



Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University Director Trevor Schoonmaker with retail visionary Jennings Brody as they unveil the art gallery's vibrant new gift shop, "Parker & Otis at the Nasher Museum."



dreaming in

color

Duke University museum partners with local retail maven to revamp its gift shop

BY ANNA-RHESA VERSOLA

Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University recently launched a new entrepreneurial collaboration with Durham shopkeep **Jennings Brody** to rebrand its gift shop. This is the first time an independent retailer has been selected to operate an on-campus store and its associated e-commerce platform.

"Well, first of all, we love Jennings," Nasher Museum Director **Trevor Schoonmaker** says of the 12-year member of the **Nasher Museum Friends Board**. Jennings, who was an art history and

political science double major at Bates College in Maine, owns and operates **Parker & Otis** – a Best of Durham honoree for its gift store (and its sandwiches!) – as well as **Tiny, Parker Paper Co., Chet Miller** and **Bahama Blues**.

The museum held a celebratory unveiling of the store for its board on April 29, revealing a fresh, white interior that mirrors the crisp letters on the exterior glass walls

announcing that you've arrived at "Parker & Otis at the Nasher Museum." Natural light from the great hall brightens the 367-square-foot shop. Colorful displays of writing and art supplies fill the shelves, along with books and paper products selected by Jennings and her staff, which includes **Michele Smith, Bryan Nickellstage** and **Meredith Pittman**. "You know I have a great love for all things paper," Jennings says.

"With her eye and the work that she's done with stores in the community," Trevor says, "it's going to be, for the first time, really a reflection of our identity as a museum, because she understands it. And even the way it looks as a space – not to mention the merchandise – it just changes things dramatically. We're super excited."

Wendy Hower, Nasher's communications and marketing director, says conversations about a formal collaboration began in 2019, but the pandemic intervened. In late 2022, the museum revisited the idea of transforming the shop.

"Jennings gets us," Wendy says. "We love working with people we love. We happened to notice that she is a retail

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Nasher Museum Friends Board members Sara Stephens and Arthur Rogers peruse the products inside the corner nook of the store.

genius. We just wanted to bring her closer. We're taking a long-term friendship to the next level."

Jennings and her team say this project is evolving. "It's really the fear of, 'Are we picking the right product assortment?'" Jennings says. "This is our starting assortment. It's super fluid and flexible. If six people come in and say, 'Hey, we were looking for this item,' or, 'We thought you'd have this,' we can make that happen."

She estimates approximately 90% of the merchandise in the new museum shop will be different from what it used to carry when it was managed by **Duke University Stores**. Eventually, Jennings and her team will work with museum staff, volunteers and artists to offer exhibit-specific products and activities.

"We're part of someone else's brand now," Jennings says. "That's not something we've ever done before. It feels like such a fun and exciting new challenge. I mean, who doesn't want to be in the Nasher, right? How good does it feel to walk into the great hall and look up and see this glass space?" ►

shaping the future

It's an exciting time at the Nasher, which was named one of Durham's best museums and art galleries by our readers. Work is currently underway to expand and redesign the **Nancy A. Nasher and David J. Haemisegger Family Sculpture Garden**.

Groundbreaking took place in February on the walkable landscape project, which was made possible with a \$5 million gift from Nancy A. Nasher and David J. Haemisegger. The lead architect is 2002 **Duke University** alumna Claire Agre, co-founder of landscape architecture firm Unknown Studio in Baltimore.

The new design will include wooden walking steps and accessible pathways for strollers and people with mobility challenges, plus a 21-foot-long stone bench. "MamaRay," a 15-foot bronze sculpture by contemporary artist Wangechi Mutu, will be moved to the main entrance, and other new sculptures are expected to be commissioned and installed to fit different landscape scenes. Bluestone pavers will connect the indoor and outdoor spaces. Completion is expected in 2025.