



KEN WESLEY

## Dora Palao: A sheer love of hair

BY BRIT MOTT

**C**RIMPED, PERMED, TEASED, FEATHERED—hair was big business in the 1980s. Big curls, big bangs and big celebrities with Aqua-Net plastered hairdos defined the decade, among garish fashions and MTV. Star-struck teenagers dreamed of being trendsetters, supermodels, and celebrity stylists.

And then there was Dora Palao. “Growing up, hair wasn’t my first choice,” she reveals. “I actually wanted to be a mechanic, but it was the ’80s and Mom said no one would take me seriously.”

Dora heeded her mom’s advice and after a year working at a salon in Collin Creek Mall, she started her own business at only 19 years old. “It was scary, but I was motivated and I had a lot of people I looked up to as mentors,” she recalls.

Back in the ’80s, Plano East Senior High didn’t have a cosmetology program and students were bussed to Plano Senior High for classes. Dora kept in touch with many of those friends over the years and says even though they’re all in the business of hair, there’s no rivalry. They’re still friends and meet weekly to consult with each other on the latest products and styles.

A California transplant, Dora moved to Texas in 1979 and has owned her Downtown Plano salon for the last 13 years. “I love it. When I was looking for a place in Plano to open my business, I saw the potential in downtown and it has worked out well.”

Dora’s Salon is vintaged-out with pastel hair dryers and antique décor hanging on the walls. Her pride and joy is an antique Turbinator hair dryer standing on four wheels in the corner of the salon. It was a “\$50 steal.” Dora loves antiquated treasures and the memories that accompany each special buy.

She also cherishes the memories that have transpired over the years in her salon. “My daughter Elysia practically grew up here,” she says. “I have an office in the back that I put her bassinet in and she’s been near my side ever since. Of course, now she’s 12 and not around as often.”

Dora’s clients have become like family though. In fact, she still has clients from the first day she started styling hair. And after losing her husband and another daughter in years past, Dora has been consoled by many clients whom she calls friends. “I struggled, but hearing my clients’ stories has helped me to cope and heal. It has been a journey, but styling hair has given me peace.”

*Visit Dora’s Salon at 1425 Vontress St. #1113 in Downtown Plano. First-time clients receive half off. Call 972.509.2220 to make an appointment.*