

# Emerson Grace Evolves in 12South

The Tennessean - December 8, 2015



Emerson Grace in 12South sells women's apparel, shoes, handbags and accessories.(Photo: Courtesy of Emerson Grace)

Kimberly Lewis wants to help Nashville women look and feel their best.

Since taking full ownership of her 12South store Emerson Grace earlier this year, Lewis has tweaked inventory to appeal to a broader range of customers.

Among the changes: Emerson Grace eliminated menswear to expand women's lines, particularly in the footwear and handbag departments, and a new series called "The Local Focus" spotlights regional brands. Lewis also brought in some lower price points to make the store accessible to more consumers.

"One of the focuses and missions that I had with eliminating men's was I wanted to expand upon footwear and handbags. It's still a work in progress, but I wanted to really make this a full service women's boutique by really maximizing the space and also appealing to the core customers we have," Lewis said.

The 2,500-square-foot store opened two years ago in 12South, a neighborhood that has become a top shopping destination for women's clothing and accessories. Most recently, actress turned entrepreneur Reese Witherspoon opened women's lifestyle boutique Draper James in 12South.

Lewis said the Emerson Grace customer ranges from women living in the surrounding neighborhood to tourists and students at Vanderbilt and Belmont. It's not uncommon for a group of women celebrating a bachelorette party to stop in the store, Lewis said.

"What I wanted to do is make sure I appealed to the girls that are in college that can come in here and pick up a t-shirt, a pair of jeans, a hat, a scarf, a blouse," Lewis said.

The dozens of brands at Emerson Grace include contemporary lines Ulla Johnson and Brochu Walker, along with premium denim Citizens of Humanity and Current Elliott. Lewis said she goes on buying trips and is always on the lookout for new products when she travels.

"When I'm out traveling, I look for a new designer, an aesthetic that's new and fresh and could be sort of exclusive to us (in Nashville)," Lewis said.

The Local Focus series at Emerson Grace features different regional brands through in-store events to showcase a designer's products. The store featured Nashville designer Jamie + the Jones with a trunk show in September. Emerson Grace also sells Ceri Hoover leather handbags.

"We really pride ourselves on carrying local brands and seeing them grow and develop. Giving them a space that they're proud to have their product in does well for us," Lewis said.

Lewis, whose husband Jim Lewis owns Nashville-based restaurant group Community Hospitality, has worked in the fashion industry since in teenager, including executive management positions with Ralph Lauren and Guess. As vice president of stores for BCBGMAXAZRIA, Lewis launched the company's first expansive retail effort. She later operated a retail and wholesale consulting firm in Los Angeles.

The relationships she developed in those positions helps guide her effort at Emerson Grace, Lewis said. She's also listening to customers and watching paying attention to how the Nashville consumer wants to dress.

"Every woman wants to look their best. We want to help them," Lewis said.