

Street of shopping dreams

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Toronto has Bloor Street, New York has Fifth Avenue, Los Angeles has Rodeo Drive and Calgary has -- 1st Street S.W.?

Don't laugh too hard. This funny little strip of nightclubs, panhandlers and soon-to-be-built condo developments is beginning to attract some of the best shopping in the city.

The latest 1st Street destination to have us defrosting our credit cards is Formans Fashion Group. Long a distinguished menswear store near Chinook Centre, about eight weeks ago Formans moved its racks of suits into the historic CIBC building at the corner of 1st Street and 12th Avenue S.W.

It also opened a women's department and proceeded to stock it with just the sort of designer clothes we love best.

"Femme," as it's called, carries luscious Hugo Boss Woman suits, jackets, sweaters and coats. It's also stocked with quietly funky Lida Baday dresses and separates, as well as pieces from the denim-chic Italian label Paul & Shark. The overall message is classic but modern, in flattering colours and luxurious fabrics.

We were also pretty excited to hear about the lines they'll be carrying for fall -- Escada Sport, Laurel by Escada, Marc Cain Sport and, oh flamboyant joy, Versace Sport.

Best of all was the simple experience of shopping there.

Femme operates on two levels of space that's open yet intimate. Traces of the building's former life as a bank still exist as well as its many incarnations as a series of restaurants: Centini, La Costa and, most recently, The Exchange.

The service is quietly knowledgeable and attentive. When they offered us coffee, tea or mineral water, for a giddy moment we thought we'd died and gone to a better shopping place, i.e. Manhattan.

It's all too fab for words. And with all the development going on along the street, we can only imagine the excellent shopping yet to come.

Pamela Klaffke is the author of *Spree: A Cultural History of Shopping*. Joanne Sasvari is a writer in the Herald's Real Life section.

Also See - Win a makeover with the personal shoppers on page D2