It’s not just the diamonds that take your breath away when you walk into Tiffany & Co. The stores themselves are part of the attraction, from their iconic, polished-granite entryways to their grand and elegant interiors.

The man responsible for designing many of these dazzling retail spaces is Deverell Smith ’00, who earned a bachelor’s degree in architectural engineering technology from the University of Hartford’s Ward College (now part of the College of Engineering, Technology, and Architecture).

As manager of retail design for Tiffany & Co., Smith has designed stores in such places as Las Vegas, Nev.; Santa Barbara and Topanga, Calif.; and Westfarms Mall in Farmington and Mohegan Sun Casino in Uncasville, Conn.

Every Tiffany store has its own individual design based on its location and surroundings. “For example,” Smith says, “we designed the Topanga store with lots of earth tones to evoke the spirit of nearby Topanga Canyon.” The Las Vegas store, located in The Forum Shops at Caesars Palace, features a purple color palette, mother-of-pearl appointments, magnificent chandeliers, and a grand staircase.

At the age of 30, Smith has already achieved tremendous success in the world of high-end architectural design. But his professional life extends in many other directions as well.

“I don’t want to be in a box. I don’t want to have a label,” says Smith, who first heard the term Renaissance man ascribed to him when he was a child.

With his striking good looks and interest in fashion, Smith worked part time as a model from the time he was school-aged until his early 20s. At the University of Hartford, Smith—who was known as “R. Sun”—not only modeled but also marketed nightclubs, produced music, and won rap competitions. During his last year and a half at the University, he worked at a high-end interior design firm in Manhattan, where he began a full-time job immediately after graduating.

The University of Hartford has played a big role in Smith’s life—both through the architecture and graphic design education he received, and through the wide range of people he met as a student.

Today, Smith is involved in a number of business ventures with friends from his alma mater. In 2006 he teamed up with Guy Neumann ’04 (who went by Gai Noiman as an undergraduate) and Mariel Peck (a graduate of the University’s Entrepreneurial Center) to create Mariel the Shoe Bar, a women’s shoe boutique located in West Hartford and Avon, Conn. Smith designed both stores—which are distinguished by “bars” that serve up fashionable shoes and handbags—and he is a co-owner of the Avon store.

Smith and another University alumnus, Darel Eastling ’99, are co-owners of D. D. Management, which owns and manages rental properties. Smith and alumnus Jason Bell ’02 are the owners of Cohesion Design Studio, a graphic design firm. As if that weren’t enough, Smith also is a competitive bicycle racer and sole owner of a cycling team based in New York City.