



In the early 1980s, Bonnie Littman was working at Chemical Bank, as her sister Sandy was launching a new decorating lighting company. To steward that brand's meteoric growth, Bonnie became president of the American Glass Lite Company in 1983. "Even then I knew was an entrepreneur," she recalls, and ultimately that flair led Bonnie and her brother David to take over Reggiani USA in 2005 and rebrand it as USAI Lighting the following year. Of setting her entrepreneurial sights on lighting, Bonnie tells Architizer, "Lighting has always been in my blood. It's been the topic of every family gathering for as long as I can remember."



Name: Bonnie Littman

Title: President and CEO of USAI Lighting

Location: New Windsor, New York

Your family has been manufacturing lighting for three generations. Was it inevitable you would go into the business?

It wasn't inevitable, but I am very fortunate to be a third-generation lighting entrepreneur. I think my father and grandfather would be very proud of the business we have created at USAI. What's extremely interesting is that each of us built businesses at pivotal moments in the history of the lighting industry. My father and grandfather built their business during the rise of fluorescent lighting; it's amazing that I have the opportunity to do the same with the next great light source.





Jet Blue Headquarters. Photo credit: Adrian Wilson

When did LEDs become USAI's majority source, and why?

In 2006, our company did a very good job in the small-aperture MR16 downlight category, but it was clear to us that LEDs would be adopted rapidly by lighting designers, architects, and consumers. The phase-out of the incandescent was a given due to its energy inefficiency.

While many companies relied on others to merely incorporate LED technology into their products, we decided early on to employ a large engineering and development team to design, build, and integrate LED technology into our fixtures. This was a bold move, [especially] as a small company. From the beginning, we listened to specifiers' concerns, and our mantra was always to provide or exceed past features and performance with this powerful new LED source, which can be 70 percent more efficient.



USAI Lighting Designs from the Inside Out

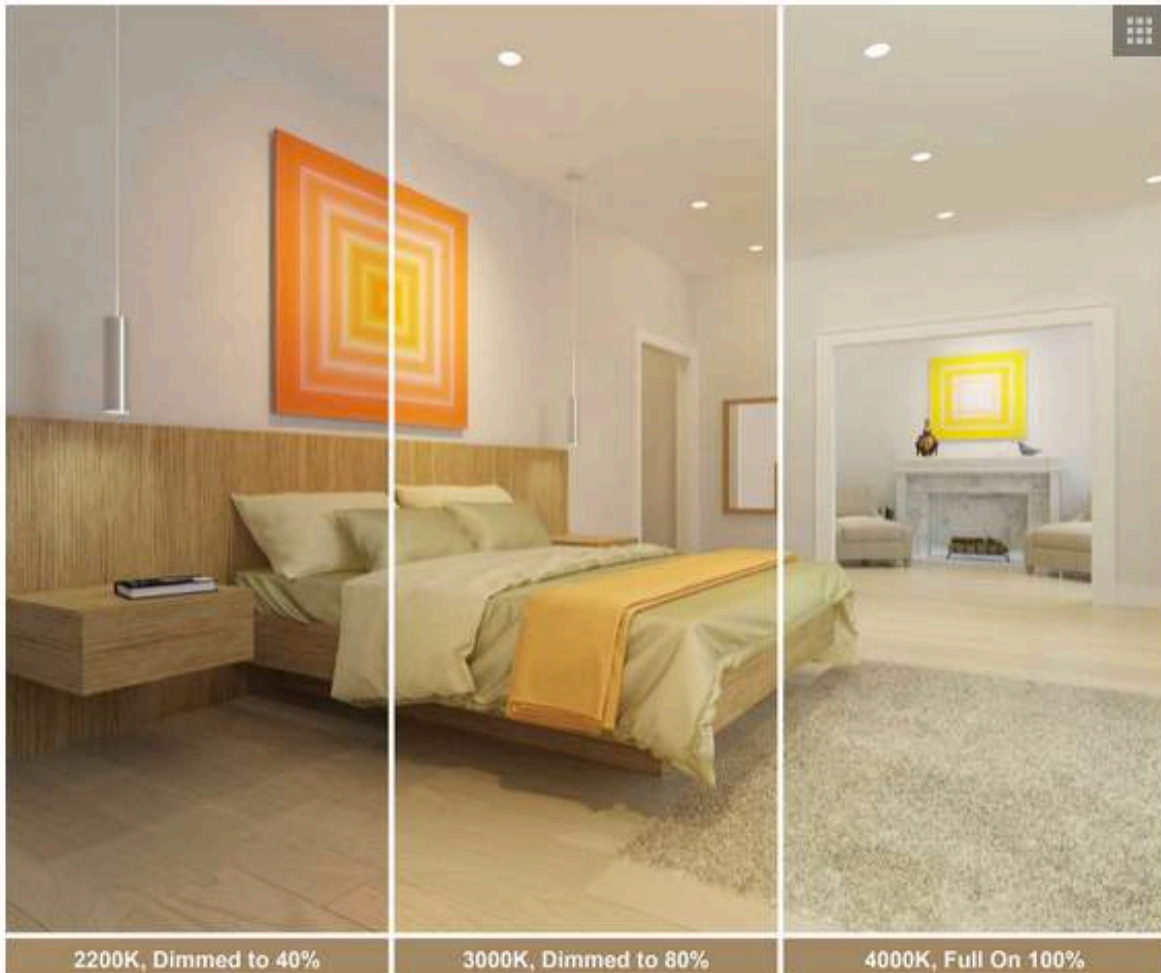


Exploded view of USAI Lighting Fixture

Of all the ways LEDs have evolved in the last decade, what one change has been most exciting?

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, and in high color rendering indices.

With USAI's Color Select technology, for example, users can adjust color temperature and intensity to their liking. Controlling color temperature to mimic daylight's changing hues has proven to maintain sleep-wake cycles, increase alertness, and optimize learning. It can also cater to the varying moods, activities, and desires of homeowners and designers, or to different décor and room styles. Lighting is no longer fixed and inflexible!



USAI Lighting Color Select Bedroom Light Settings

Are LEDs now superior to other light sources in all respects, or does the technology still have a few challenges to overcome?

LEDs come in a multitude of form factors, aperture sizes, beam spreads, outputs, CRIs, color temperatures, and more. The technology has effectively replaced and surpassed traditional sources, and continues to evolve: As we enter the phase of the Internet of Things, concerns are surfacing about the lack of a cohesive WiFi connectivity standard for different smart lighting products, for example.

Could you briefly describe USAI's R&D process?

USAI Lighting is a fast and nimble company. The chain from the customer to me and ultimately to engineering is very short, which shortens the timeline on new and innovative products. This has been the case with several of our patented technologies, which have helped advance the adoption of LED lighting among people who still loved their old sources.

We take pride in developing and manufacturing our LED light engines as well as our fixtures and optical and thermal-management systems. Reliable dimming and compatibility with major architectural control systems is ensured through rigorous engineering and testing.



Elizabeth Arden Red Door Spa. Photo credit: Eric Laignel Photography

How does working with specifiers differ from marketing to consumers?

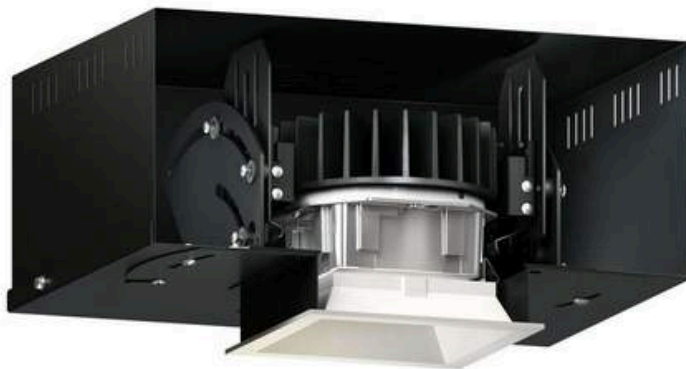
Right now the consumer conversation centers on bulbs that can be bought at mass retailers. We are trying to change that conversation and communicate why carefully engineered, sophisticated architectural lighting systems are a better option than less expensive bulbs. Specifiers, as a whole, know more about the ins and outs of LEDs, but there is still a story to be told about LEDs' potential.



Georgetown University – School of Continuing Studies. Photo credit: ©Bruce Damonte

What is your most specified product, and why do you think that is?

The BeveLED 2.0 has been a popular pick — specified in well-known and iconic places such as the Waldorf Astoria, San Francisco International Airport, Ann B. Barshinger Cancer Institute, JetBlue offices, and Georgetown University — probably because it is a workhorse boasting a variety of specification options like downlight, adjustable, or wallwash in multiple sizes and beam spreads and delivered lumens from 475 to 3150. The BeveLED 2.0 product family has expanded, too, with Max Output, Color Curve Dimming, Warm Glow Dimming, Color Select, and Mini lines. It now even comes with the thinnest housing in the world, called BeveLED FLAT.



USAI Lighting BeveLED 2.0.

Is there a new product poised to take over that top slot?

We have a lot of amazing products and technologies in the works. Stay tuned for a "colorful" new addition to our assortment with "infinite" possibilities!

If you could make one universal improvement to the way architects and lighting designers specify lighting, what would it be?

One would be to require that contractors provide samples of all products being considered for the project, at the time of submittal review. This would serve a variety of purposes, such as allowing specifiers to confirm that a desired product is right for the job, and making it possible for the design team to thoroughly coordinate finish, mounting, dimming compatibility and other aspects pre-installation. It would also allow the specifier to compare preferred fixtures to their proposed alternates: Designers need the opportunity to handle product samples to determine ease of maintenance, component durability, and light-source and optic performance.



San Francisco International Airport Terminal 3. Photo credit: Joe Fletcher Photography

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