

San Antonio Express-News

Saturday, July 9, 2011 | mySA.com

The voice of South Texas since 1865

C SAN ANTONIO EXPRESS-NEWS **BUSINESS**

mySA.com/business



PHOTOS BY HELEN L. MONTOYA/hmontoya@express-news.net

Lucifer Lighting founder Gilbert Mathews (from left), son Ben Mathews, daughter Alexandra Mathews and wife Suzanne Mathews. Their clients have included everything from art museums to private homes.

A shining example

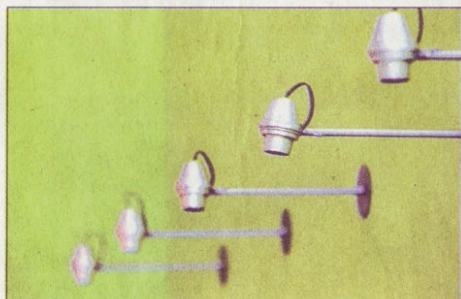
Lucifer Lighting has international reputation.

BY JENNIFER HILLER
jhiller@express-news.net

Few people know about Lucifer Lighting Co.

And even in a room washed in its light, Lucifer's fixtures are so subtle that most people wouldn't give them more than a passing glance, focusing instead on the artwork on the walls or architectural details of the room. That's the way it's supposed to be for the San Antonio-based manufacturer of high-end architectural lighting.

The company has quietly created an international reputation among architects and lighting designers, both for its discreet, almost



The light fixtures produced by Lucifer Lighting Co. are so subtle that they're often overlooked in favor of artwork on walls or furnishings.

mySA.com
To see more photos, go to mySA.com and click on slideshows.

sculptural fixtures and for the museum-worthy light they produce.

"A light in the ceiling is just a hole in the ceiling. It's ugly. We want the

fixture to be as smooth as possible," Lucifer founder and CEO Gilbert Mathews said. "We like to say we paint with light. It's very even and quiet and sophisticated."

The family-owned company specializes in to-the-trade sales, and Lucifer lights shine down on offices such as Morgan

ff People always think it's Italian or German. But it's Texan."

ALEXANDRA MATHEWS

Stanley and Microsoft, and can be found everywhere from swank New York restaurants to the McNay Art Museum or Louis Vuitton stores. Recent projects include Tiffany & Co. in Paris and the Royal Mirage Hotel in Dubai.

The company this spring released its newest LED downlight, which at 18 watts puts out more light than a 50-watt halogen bulb. The LED lasts 50,000 hours, or at 10

See LUCIFER/6C



COURTESY PHOTO

High-end architectural lighting products from San Antonio-based Lucifer Lighting Co. are used in museums, restaurants, hotels and homes throughout the world, including in the Cooper Square Hotel Bar in New York.

LUCIFER

CONTINUED FROM 1C

hours of use per day, has more than 13 years of lamp life.

"It's changing the way people will think about LEDs," Mathews said.

That's because it's not just bright and energy efficient. Lucifer — as in "bearer of light," not the fallen angel — aims to please finicky designers who can use gears to precisely aim the light and can "tune" the light by precisely controlling the beam pattern, intensity and color temperature.

"They make it their mission to be up with technology and what is the newest and greatest," said lighting consultant Christina Brown of Brown Design Consultants. "A lot of manufacturers just throw a bunch of junk out there, especially with LEDs. They took their time and did it right. It shows the quality and the level of detail."

Lucifer has resisted the temptation to move its manufacturing overseas, preferring to keep its headquarters and factory together (in the remodeled

Pace Picante Sauce facility off of Interstate 35) to preserve quality control.

The company has invested more in its equipment, allowing it to keep all aspects of manufacturing in-house, and reducing design and manufacturing timelines.

"It really allows us to perfect our products. If we have to do a design change, we can do it immediately ourselves," said Mike Hodge, machine shop supervisor.

Tim Blonkvist, founding principal at Overland Partners Architects, plans to use the company's lights in a Dallas residence that will house a large contemporary American collection, and had the LED lighting installed in his own home so he can test the product.

"They're so small, so discreet," he said of the fixtures. "It's amazing aesthetically and functionally. It's a really great light. It illuminates the color very well."

Mathews, whose family owned the Frost Bros. department stores, started as an attorney, dipping a toe into lighting when he found a small European strip light that could be used in retail for under-

counter lighting. In 1979 he started importing and marketing the lights, called the Lucifer Light Strip, and split his time between the legal and lighting professions.

"I didn't want people in the lighting industry to know I was an attorney, and I didn't want anyone in the legal profession to know that I knew anything about lighting," Mathews said.

Urged by his wife, Suzanne, to pick one, Mathews went with the profession that would keep him close to his love of architecture, art and design.

He delved into lighting design and manufacturing, which has become a family affair; with daughter Alexandra overseeing international sales and marketing and son Ben overseeing the company's supply side chain. Suzanne is a director at the company.

At trade shows, people often ask where the lights are designed, never thinking that such a modern look could come from San Antonio.

"People always think it's Italian or German," Alexandra Mathews said. "But it's Texan. We marry the aesthetics and fine design."