

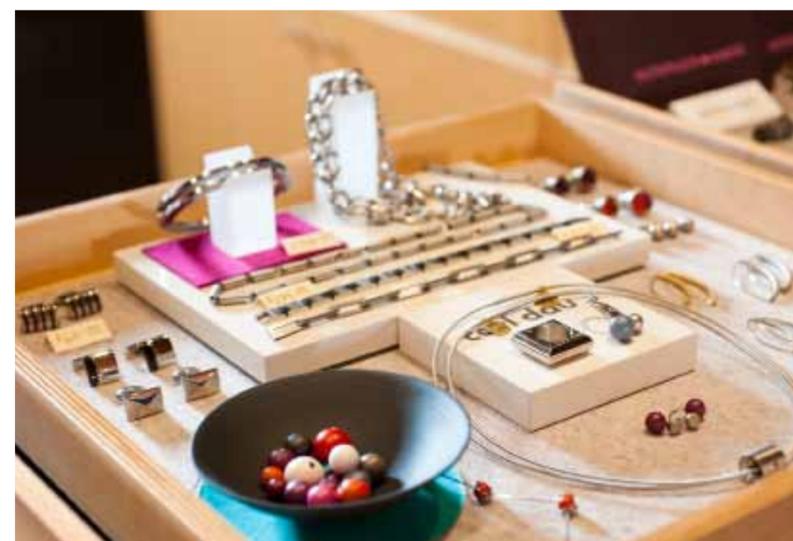
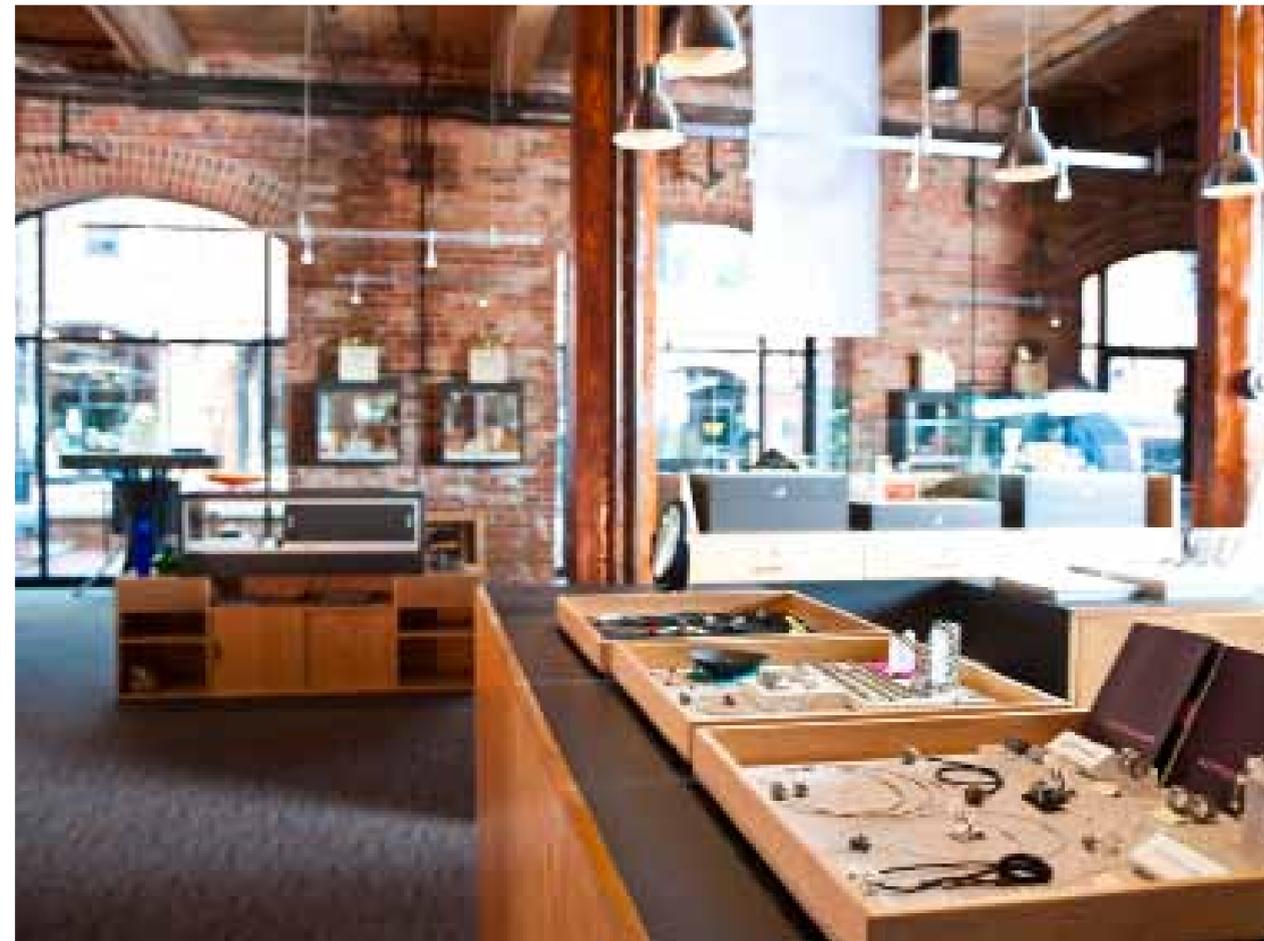
## Hamilton Hill

905 W. Main St.  
Durham, N.C.

When gemologist Sarah Hill and her former business partner, Michael Hamilton, decided to open Hamilton Hill, they easily could have set up shop in one of the Raleigh-Durham area's numerous malls. Instead, they chose downtown Durham—an area that, at the time in 2001, was still struggling to make a comeback. “We had a passion for downtown Durham,” says Hill. “We wanted to be a part of it, and even though it probably would have made more sense financially to sell to the masses at the mall, it was so important to us to be in this neighborhood.” Today, the contemporary jewelry boutique is part of a thriving community that’s experiencing a true urban renaissance. And it’s in good company with cool neighbors such as women’s boutique Vert & Vogue and Wentworth & Leggett Rare Books. —Jennifer Bringle

### EASY ON THE EYES

Located in historic Brightleaf Square—a complex of former American Tobacco Company warehouses—Hamilton Hill exudes the feel of an urbane art gallery, with exposed brick walls, spare decor, and sleek glass cases. “It never occurred to us to have a typical jewelry store,” says Hill. “Display is important to us and it just seemed natural with the jewelry we had. Your eye has a place to rest and it’s not so bombarded by stuff.” The space reflects the minimalist design aesthetic of much of the jewelry at Hamilton Hill: Work by international



### DOG DAYS

Assisting Hill in customer relations is Billie, the official shop dog. A stray found wandering outside the store, Billie was adopted by Hill and spends her days welcoming shoppers and snoozing beneath the cases. “She brings so much joy to our workday,” says Hill. “Having her here just adds a really nice element of sweetness and connection to our world.”

### COMMUNITY PRIDE

In the nearly 15 years since its opening, Hamilton Hill has become the go-to jewelry store for local artists as well as doctors, scientists, and professors from nearby Duke University. “They are the smartest, most interesting, and most appreciative people,” says Hill. “At the end of the day, you feel like you’ve been at a party with the most interesting people in the world.” ■

jewelers such as Niessing, Furrer-Jacot, and Satoru feature similar clean lines and contemporary shapes. “Niessing was one of our firsts,” Hill says of the German brand, known for its tension-set engagement rings and inventive use of stainless steel. “They approach everything very conceptually and really give us a framework for thinking about simple beauty.”

### BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

“We really want a relationship; our customers want one with us and we want one with designers,” Hill says of the store’s 30-plus artists, whose pieces retail from \$100 to \$10,000. “We don’t think of them as vendors. We think of them as partners.” As much as she enjoys working with designers to select inventory for the shop, Hill also relishes assisting clients in finding the right pieces to fit their personal style. “What I’m really interested in is helping clients choose something they’re really going to love,” she says.

➔ [JCKONLINE.COM](http://JCKONLINE.COM)  
PROUD OF YOUR WINDOWS AND  
DISPLAY CASES? SEND US PHOTOS.