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Skincare takes a sip of something new in Ballard

By Mia LaCourse

Walking into The Wax Bar, Ballard's newest concept in skincare salons, is like entering a chic alternate universe. A young man stands behind a custom-made, padded white desk in the front of a mod white foyer, and looks up from a shiny white iMac computer. Instead of the standard "how are you?" his first question is "would you like something to drink?"

The Wax Bar, which specializes in facials and waxing, is Karen Jahn's new baby, born Sept. 21.

Jahn's skincare and waxing "bar" is the first salon in the Seattle

area to acquire a liquor license. Although they cannot serve wine due to their lack of a functioning kitchen, Jahn offers her clients a variety of beer, including a small selection of fruit-flavored Lambic beers. According to Jahn, the raspberry Lambic beer is the most popular at her salon, with customers asking for it regularly.

These alcoholic treats run from \$2 to \$3, which basically just covers the cost, says Jahn, and are for clients only.

We originally wanted to just give it away, says Jahn, but it's actually illegal for the salon to not charge for the alcoholic beverages.

Jahn worked at Habitude, another popular salon and spa in the Fremont and Ballard areas, doing waxing and facials for nine years before deciding the company had expanded too much, and had essentially "outgrown" her. During her time at Habitude, Jahn says that many of her clients would comment on how great it would be to have a drink when they came in.

That concept stuck with Jahn, and inspired her to open The Wax Bar.

Although she mulled over the idea of starting her own salon for a couple of years before leaving Habitude, Jahn claims that she didn't even realize it until she announced her intentions, and a client said "its about time, you've been talking about it forever."

What sets her salon apart, liquor license aside, says Jahn, is her dedication to offering clients an entire experience, not just a simple

waxing or skincare service. The front tables, covered with what Jahn calls "bad" magazines, and the well-stocked beer refrigerator help promote The Wax Bar's image as a "skincare lounge."

Busy moms make plans to meet and catch up here, says Jahn. They leave their kids at home and have 30 minutes to themselves. Instead of meeting at a bar or a restaurant, they get their eyebrows waxed, read a few fashion magazines and have a beer, chatting with their girlfriends.

"It's really fun," says Jahn.

The Wax Bar is also very exclusive, in that it only offers skincare and waxing services.

"We don't do nails, and we don't do massage," says Jahn.

At Habitude, which Jahn says has grown from 10 staff members when she first started working there, to 150 today, the parking has become congested and "some clients feel like they're just another number." Unlike The Wax Bar, Habitude offers a variety of service, including hair care and massage. While Jahn acknowledges that some people don't mind that, and they like to be "on the go," The Wax Bar offers something more intimate and relaxing.

Some people want to hang out, says Jahn. She describes how going to a salon can be "huge," for some people, and "the highlight of a mom's day." Jahn believes society is moving into a time when it's really about the experience. In response to this transition, Jahn provides her clients with her salon's



FACIALS, WAXING AND A DRINK. A new business, The Wax Bar, is a skin care salon with a liquor license.

popular cucumber water, flavored beer and "trashy" magazines. It's the added little touches," says Jahn, adding that it's the little treat for her customers to look forward to.

It's an escape, says Jahn, even if it's for just 15 minutes.

The idea behind The Wax Bar's decor is simplicity: white walls and white furniture. To keep it from appearing sterile – Jahn says she was afraid of it looking like a doctor's office – she decided to incorporate small touches of teal throughout the rooms, and on her business cards. The furniture is modern and spare, while the teal is bright against the stark palette of the white everything else. Jahn says she got inspiration from styles in L.A. and Miami.

"The Northwest is very organic," says Jahn, "which is great." She just wanted a different feel. She wanted something clean and modern.

Jahn recognizes that many people enjoy being pampered, but often cannot afford to do so on a regular basis. Her prices are competitive; an eyebrow wax at Habitude costs \$27, while the same service at The Wax Bar is only \$22, and Jahn also offers a Brazilian wax "maintenance program," which is not available at Habitude.

For those who are on an even tighter budget, Jahn offers "happy hour" services Tuesday through Friday from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. Clients can enjoy reduced prices on select services, which change on a monthly basis. Appointments can only be made on the day of, but "It's a great way for people on a budget," says Jahn. This month, eyebrow and lip waxing are featured, for \$12 and \$8, respectively.

"I want clients to have a high-end experience," says Jahn, "but not at a high-end price."

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