

FAMILY STYLE

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By Meka Boyle

In the Details

Lucifer Lighting has made a name for itself with fixtures meant to be experienced, not seen. Now for the second time in its 40-plus-decade history, it is launching a decorative fixture where form meets function.



Image courtesy of Lucifer Lighting.

“We all live with light,” says Gilbert Mathews. “When done correctly, lighting brings out the beauty of its surroundings.” The CEO and founder of Lucifer Lighting has made a name for his company whose name refers to the “bringer of light” in Latin with three tenets: “define, design, and disappear.” True to its motto, Lucifer is both under the radar and ubiquitous across architects, high profile clients, and luxury brands. Its sleek, minimal fixes dot the ceilings and line the walls of Apple’s campus, SFMOMA, the Four Seasons, JP Morgan Chase Headquarters, storefronts of Gucci, Cartier, and Tiffany’s, the luxury penthouses of 220 Central Park South, and airport lounges across JFK LAX, and SFO, to name a few.

Now, the brand is branching out with a new decorative fixture, Stellaris, which launches this September after its debut at Euroluce, Salone's international lighting exhibition, last week. "We spend all this time above the ceiling, we're ready to come out," says Mathews' daughter Alexandra, an executive vice president at Lucifer, working alongside her sister Roselyn and their family matriarch, Suzanne.



Image courtesy of Lucifer Lighting.

Stellaris is first and foremost a design object. It has a utilitarian purpose—to evenly distribute a warm glow with three distinct volumetric light sources—but it also functions as a sculptural form with its mechanics slickly concealed. Like an artwork, its smooth, curved exterior and glowing center deal with minimalist concerns. When it is turned off it looks like clear glass, and when it's on it looks opaque. It's only natural, then, that the lighting company's influences are just as varied: Mathews lists the Art Deco period, Paris' 1925 International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts, Le Corbusier, and glass designers like René Lalique.

The second decorative fixture that Lucifer Lighting has brought to market, Stellaris took three years to complete in collaboration with the architecture firm Gensler. "We did many rounds of prototypes to ensure that the light was evenly distributed through the wave guide, the unique PMMA material of the shell," recalls Gilbert. Collaboration is at the heart of Lucifer's ethos. "Ideas are challenged, and distilled, and gradually a product design emerges from prototyping refinement."



Image courtesy of Lucifer Lighting.

Located in San Antonio, Texas on a 13-acre campus, the state-of-the-art in-house manufacturing includes a combination of robotics, skilled craftsmen, and engineers. Lucifer's thoughtful engineering and emphasis on sustainability can be boiled down to a holistic attitude that is not just concerned about what happens once the lighting is shipped, but also what goes into making it. Its steel content is 70 percent recycled; the aluminum is recycled; the plastic they use is a post-consumer product. (The PVC coatings on wires in virtually all American buildings are listed as a Red List material by Declare, and Lucifer Lighting is manufacturing one of the wires that's now safe.)

Gilbert recalls the first lighting fixture he saw that resonated with him: A Swiss light strip that his father sourced to use in Frost Brothers department stores that his family owned in Texas. It was in 1979, and a year later, his brand was born. "The light strip was designed to be concealed so that all viewers could see was the glow from the light," he emphasizes. "It had a mystique, a special allure, no one had seen anything like it at the time.



Image courtesy of Lucifer Lighting.

So what makes a Lucifer Lighting fixture stand out when the mounting method, compact high-outlet fixtures, and soft punch-down lights are designed to be glare-free and invisible? For the Mathews family, the devil's in the details. A visitor to the museum might not realize it, but the art of the design is in the fact that they don't notice the light fixtures—that and the tone. "People don't understand the importance of color temperature and the magic it can provide," says Gilbert. It's a subliminal effect that can draw attention to certain focal points in the room or omit a calming glow. "I am in this for creating beauty, for giving architects and designers the tools to create beauty in lighting for their clients," he continues. "Our mission is to light the world's most beautiful spaces," he adds with pride. "And we do."