

## HOME & DESIGN

# A factory of bright ideas

**By JESSICA RITZ** >>> Stepping into the Paul Ferrante factory located on Rodeo Road near La Cienega Boulevard is just about the closest you can get to experiencing the sights and sounds of an old-school trade workshop. ¶ What might start with a conversation and a rough sketch from a customer results in striking, one-of-a-kind light fixtures and furnishings made by some of the best trained hands in the business.

There, a single room is dedicated to hand-applied gold leafing. Another space stores thousands of chandelier crystals in all shapes and sizes. Imposing chain links hang from bars near the work areas dedicated to metal finishing. Wood detailers painstakingly finish surfaces to create the illusion that the wear and tear is centuries-old.

The handmade light fixtures and furniture that result are sold at Paul Ferrante's Pacific Design Center showroom and others across the country, or made-to-order for exacting customers.

Noted Los Angeles interior designer Trip Haenisch turns to the company when looking for something unique: "They are totally willing to customize things in the exact size you need.... A true 'one-stop shop.'"

Then there are the unique vintage pieces that you can't find anywhere else, such as an Egyptian revival Art Deco chandelier, and antique Chinese vases that have been adapted into lamps; some provide inspiration for potential designs, while others are waiting for the right buyer to come along. Nearly all areas of lighting and furniture production, save for foundry work and glassblowing, take place in this jumble of warehouse buildings near Culver City.

### Expert hands

Given this degree of specialty, Paul Ferrante employees are known for both their technical expertise as makers, and for being design historians of a sort.



Photographs by CHRISTINA HOUSE For The Times

**A WOOD DETAILER** at the Paul Ferrante factory meticulously works on a gilt basket to create the look of an authentic antique.



The factory also holds onto samples of its own original productions, for future reference.

Lamp shade crafters, for example, still use patterns and rings from 50 to 60 years ago, explained Alex Menegaz, director of production at Paul Ferrante. "We try to save everything just in case. You just never know what clients might want," Menegaz said.

The company's namesake founded his antiques business in 1957, first setting up a showroom on La Cienega before moving to Melrose Place as part of the wave that cemented that street's reputation as a design destination. Neighbors included Hollywood Regency style master and legendary architect John Elgin Woolf, whose own studio was located a few doors away. Ferrante's primary focus was rewiring antique vessels into custom lamps, but he maintained an eye for antiques of all varieties, fueled by buying trips to Europe starting in the 1950s. He died in 1994.

Ferrante, along with business partner Tommy Raynor, who still runs the company, built the Paul Ferrante brand into one of the city's biggest names in antiques and, more specifically, top-quality lighting. And it's a bit of a family affair: Raynor works alongside his sister, Grace Saroyan, and her daughters, Elizabeth Kaplan and Julie Urbanek, in managing all aspects of Paul Ferrante.

### Mixing it up

At 84, Raynor conveys the nonsense streetwise smarts of a kid raised in Brooklyn, N.Y., mixed with the sophistication of the West Hollywood antiques dealer and interior decorator he became.

He was embracing eclectic styles long before that concept became common. "I like the mix," he said of his approach. "I don't like 'one scene.' You pull from here, you pull from here, and you give it a look."

Thousands of lighting fixtures, ranging from original designs to reproductions, are on display at the Pacific Design Center, along with the furniture collection and some antiques. (Lighting makes up approximately 75% of the company's sales, with antiques and the furniture line accounting for the rest.) The vine-covered, old-world feeling original shop at 8464 Melrose Place still stands, although Raynor has closed this venue for the summer to undertake a top-to-bottom overhaul in time for the 60th anniversary.

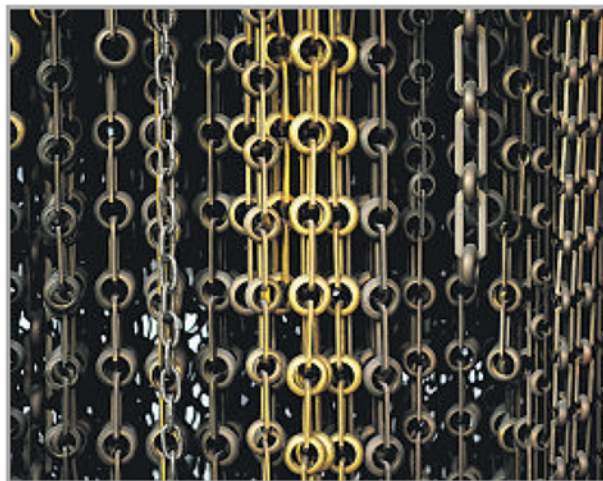
After nearly 60 years, the future at Paul Ferrante shines bright.

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**THE FACTORY** crafts thousands of one-of-a-kind lighting fixtures such as chandeliers and eclectic home decor like chain links.



**PAUL FERRANTE** is a family business, with Tommy Raynor in charge along with his sister, Grace Saroyan, and other relatives.



**THE PAINT DEPARTMENT** adds polish to items, which are displayed at a Pacific Design Center showroom and elsewhere.