

REGIONAL REPORT: ST ALBANS



The goldsmith

Christopher Wharton
1 George Street
St Albans

All Christopher Wharton's collections are made on site by nine goldsmiths. In addition, it stocks Stefan Hafner, Nanis, Orlando Orlandini and Marco Bicego, which have all been successful, and silver brands Georg Jensen and Links of London. It also carries Omega, Breitling, Longines and Ebel watches.

"We have a lot of young professionals in St Albans and Hertfordshire. More people have moved out of London and we noticed an increase in sales after the July 7 bombs two years ago," says the shop's general manager Ian Packham.

"We have two core markets: women aged 25–35 and 45–80. But we also have 20-year-old City types spending £1,000 and £50,000. Prices go from £20 up to £250,000 and more. In addition, we do quite a bit of business with tourists who come mainly from Europe."

Best sellers are Wharton's own designs, which are classical with a contemporary feel. Round brilliants are still the most popular diamonds but princess cuts also do well. And there is increasing demand for yellow gold set with coloured stones such as tanzanites and morganites.

"We're bullish about 2008," says Packham. "We've just launched our own shop in Cambridge and we want to keep our customer base growing."



Diamond jewellery by Christopher Wharton



The fashion man

Petragems
7 High Street
St Albans

Two years ago, Paresh Pattni opened up in St Albans to expand his customer base from his shop in Watford.

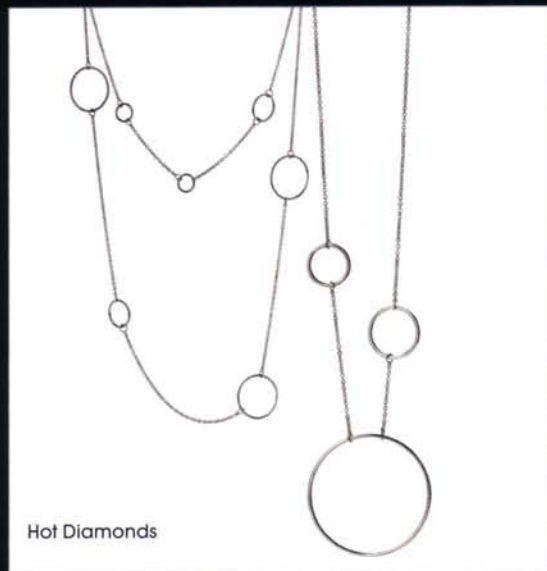
One brand he stocks is Zoppini, a Florence-based brand that makes steel, rubber and black diamond jewellery as well as silver and coloured stone pieces. It also does silver charm bracelets for women and rubber with black diamond bangles for men.

Pattni also carries a Hot Diamonds range of rhodium-plated silver jewellery. Then there are individual pieces such as a coral and lava necklace sourced from a local supplier and an amber collection from Poland.

"We get a massive demand for amber, which is one of our biggest sellers. And the pieces are so unusual; the more outrageous they are, the faster they go. They're very popular with the Polish community living and working in St Albans."

Prices go from £10 for silver earrings to £3,000 for a heart-shaped pavé diamond pendant. Clients are aged from 17 to 65 and even older, and he gets quite a few tourists in the summer – mainly Americans and Europeans, but also UK visitors from Manchester, Leeds, Wales and Scotland.

Pattni has seen strong sales in 2007 but is cautious about prospects for this year: "I think 2008 will have a tough start because there's been a general slowdown and people are watching their pennies."



Hot Diamonds