



MASTER CRAFTSMAN

Lighting Designer Art Donovan

For some, the objects and hardware that illuminate our homes and businesses are ubiquitous, even easy to pass over or ignore, but light is arguably the most important component of any interior space. Without it, atmosphere, mood and composition slip under a blanket of darkness—our eyes desperately trying to navigate a way forward instead of relishing the nuance and subtleties of a well-designed room.

Southampton lighting designer Art Donovan is no stranger to this truth. He’s spent 27 years crafting innovative and beautiful lamps in harmony with the function and aesthetic of the light they produce. Donovan Design, his company with wife and partner Leslie Tarbell Donovan, is built on this talent for creating handcrafted custom lighting to suit any need, form or function.

“We occupy a unique niche—we work now almost exclusively with architects and designers,” Donovan says. “We design lights from scratch.”

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—*—*

Because of his artistry and a deep understanding of how light works, including all the latest industry advancements, Donovan gives architects and decorators the freedom to execute their vision unimpeded by limitations to size, color, material or anything else that might stand in the way. “We don’t do lamps out of the box—that’s been our stock in trade for the last 17 years,” he says.

Donovan found a career in lighting through a circuitous path that began in the 1980s working in package design and corporate identity under industrial designer Donald Deskey—the man who designed Radio City Music Hall. It was there Donovan fell in love with Art Deco and learned to appreciate design, but he would spend some years as an art director at New York advertising firms before he answered his true calling.

“With each zigzag in my career I was able to apply what I learned from a previous industry,” Donovan says, noting how his fascination with lighting began shortly after leaving the ad business, and it took him right back to Deskey’s influence.

“It started in 1990 with one lamp,” he explains. Over the next decade Donovan and his wife expanded the line, which grew to 130 different designs by 2000. “Leslie names them all,” Donovan points out, describing his wife as the president of Donovan Design, client liaison and, most importantly, his creative inspiration. “She’s completely my muse,” he adds without hesitation. “She’ll constantly surprise me with new visions and new directions,” Donovan continues, happily admitting that nothing would be possible without his wife.



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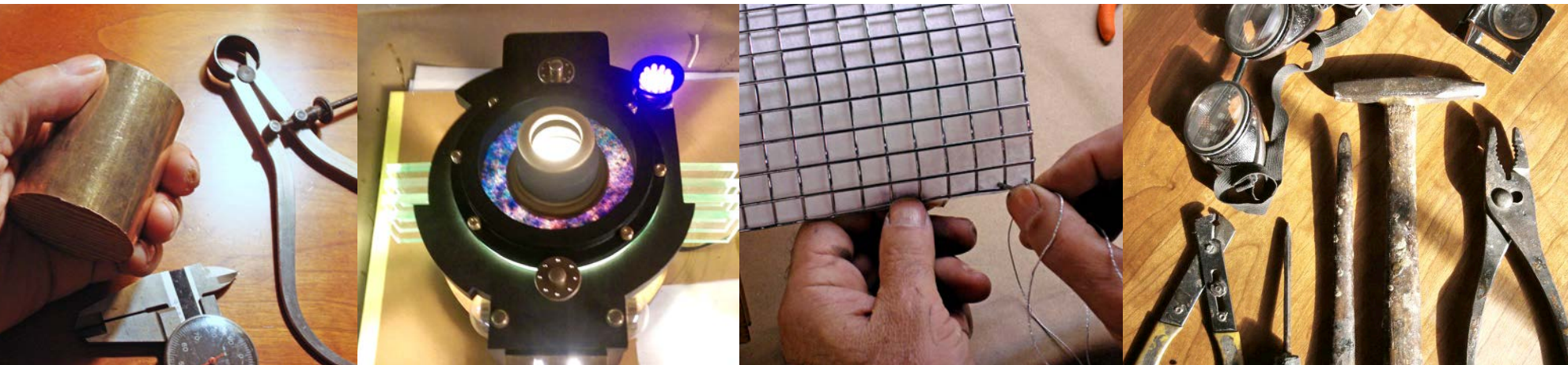


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Their combined talents have led Donovan Design to work with dozens of top-tier clients, including Tiffany & Co. in NYC, The Palms Hotel + Spa in Miami, Disney Cruise Lines, Four Seasons Resorts Villas in St. Thomas, and Bennetti Luxury Yachts in Italy, to name a few. He's also created lighting for film and television productions, such as *Saturday Night Live*, *The Sopranos*, *The DaVinci Code*, *End of Days* and more.

Custom lighting design remains at the core of his business, but Donovan's name has become more and more associated with the steampunk design movement over the last decade. Steampunk became an obsession after Donovan came upon it during an online search for new design styles. This fanciful amalgamation of futuristic and Victorian aesthetics inspired him to create jaw-dropping sculptural lighting pieces in the style, but it didn't end there.

Donovan has since authored three books on the subject, worked as a consultant and talent director for History Channel's *Modern Marvels/Weird Machines*, and curated the world's first major exhibition on steampunk art and design at the Museum of the History of Science at Oxford University in England. He's now considered one of the world's foremost steampunk experts. This is what happens when Donovan invests himself in something he loves.

"My favorite job is designing and building a single lamp to my own liking and specifications," he says. "It's a sculptural project that includes some source of illumination."

Donovan's passion projects, like his steampunk designs, give birth to innovations he later applies to projects he does for others. "There's always crossover to the practical," he explains, acknowledging that steampunk can be seen all over popular culture and design, even if it's not always labeled as such. Just as influential art is absorbed into mainstream visual vernacular, components from Donovan's wildest creations are often contoured and modified to fit his customers' more pragmatic designs.

From concept to completion, Donovan does everything with his own hands. "I fabricate it entirely myself—truth be told, it's the only way to get it done right," the designer says, though he welcomes collaboration and does what's required to bring a client's vision to fruition. With each project, Donovan pulls away that blanket of darkness, enhancing and illuminating a space with lighting no one can ignore.

- Oliver Peterson

