

Be Well Juice Bar owner sets sights on The Waterfront Vancouver

She hopes to open Hawaii-inspired space by the end of the year

By Rachel Pinsky, for The Columbian

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Amanda Serrano hopes to open Be Well, a juice bar at The Waterfront Vancouver, by the end of the year, as seen Thursday morning. The new space is in the RiverWest building between Kafix Roasters and Airfield Estates Winery. (Amanda Cowan/The Columbian)

Amanda Serrano, owner of Be Well Juice Bar, plans to open a new space at The Waterfront Vancouver.

By the end of the year, she hopes to bring an aloha vibe, as well as juices, smoothies and acai bowls to a storefront between Airfield Estates tasting room and Kafix Roasters Gastro Cafe, at 740 Waterfront Way. Her downtown Vancouver location will close one to two months before she opens Be Well Juice Bar at the Waterfront.

Serrano has worked at Be Well since it was first opened by Courtney Firstenberg in 2018. Melanie Concannon, who bought it from Firstenberg, asked Serrano if she wanted to buy the business several months after purchasing it. Serrano loved the idea of running her own juice bar and quickly came to an agreement with Concannon to take over Be Well.

“I have a kid. I want to provide a legacy for him. I’m the only one in my family to own a business. I want to do well to encourage them to take risks,” Serrano said.

Before her time at Be Well, Serrano spent 10 years at Lanikai Juice in Oahu. At Lanikai, she worked her way up to operations manager and spent her time driving around the island setting up new stores for the company. In Hawaii, Serrano discovered her passion for making whole food, plant-based, mostly vegan food that tastes good.

“I want to make things that my mom and my aunt and my kid would have,” she said.

Serrano’s customer, Rahim Abbasi, of Abbasi Design Works, nudged her to move to the Waterfront. A year and a half ago, Abbasi proposed splitting a space at the Waterfront. He’s one of the owners of Compass Coffee and had talked to RiverWest building’s owner, Josh Oliva, about opening a Compass Coffee on the waterfront.

Abbasi felt a juice and coffee bar would be a great addition to the building. The owners of Compass weren’t completely sure about opening a space at this new and untested development. Kafix Roasters claimed the spot for its Gastro Cafe before Serrano and Abbasi could lease it.

Abbasi still believed that Serrano’s juices and smoothies belonged on the waterfront. He introduced Serrano to Oliva. She secured a rental agreement on a 1,200-square-foot spot.

Due to the proximity of Kafix, toasts with avocado or peanut butter won’t be on Be Well’s menu at the new location. The Waterfront version of Be Well will serve juices, smoothies and acai bowls.

Abbasi, whose projects include Dos Alas and Compass Coffee, is working with Serrano to design the space. He describes it as 1950s Hawaii meets Tulum, Mexico. He estimates the buildout for the space will take 10 to 16 weeks.

Be Well won’t completely leave the downtown area. By mid-October, Serrano hopes to secure all of the permits to allow her to serve juices, smoothies and acai bowls from 7 to 10 a.m. Tuesday through Friday at Ingrid’s Good Street Food on Broadway.

Serrano has many long-term plans for her company. In 10 years, she’d like to move to zero waste. She’d also like to grow her ingredients for the juice bar on a farm nearby. In addition, she has her eye on Arizona and Hawaii as good places to open Be Well cafes.

For now, she’s focused on getting her Waterfront and Uptown Village locations up and running. She plans on devising creative fundraisers to pay for the buildout for the new space. She also wants to throw a special grand opening party on the waterfront. She hopes to secure reggae band Common Kings and have an outdoor dance party to celebrate her new business.

“I want the grand opening to be insane,” she said.

