NEW YORK SPACES

Q&A with Bonnie Littman of USAI Lighting

NYS: How did you get your start in the lighting industry?

BL: Although lighting has been our family business, and I'm the third generation, I initially bucked the bloodlines and opted for the world of finance, beginning my work career in the early 1980s at Chemical Bank (now JP Morgan Chase), where I was assigned to Pronto, the first home banking service. My sister Sandy was in her 5th year of building The American Glass Light Company, a decorative lighting company when she needed someone to help manage her quickly growing brand. So, I joined AGL in 1983 as President. Although I enjoyed my time working for a large bank, I knew even then that I was an entrepreneur and jumped at the opportunity.

NYS: Your grandfather manufactured the fluorescent fixtures GE introduced to mainstream America in 1939. USAI designs and manufactures technologically advanced LEDs, a light source taking the market by storm. What have you learned from your heritage that has helped USAI usher in LED adoption?

BL: I think my father and grandfather would be very proud of the business we have created at USAI. Lighting of course has always been in my DNA. It's been the topic of every family gathering for as long as I can remember. What's extremely interesting is that each of us built our businesses at pivotal moments in the history of the lighting industry. My father and grandfather built their business during the rise of fluorescent lighting while the world was refitting old inefficient sources. It's amazing that history is repeating itself and I have the opportunity to do the same with the next great light source since fluorescent - LED.

My grandfather, who was soon joined by my father, had the vision to understand that fluorescent lighting was a game changer for the industry. We have learned from our father and grandfather to be fearless in moving forward a technology we believe in and to embrace invention, and not to be afraid to be different. They built their businesses during many economic ups and downs and stayed the course. We did the same at USAI as LED lighting became very real and viable around the time of the economic downturn in 2008. My brother David and I saw the opportunity and committed to going for it in the most powerful way we could while many other companies pulled back and waited for the clouds to part. I believe that our timing could not have been better.

NYS: What are the benefits of using an LED light source?

BL: Many interior designers, architects and consumers still only value LEDs for their energy-saving qualities. They are unaware of the engineering advancements, like those USAI has pioneered, which have added unexpected functionality to LEDs so that this lighting platform now not only replaces, but also surpasses, the capabilities of traditional light sources such as incandescents, CFLs and halogen lights. LEDs are now truly able to transform spaces.

Many interior designers and consumers still believe the myth that LEDs can only emit cool blue light and that they don't illuminate colors beautifully. However, LEDs now are available with various color temperatures (color temperatures, measured in Kelvin (K), indicate how "cool" (over 5,000K) or "warm" (2,700–3,000 K) the white light is) and in high color rendering indices (CRI is a light source's ability to reveal the colors of objects faithfully in comparison to an ideal or natural light source). For example, kitchen lighting with high color rendering ability (80 or 90 CRI) makes colors pop and brings out details of meat, vegetables and other ingredients. Rich color rendering in a bathroom's vanity mirror lighting is ideal for applying makeup or shaving—and adjusting the lighting's color temperatures can enhance different skin tones.

Choosing from an array of optics is another advantage of LEDs. It was previously difficult to offer LEDs with both wide beams and focused, narrow beams. It has taken sophisticated software, human ingenuity and engineering developments, but USAI has created a patent-pending optical system with a full array of beam spreads, whether you want an 80-degree beam for ambient lighting or a 10-degree beam to highlight the details of fine artwork.

LEDs can also provide high performance or output ideal for tall spaces, with large lumens per watt values (a lumen is the measure of the total "amount" of visible light emitted; fixtures that emit high amounts of lumens from low wattages are more energy-efficient). High performing fixtures used to only be available with big apertures and were very noticeable in the ceiling. USAI has now developed minimal fixtures with small apertures (such as 3" x 3" or 4.5" x 4.5") that emit high lumens per watt, yet blend seamlessly into architecture.

NYS: You offer personalized lighting. What does that mean for a consumer?

BL: Lighting becomes personal when users can change light as they do—whether they are working, playing, relaxing, dining, studying, etc. With USAI's Color Select technology, users can adjust between wide ranges of color temperatures and intensities to customize lighting to their liking. Being able to control color temperatures to mimic natural daylight's changing hues indoors has proven to maintain sleep/wake cycles, increase alertness and optimize learning, and it can also cater to the varying moods, activities and desires of homeowners and designers. For example, in one seamless fixture, interior designers and architects can play around with the warmth and brightness of light to complement the aesthetics of different décor and room styles. Lighting is no longer fixed and inflexible!

NYS: We love the new BeveLED mini. What do consumers need to know about it?

BL: BeveLED mini is a tiny LED powerhouse that combines high performance with a punch of style, while saving energy (70% more than traditional light sources). The recessed LED downlight, adjustable and wall wash fixtures deliver more than 1000 lumens from only 20 Watts, and last 50,000 hours. They come in trimless options or with trims in Pantone or RAL colors, metallics, black and white.

When specifying one of USAI's dim-to-warm technologies, the full potential of LED is unlocked. For instance, the BeveLED mini with Warm Glow Dimming transitions from warm to warmer, mimicking the sunset glow of an incandescent lamp for a relaxing vibe; while the BeveLED mini with Color Curve Dimming goes a step further by integrating cool color temperatures, delivering an indistinguishable replacement for compact fluorescent sources.

NYS: How much ceiling space do you need to incorporate one into your home?

BL: Taking up only 3"x3" of ceiling space, BeveLED mini comes with a variety of housing options and in a Retrofit form factor to apply to both new and existing constructions.

NYS: What makes NanoLED NXT Cylinder different from traditional pendant lights?

BL: The NanoLED NXT Cylinder integrates the long-lasting, energy-efficient qualities of LEDs with state-of-the-art features that are not found in most LED pendant or sconce fixtures, such as various mounting options, unparalleled performance, and exquisite color rendering.

NYS: Why do you think the NanoLED NXT Cylinder exceeds the capabilities of typical decorative pendants?

BL: Unlike traditional decorative pendants that must be paired with ambient lighting to fully light up the room, the sleek NanoLED NXT Cylinder can serve as a standalone light source and fulfill accent and task lighting needs, because the versatile 10", 12" or 15" long, 3" diameter aluminum design can be specified in stem/cable mount, surface mount, or wall mount options. It is also available with a precise 10-degree beam spread or with interchangeable, wider beams up to 50 degrees.

NYS: What kind of finishes do you offer for the cylinders?

BL: A variety of statement-making finishes complement any décor scheme, with two-tone or solid metallics, white, black, any RAL color and most Pantone colors.

NYS: What is a USAI Lighting product you cannot live without?

BL: Our products and technologies are continuously evolving, so it is hard for me to pinpoint one product, but the BeveLED 2.0 and BeveLED mini Retrofit fixtures are important for today's homeowners, because they allow for an easy transition to efficient LED lighting without removing or replacing the ceiling. They also come in four classic color temperatures and 3" or 4.5" aperture sizes.

NYS: Where can consumers purchase your products?

BL: Consumers can contact 845.565.8500 to be directed to the sales rep in their area for further installation instructions and information.