

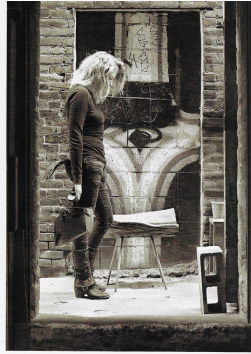
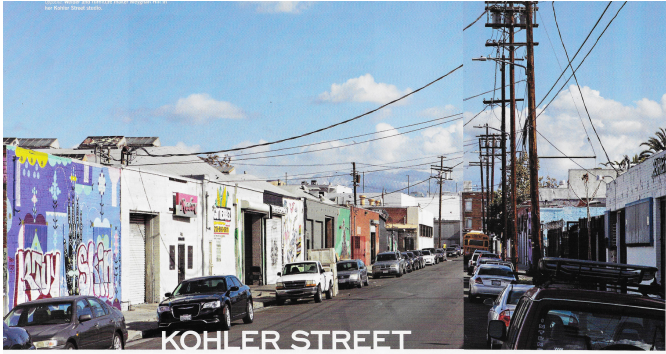
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MEYGHAN HILL OF THE
KOHLER STREET COLLECTIVE



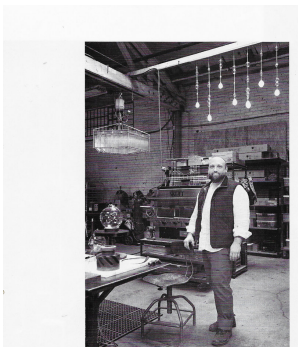
MEYGHAN HILL AND URI DAVILLER REPRESENT THE NEW CREATIVE COMMUNITY THAT IS TRANSFORMING DOWNTOWN

Text by Abigail Stone | Photography by Karyn Miller

6 realized that I needed people around me who were doing the same thing," says welder and furniture fabricator Meghan Hill, reflecting on the winding road that brought her to Kohler Street and the group of studios and entrepreneurs colloquially known as the Kohler Street Collective. Growing up in South Bend, Indiana, she'd dreamed around her. "I tried to do some things by the time I was fourteen. That's probably where my affinity for things that belong in a home comes from." Later, while in the army, she managed to arrange a full scholarship to military school. "I was like, 'This is a great way to have some free years earlier!'"

Though most people would've balked at the regimented discipline of military school, Hill thrived. "I could do all the things I wanted. I had the college experience early." Upon graduation she headed to New York, where she was spotted by a model agent and, more intriguingly, booked the first job she was sent out on. Inspired by Ford, she headed for Los Angeles on a job and decided to stay.

The pivot to meshwork came after she had the home she'd been renovating with her fiancé and found herself in an empty apartment in Hollywood that needed furniture. She thought she'd



karyn how to weld. The when she stepped her into a machine shop in the Valley. "I figured I'd try my hand and get someone to teach me." In retrospect, she admits, "I could've gone very wrong." Instead, the tradesman took her under their wing.

"My designs grew organically from my experience there. Hill notes, "I was seeing a lot of their script steel security gates come in very specific lengths, so the cut-offs were all the same size." In her hands those pieces became furniture legs. Reflected they've become the basis for the strong geometries of her blackened-steel tables, bedeviled by touches of brass. The through-line from the script of some of the malleable decorative next door to the jagged headboard that forms the focal point of her magnetic cocktail table.

Success came in the form of glassblower Uri Daviller. Daviller's route to his craft had been equally serpentine. He was three years into an engineering degree at Case Western Reserve University when a friend asked if he'd help out with a glass blowing project. He was immediately hooked. "It was the first time I experienced something where the middle side of my interest in engineering could be expressed in a really artistic way," he remembers. In fact, it was an revelation that Daviller switched to the art school, "and I've been blowing glass ever since."



Quinn Gustafson in Daviller's studio in Hollywood, Los Angeles. Photo by Karyn Miller in 2012.

Upon graduation, he was offered a scholarship that would finance two months of travel, and he set off for Australia and New Zealand. "They have an amazing glass scene there," he explains. "Because the raw material is so close, it's super price. He secured the grant money for two years and old jobs, knowing there were two countries until he accidentally overplayed this was and found himself in a glass hub back in the States. "There were two choices. The workshop had driven me out of Cleveland, so I certainly wasn't going to go to New York." Instead he headed to Los Angeles.

Introduced by mutual friends in 2012, Hill and Daviller discovered an immediate kinship. Along with woodworker Weslin Mitchell, they began looking for a space they could share, settling on a sprawling three-foot warehouse a few blocks west of DFW DTLA.

Kohler Street, in the middle of old town, is named after Charles Kohler, credited as one of the founders of Los Angeles's wiremaking industry. The row of buildings between 27th and 30th streets was long the site of the Southern California Hardware and Lumber Manufacturing Com-

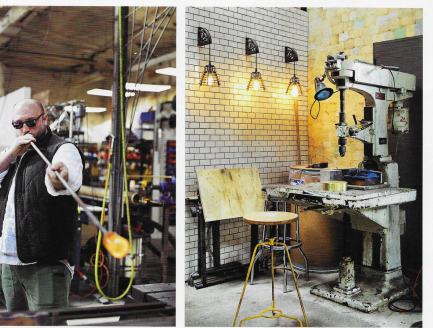
pany, which created the interior furnishings for the original Hollywood store. Later the structures became storage for so-called production fabric, when we moved here in January 2013 were Uri, Mitchell, Weslin, and I. The space used to be the site of Santa Fe. Daviller remembers. The first thing that we did was build a long wooden bar that extended down one side of the vast workroom. Hill explains their reasoning. "We knew we had to create a customer base that was interested in the process and the fact that we were



making it ourselves." Dubbed "Design Night," the bi-monthly event they host now draws a cross-section of artists, interior designers and fellow colleagues. The energy of their workplace captivated architect Ben Madansky, who built his "dream studio" in the area.

While Mitchell and Madansky have since left (Madansky moved to Ferguson after his space burned down in 2015), others have eagerly taken their place. Visual artist Nick Karamian, architect Ben Hopkins, Sable Design House's Jacob Rabinov and Fathom and Form's Priscilla Johnson, an architectural fabrication company, are now in. The large room teems with the vibrant chaos of people, work and animals.

Johnson suggested that Daviller switch his focus to lighting. Remembers Daviller, "He mentioned that the one thing that every single architect is asking is really amazing lighting." Daviller took the recommendation seriously.



trial design. That job also helped his "amalgam," the connecting point that holds glass in metal. Daviller's proprietary technique uses laser cut and has become a signature of sorts, giving his work its elegant simplicity, mirrored by its various joints and extraneous fittings.

It was interior designer Tamara Kerec Hince of House of Hince who gave Daviller the commission that put his work (which he sells under

like many of his pieces, it finds its genesis in his faith and in the past. His current channeler electrical wiring, the Lora chandelier reads in character's structural formality. It was based off some quirky mathematics I studied in engineering school," he explains.

Fortunately, Daviller had received his UL certification just before accepting the job.

The expansion of Daviller's business prompted Hill to move her studio into her home's overgrown, seven-acre square-foot lot, tucked into a vine-covered building just across the street. "Some days the most exciting part is walking the hundred steps to it's and back," she laughs. Although she enjoys the solitude of working alone, it can push her to the breaking point when a big order—like the ten-foot tables she created for the Clippers lounge or the

≡ (WH)ORE HAÜS STUDIOS



you need to make this stable, and that's been tough, because I feel like people respond to my brand because I'm building it myself and I talk about that a lot."

Hill has hopes of one day creating a women's work space to support her. "In Boston there's a program called Women Who Sell, where they take women out of offices and teach them the craft," she explains. She also has dreams of her "Women's Army" referring to her business name, which she plans to change to check play on words compared to when she couldn't get the domain name she wanted. "Chelsea was

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sales, and a friend suggested I add the word to it. I reasoned that if anyone could do it, it would have to be a woman."

"The definition of the word is to remain something of value," she says. "At the time, I was using my friends that were meant to be discarded, so I was pulling them out of that, and I wanted to give the word that was meant to divide a new value. It's very meta, and it's about the confidence of that. But," she admits, "not everyone loves it."

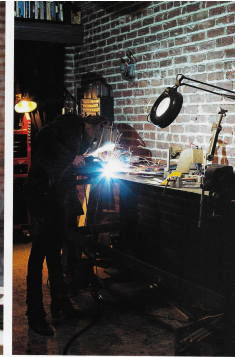
As her work evolves toward the future, Hill freely borrows from her past. Recent pieces

she has featured a collection of tubes wrapped in leather and lined up with brass buckled belts, and in high-heeled and low-cut boots on corsets. She's also designed a line of small goods, including notebooks and brass bookends. Recently, featured on COOP's salt collars and leather cuffs sold in pairs and meant to be shared with another bad-ass woman. "Hill like, that's in a nutshell what it comes to craftsmanship they're surprising, her work is carried by some of the most creative dimensions across the country, including her folks in San Francisco and "trained in the homes of a whole bunch of other PIPs under PIP."



"My perfect life would look very similar to what it is now, with just a little bit more ease in terms of business and doing more projects that I want to," Hill reflects. "Some people have a little mindblock by the side of their bed when they get down their knees. I can just get up and build it right there. So I really just want to keep that."

And she wants to stay on Kohler Street. Recently she welcomed designers Ryan Galbraith and Lisa Dombroski of Landfill Studios into her space. "Our perception has always been that it's really the epicenter of people



pushing the boundaries in design within Los Angeles and supporting each other as they can take risks," says Galbraith about what drew the duo to the shop.

Hill agrees. "It wasn't until I moved downtown that I really fell in love with Los Angeles," she says. "This is not just a space, it's a community and it's really valuable." Adds Dombroski, "I moved downtown because I was trying to replicate the experience I had in New Zealand and a beautiful studio and a group of people who were intensely invested in their craft. Done and done."

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