

Laura James

photography by laura james



Laura Schmelzer James is a native of Jackson who landed in Charlotte, North Carolina after college. She married, and stayed there, but she never left behind her Mississippi roots. A graduate of Ole Miss, she studied fashion merchandising and design and started designing her own jewelry in 2002. She launched her business website www.laurajamesjewelry.com in 2005. It's been a wild ride ever since.

"As a child I used to take necklaces apart with my dad's pliers, and I decided to try it again," James says. The necklaces she designed started gaining attention wherever she went. "I would wear it, and people would offer to buy it off of me," she says.

James' big break came when an editor at *Lucky* magazine saw a friend wearing her jewelry in New York. It was featured in the magazine's 2007 De-

cember gift guide, which brought it to the attention of costumers in Los Angeles. Soon, she started fielding calls from people interested in using it for television shows such as *Gossip Girl* and the upcoming movies *It Came From Upstairs* starring Ashley Tisdale and *Sorority Row* starring Rumer Willis.

She was also selected to design the official necklace of the Deanna Favre Hope Foundation, which provides financial aid to breast cancer patients in Mississippi and Wisconsin.

"I love to travel, and I really take a lot of inspiration from places I've been," James says. She cites Central America, Europe, Asia, and the Caribbean as particular influences.

Laura James jewelry is now sold in seven states, from Mississippi to Maine. You can find it at 4450, a boutique in Jackson, or on her website. She works out of a window-filled studio in her home where she makes each piece of jewelry by hand. She makes special use of semiprecious and organic stones and carved jade. She loves incorporating vintage components into her pieces.

"I tend to go toward the elegant," she says, "but it's something you wear every day."

Despite living in North Carolina, James is always quick to claim Mississippi as her home and to use her jewelry as a promotion for her home state. "I realized I really wanted to be a voice for Mississippi," she says, and it is a voice that's now worn proudly across the country.

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