You don't have to spend a lot of time trying on pair after pair. That's what you get from the experts. We find the right ones for you."