



Vintage Industrial LIGHTING

A bright



Father/son duo Rick and Eric Sturtz have refurbished hundreds of old industrial lights. Here they share what you need to know to acquire and restore these finely crafted, unique vestiges of the industrial age.

tway to illuminate your man space

In the years before sodium-vapor, LED, mercury-halide, fluorescent, and other efficient light sources, commercial settings, such as factories, schools, power plants, warehouses, and gas stations, were lit with good old-fashioned incandescent lamps. Those typically 100-, 200-, and 300-watt bulbs were often housed in thick glass globes, surrounded by metal cages attached to finely crafted cast-metal housings, and often included porcelain-coated metal shades that could stand up to harsh environments over decades of use. They were tough, no-nonsense fixtures, often designed to be explosion-proof.

Today, those fixtures bask in the glow of renewed popularity because of their enduring and pragmatic design, fine detailing, rugged construction, and raw-but-exquisite look. All of which makes them perfect for man spaces.

Salvaged fixtures: The hunt is half the fun

If you're resourceful and enjoy scrounging for good buys, you can find vintage light fixtures. Potential sources include craigslist.com, construction and electri-

cal contractors, metal scrap dealers, salvage yards, flea markets, and antique stores. Keep your eyes peeled for fixtures from key manufacturers Abolite, Appleton, Benjamin, Crouse-Hinds, GE, Holophane, and Killark. You'll find hundreds on sale at eBay.com, but typically at higher prices than local sources.

Of course, finding the fixture is just the start. Unless the light has been completely refurbished, you need to make sure it's worth buying and restoring in the first place. For expert advice, we quizzed Rick and Eric Sturtz, who have collected and restored hundreds of these fixtures, and today operate the vintage-lighting website blubulb.com. Here's what they told us.

MC: What do you look for when purchasing a vintage light?

R&E: It's easy to get enamored with the appearance of a light and overlook missing or damaged parts. Don't fall into that trap—you may wind up with a non-functioning light.

First, look for a socket that works. Many sockets are unique to a manufacturer, and can be extremely difficult to replace. Next, make sure you can fully disassemble the light without damaging it. Most need to be rewired—a simple process provided the fixture comes apart. You may want to take a chance on "frozen" lights with corroded parts, but be sure to pay a bargain price in case it won't come apart.

MC: What are your tricks for disassembling frozen fixtures?

R&E: Immediately after acquiring a vintage light, apply plenty of penetrating oil to all screws, bolts, and other threaded parts. After it sits for a week or longer, have the following tools on hand: a vise, large (1–2") open-end and adjust-



INCREDIBLE CASTINGS

Finely detailed, superbly made iron and aluminum castings, and other built-for-the-ages components, distinguish vintage industrial lights.

RUGGED BUT ELEGANT

Nearly 100 years after being made, this hanging street light with a cast-iron "acorn" housing and porcelain "radial-wave" shade requires only new wiring and a bulb for more decades of service.



able wrenches, slotted-head screwdrivers in various sizes, Allen wrenches, a hard-rubber mallet, and a couple of the large, adjustable wrenches with rubber-strap jaws for gripping oil filters and other large-diameter slippery objects. A Vise-Grip locking-chain clamp comes in handy, though you have to be careful not to damage surfaces with it.

If two parts prove especially stubborn, it often helps to rap them with the rubber mallet. Applying a propane torch to frozen screws will go a long way in freeing them up before you accidentally mar their heads or snap them off. Should all that fail, and the light has good intrinsic value, it pays to take it to an experienced machinist or mechanic with specialized tools and skills.

MC: How do you deal with paint, dirt, and corrosion?

R&E: You can remove paint with chemicals, abrasion, or heat, but be careful—the paint likely contains lead. If you must remove the paint, always wear a full-face respirator and work in a well-ventilated area. We often prefer to leave old paint



LABELS YOU LEAVE ON

Back in the day, many industrial fixtures came with no-nonsense tags screwed in place. They displayed detailed specifications only an electrician could love, such as model numbers, maximum amperage, and voltage.

in place and coax a luster from it by hand-buffing with 0000 steel wool or Scotch-Brite pads.

You can use any strong cleaner to remove dirt; we prefer LA's Totally Awesome All-Purpose Concentrated Cleaner (lastotallyawesome.com) because it's effective and cheap: \$1 for 32 ounces at many dollar stores. Scrub carefully with 0000 steel wool to remove grime; then power-buff with a wool pad charged with a small amount of tripoli, jeweler's rouge, or automotive buffing compound. Finally, hand-buff with a soft cloth or paper towel.

To remove rust, work through a progression of coarse to fine steel wool to create a natural-looking luster. We discourage the use of wire wheels that can scratch the surface and create a fine mist of toxic particles. If you prefer a "like-new" metal finish, hire someone to bead blast the fixture. But consider carefully

before you remove every trace of patina from fixtures; it's easy to wring the "romance" out of an old light by over-cleaning it.

MC: How do you clean globes with stubborn stains and mineral deposits?

R&E: If strong cleaners don't do the trick, you may have some luck with products designed for cleaning lime or iron deposits. We've had modest success with enhanced (10 percent) vinegar. If those solutions fail, try a fresh, soapy SOS pad, but be careful—some globes will show scratching after this type of cleaning. Mineral deposits can actually etch a globe; if that appears to be the case, try a wool pad charged with cerium oxide paste. (Cerium oxide is available in powder form from amazon.com. Mix it with distilled water to form a paste.)

MC: Where can replacements for missing or damaged parts be found?

R&E: You can occasionally find the vintage part you need on eBay. A good source for new parts is B&P Lamp Supply (bplampsupply.com).

New fixtures: A convenient alternative

Do an online search for "vintage industrial lighting," and you'll find multiple mail-order sellers of original and new lighting. Better-quality modern-made fixtures look beautiful, come in many styles and colors, and can be ordered in any quantity. One source: Barn Light Electric (barnlightelectric.com) still manufactures Benjamin-branded fixtures and makes nearly all of its lights in the U.S. to higher standards than you may find in lower-cost lighting made in overseas factories. **MG**



GLOBE MAGIC

Prismatic glass shades, most often referred to by the name of their manufacturer, Holophane, diffuse light to produce extremely eye-pleasing illumination.