

Bright ideas

From paper lanterns to crystal chandeliers,
Ernest de la Torre gives a lesson in lighting



Designer Ernest de la Torre basks in the glow of sculptural lighting at the Noguchi Museum Store.

de la Torre to serve as an educational tour guide.

Class begins on West 26th Street, just outside the de la Torre Design Studio in West Chelsea, where the designer meets us for a three-borough expedition to his favorite lighting haunts. De la Torre is involved currently in a deluge of projects—11 including his own pied-à-terre—so his mind is brimming with spaces in need of enlightenment.

As we make our way to our first stop in Long Island City, we start with a briefing on the basic question of when lighting comes into play.

“When the floor and furniture plan are set, we can determine where it’s needed,” de la Torre explains. “Function is always considered.”

With that in mind, we begin at a hidden gem, the Noguchi Museum Store at 9-01 33rd Road. More than just a smattering of art-inspired postcards and trinkets, the shop offers a full line of

Akari paper lamps designed by Japanese artist Isamu Noguchi. In a corner of the small space, a tall banana-shaped light with a bamboo

LIGHT IS A SIMPLE CONCEPT. But lighting—now that’s a whole other story. The endless options can leave one feeling overwhelmed.

Where to begin, and how to get it right? To answer those questions, *New York Spaces* prevailed on Manhattan-based designer Ernest

Picks from John Salibello Antiques include a Karl Springer lizard-skin light, \$7,800 a pair, and a Paul Evans metal and wood lamp, \$6,800 a pair.

band and matching stand, \$845, quickly catches de la Torre's eye.

"People shy away from paper lights because you can find them at Ikea," he says. "But you won't see this one anywhere but here. It has a sculptural feel." That coupled with its soft light makes the floor lamp a great pick for the guest bedroom of one client, whose style is Japanese-inspired.

Still in Queens, we head over to Nesle, 38-15 30th Street, an antiques and reproductions emporium. Before a March 2006 move to be closer to its warehouses, the store was located at 57th Street and Lexington Avenue, a spot that mirrored its client base.

"If you had a Park Avenue apartment and you wanted a killer chandelier, you'd go to Nesle," the designer says. Its reputation continues to draw loyal buyers—and we can see why. Rows and rows of opulent crystal chandeliers may intimidate the



At Liz O'Brien, de la Torre selects a circa-1960 plaster table lamp by John Dickinson, \$22,000. A glass and brass chandelier by Stilnovo, \$8,500, impresses at John Salibello Antiques.

average buyer, but de la Torre makes it look easy. His eye zeroes in on a rock-crystal chandelier with a balloon-shaped center, \$56,000. Because of its whimsical character, he says, "my Greenwich clients would love it."

A few steps farther and a six-foot cut-crystal chandelier with frosted shells, \$38,000, captures his attention. "I could work a whole



At Chameleon Fine Lighting, the Art Deco style of a pair of paneled Murano glass sconces, \$17,000, catches the designer's eye.

With lamps in tow, we head to Midtown and 60th Street—what de la Torre deems “antiques row for decorators.” First stop: Carlos de la Puente Antiques at 235 East 60th Street.

“There is lighting everywhere!” the designer proclaims, as we meander through the shop. But he focuses on grand-scale pieces. A pair of 1920s gold-colored Murano glass table lamps nearly two feet tall, \$12,000, are hard to miss.

“They have great scale,” he says. “Two of these on a table would really do up a room.”

Up the spiral staircase, he finds a 1900 Dutch bronze chandelier with a globe center and eight surrounding lights, \$12,000. “Chandeliers are being used differently now,” he notes. “They’re a little simpler, but they still add drama and height.” The piece could easily anchor a room with its imposing size and matte finish, he says. Around the corner, modern French 1950s table lamps with large white bases, \$3,800 a pair, further illustrate the idea, and de la Torre deems the rotund pair fitting for a country house.

We cross over to 239 East 60th Street and into Ann-Morris Antiques. Searching out pendant lights for a kitchen renovation is de la Torre’s mission here, and the Cooper Cone Light, \$1,800, is an intriguing find.

room around its carved shells,” he says. “It’s like a big wedding cake!”

On our way out, a whimsical daisy fixture with crystal leaves and a yellow pressed-glass center, \$24,000, inspires his imagination. For a Manhattan nursery, de la Torre recently crafted a modern ceiling fixture out of a floral fabric-covered lampshade and a brass rod. The daisy would add a great peekaboo element in its center—sold.

Crossing into Brooklyn, we seek out Aurora Lampworks at 172 North

11th Street. De la Torre was introduced to the shop when some overseas purchases required rewiring. Now he sends all his restoration projects here and searches through its stock for replicas and custom fixtures. While touring the studio, de la Torre checks on his orders. He sees that his Greta Grossman swoop-back lamps have been redone with silk cording.

“I was at auction, looking on a client’s behalf, and found these for myself,” he confesses.

More lighting hot spots

EILEEN LANE 150 Thompson Street, 212-475-2988, www.eileenlaneantiques.com • Alabaster pieces

EVERGREEN ANTIQUES 1249 Third Avenue, 212-744-5664, www.evergreenantiques.com
• Swedish classics

GUÉRIDON 37 West 20th Street, 212-462-2149, www.gueridon.com
• The classic Mouille light, among others

INGO MAURER 89 Grand Street, 212-965-8817 • Modern fixtures by a German lighting pioneer


LOBEL MODERN 207 West 18th Street, 212-242-9075, www.lobelmodern.com • Vintage lamps

MOSS 146 Greene Street, 212-204-7100, www.mossonline.com
• Floor, table, wall and suspension lighting, plus other home accessories

REMAINS LIGHTING 213 East 59th Street, 212-755-5484, www.remains.com
• Early 19th- and 20th-century antiques and reproductions

URBAN ARCHAEOLOGY 143 Franklin Street, 212-431-4646, www.urbanarchaeology.com
• Specialty metal finishes and custom fixtures





Vintage stage lights from Ann-Morris Antiques, \$2,250, would serve as an intriguing way to highlight important furniture and art.

"It can make an antique kitchen look fresh with its simple shape," he says, deciding on a series of six to divide the headway over the center island.

Upstairs, we see several vintage stage lights, \$2,250, hanging from a long pole. De la Torre imagines using them for a loft to spotlight valuable pieces of furniture and artwork.

Leaving Ann-Morris, we arrive next at John Salibello Antiques at 211 East 60th Street. His mood harking back to the '70s, de la Torre spies two creations by German designer Karl Springer. Brown goatskin floor lamps, \$9,800 a pair, beg to be touched, and orange lizard-skin lamps, \$7,800 a pair, add pop. Sticking with the groovy decade, artisan-crafted metal lamps on wooden bases by Paul Evans, \$6,800 a pair, prove history repeats itself.

"Organic shapes and metal are very in again," says de la Torre, noting that Evans is big now because his pieces feature an architectural quality that's hot on the auction blocks.

Traveling down one block to Chameleon Fine Lighting at 223 East 59th Street, we shift our focus to sconces. And here we find a few options. The glow of circa-1940 Art

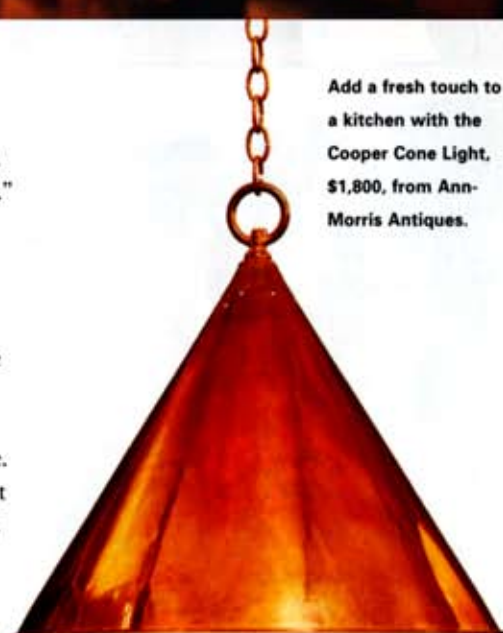
Deco paneled Murano glass sconces, \$17,000, is hypnotizing. "I'm doing my own bathroom, so I'd love these on each side of the mirror," says de la Torre. "But they'd need to be smaller."

He then spies another option on the other side of the store that would work better. Petite flower-shaped Murano glass sconces mounted on bronze, \$5,500 a pair, wouldn't create harsh shadows—a frequent problem in bathroom design. We're taking them and two extra for good measure.

"The problem with sconces is that you need a lot of them," he says. And if the multiples won't work in this case, they'll go into storage for future use elsewhere.

Moving from traditional to contemporary, our last stop is the prestigious gallery Liz O'Brien at 800A 5th Avenue. "Liz O'Brien is top-shelf modern with collector's pieces," says de la Torre. "She is known for her unusual shapes."

And true to the store's reputation, there are plaster table lamps by John Dickinson, \$22,000, which feature animal-inspired legs as the base. They're unusual and organic—but also adorable, says de la Torre.



Add a fresh touch to a kitchen with the Cooper Cone Light, \$1,800, from Ann-Morris Antiques.

Designer Paul Evans makes another appearance with a circa-1970 standing lamp covered in chrome tiles, \$3,500. Its weighty bottom is balanced by an oversize linen shade.

By our journey's end, we've begun to acquire enlightenment. De la Torre reassures us that the process takes time; it's not like flipping a switch.

"Lamps can be hard to select, but they're important," he says. "They are the jewelry of a room." □