



ARROYO CRAFTSMAN:

Enduring Artistry in a Throwaway Culture

BY MATT HORMANN

DURABILITY, DETAIL, IMAGINATION. These words define Arroyo Craftsman's light fixtures. In a world of cheap bric-a-brac, assembly lines, and outsourced jobs, the company stands apart in its commitment to hand-craftsmanship and the core principles of the Arts and Crafts movement.

"I think there's always going to be a little bit of that pushback against the industrialized world," says owner Malcolm Tripp, 55, who purchased the business in 2000, integrating it into his collection of companies, American Lighting Brands. "The Arts and Crafts movement was a rebellion against the industrialization of the United States. There was a fear that as more people moved into cities and worked in mass-production factories, our society, our culture, would lose some of the agrarian values they held dear. Arroyo was one of the first companies to re-popularize this philosophy, and we've been around a long time and survived."

Founded by lighting designer Robert Tatosian in 1987, Arroyo Craftsman has today grown into one of the premier suppliers of Arts and Crafts lighting fixtures, with products available in retailers across the U.S. and



Canada. Their designs have appeared in historic structures from the Gamble House to the Grove Park Inn.

Each of their unique fixtures—post mounts, column mounts, chandeliers, even mailboxes—is fashioned by artisans in Baldwin Park, California, using raw brass and a meticulous finishing process that takes days.

"We're really known for our finishes," says Tripp. "Especially our oxidized finishes, because they take a while to make and they're nearly indestructible. The substrate is all brass. They get washed in sulfates and chlorides, and the product is really known for its durability, especially for people who live near the ocean."

When customers approach Arroyo Craftsman looking to restore their vintage homes, the company works closely to achieve a seamless period look. "People who are into Craftsman homes want thematic consistency," explains Tripp. "And that's one of the strengths of Arroyo Craftsman, because we can make any size [of fixture]. End users get to become their own designer because they're choosing the finish and the glass."



With a unique array of region-specific names for its products, including Berkeley, Carmel, and Glasgow, Arroyo Craftsman also strives to reflect the history of various schools of the Arts and Crafts movement. “A lot of people who don’t know the movement very well have an image of the Frank Lloyd Wright Prairie Style,” Tripp says. “But there was actually a New England strain of Arts and Crafts; there was a Scottish strain, there was an English strain, and there was a kind of a Southwest mission strain. There were all these little areas or looks within Arts and Crafts.”

Tripp is proud to be part of a tradition that adheres to the ideals of simplicity and workmanship fundamental to the original Arts and Crafts movement.

“A lot of people think that Arts and Crafts is just a look,” he says. “It’s really not. It’s more of a design-build philosophy that elevates function over form, and it was a rebellion against the over-ornamentation occurring during the Victorian period. All these mass-produced little trinkets were attached to everything and everything became very ornate. It also emphasized individual hand-craftsmanship, being true to the materials you’re working with: i.e., metal should look like metal, wood should look like wood, etc. That doesn’t mean there isn’t anything aesthetically driven in it. It just means that it’s almost kind of a *feng shui* idea; that it should blend in with the surroundings instead of trying to stand out.”

In this spirit, Arroyo works loosely with customers to attain a harmonious appearance; one that fits with their home. “We sell through retailers,” says Tripp. “And the retail lighting showroom walks customers through to help them with scale and size, and choose their finishes and glass. It’s totally reliant on the subjectivity of the end user.”

Though it requires time and effort, Tripp is proud of the fact that all his products are built domestically. “Not only do we make it all in the United States, but the metal-working and finish quality is at the highest level,” he says. “A lot of

the Arts and Crafts historical registers and famous Arts and Crafts homes and institutions have Arroyo Craftsman fixtures, and that’s pretty special.”

Tripp even senses a resurgence of consumer enthusiasm for the Arts and Crafts ethos today. “I’m not a sociologist, but if you look at buying habits and how people live their lives now, it’s so much different than it was even 30 years ago,” he explains. “I think people are becoming a little bit more modest or maybe not as ostentatious. Craftsman projects are not inexpensive by any means, but it’s not like being my age and going out and buying a Porsche.”

“If I wasn’t optimistic about it, I’d sell the company,” he adds. “And I’m not a seller.”

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