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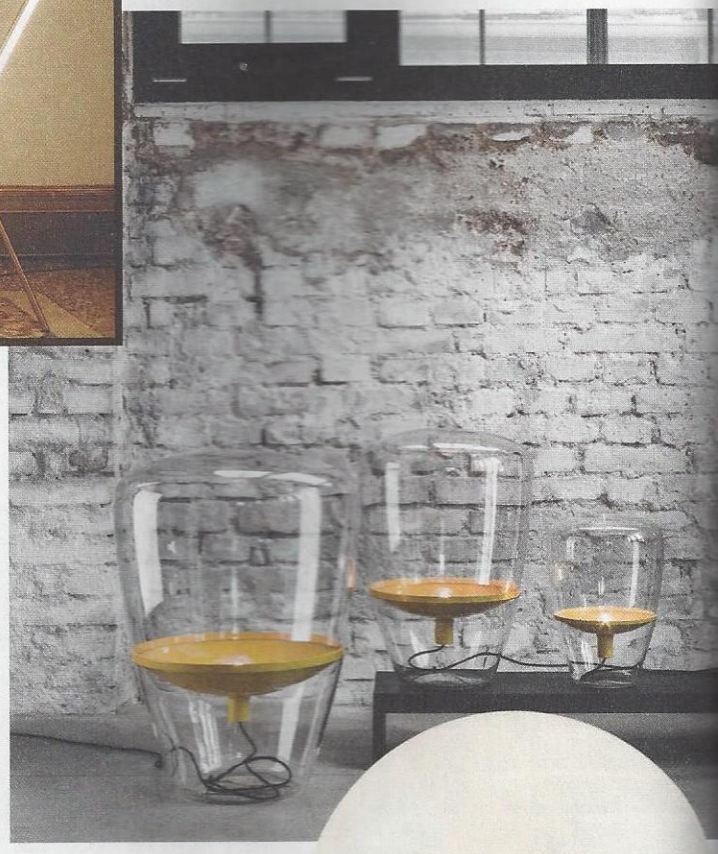
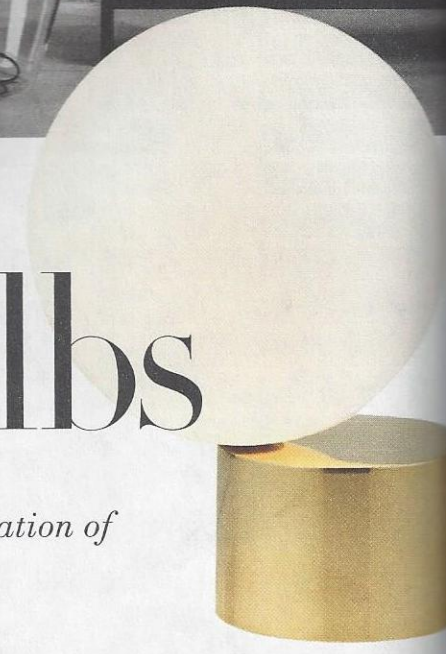




Spring bulbs

***Dominic Lutyens** on London's new generation of contemporary lighting designers*

In the past 20 years or so, contemporary lighting has swung between two extremes. At one end of the spectrum (excuse the pun) we've had discreet, near invisible recessed spotlights. At the other, those neo-Baroque chandeliers synonymous with the long established, boudoir chic style (a.k.a. maximalism) popular in myriad hotels, bars and restaurants.

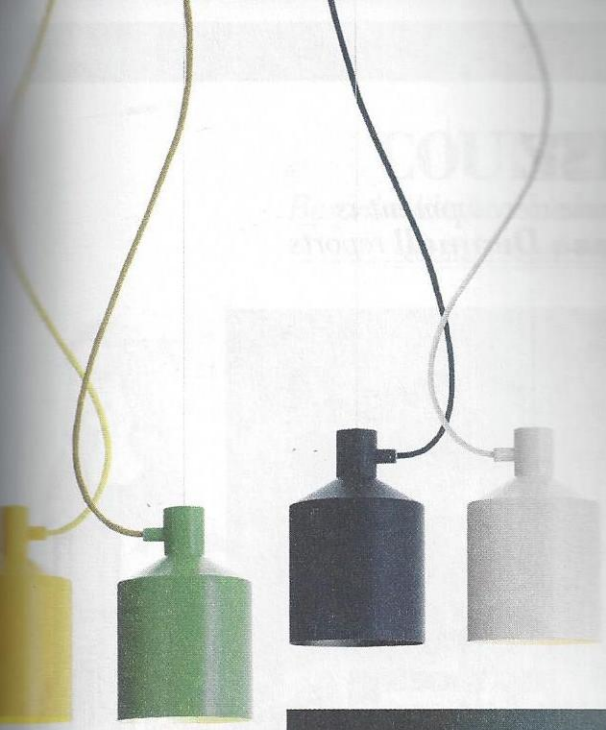
Aesthetically, lighting now often occupies a middle ground between these diametrically opposed styles; understated yet still statement-making. Arguably, London-based design supremo Tom Dixon trailblazed this look in the Noughties with his brass pendant lights, which, redolent of chic 1970s bistros, were minimalist in form but opulent in terms of their materials.

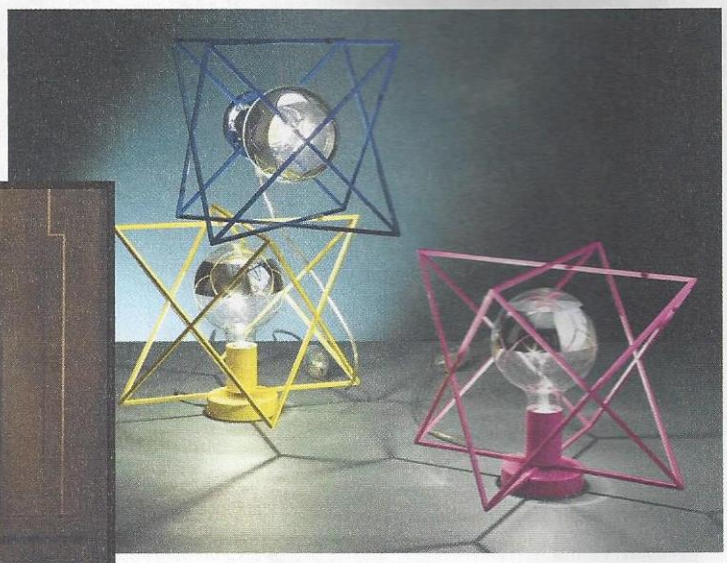
Now a younger generation of London-based designers are torchbearers for similarly subtle lighting. Yet its style allows for variety, ranging as it does from the sharp-edged and geometric to the organic and gently bulbous.

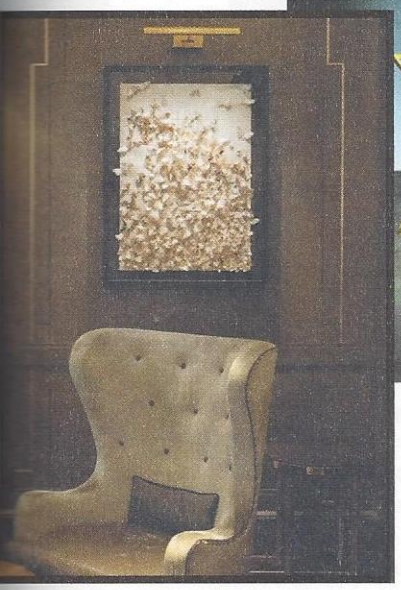
Cypriot-born, Royal College of Art-educated designer Michael Anastassiades, who has a workshop and showroom in Waterloo (*michaelanastassiades.com*), creates perhaps the most polished examples. His starkly geometric lighting sometimes incorporates utilitarian, tubular bulbs, making it look almost industrial. Yet offsetting this are its other sumptuous materials, such as high-gloss brass and stainless steel with a jet-black patina. While high-end and thoroughly grown-up, these pieces are sometimes playful too, thanks to Anastassiades' penchant for witty optical tricks: his Tip of the Tongue table light comprises a spherical shade in milky opaline glass, which, precariously balanced on the edge of a cylindrical brass base, looks like it could tumble and roll away. Another, his Mobile Chandelier, is kinetic, calling to mind artist Alexander Calder's mobiles. In fact, all these streamlined lights are reminiscent of pared-down modernist sculptures. "I want my lights to resemble sculptures when switched off," says Anastassiades, who has collaborated with architects John Pawson and David Chipperfield, both known for their spare, minimalist aesthetic. "I'm interested in how their light and shadows interact with an architectural space."

Clockwise from left: The Vessel P light by Decode, £264; Lit Lines floor lamp by Michael Anastassiades; 'Balloons' lights by Koldova and Brokis; Michael Anastassiades' Tip of the Tongue Light, £650

Similarly geometric is the metal lighting of Westbourne Grove-based company Kaia (*kaia.at*), which takes inspiration from architecture or symmetrical forms in nature, such as dandelions. Its designer







"Minimalism in lighting is dead. People now want detail and texture"

Peter Straka was originally a metalworker for the public tram service in Vienna. Today, his brass lamps are manufactured in workshops there and are usually plated with a nickel, chrome, platinum or copper finish. The star of Kaia's collection, literally, is its Lum light. Comprising two interlocking pyramids that enclose an oversized bulb, it has a nickel or brass finish or comes lacquered in 1980s pop shades of pink, lemon yellow or electric blue. "When illuminated, it creates a play of shadows reflecting its geometric shape," says Kaia's managing director, Manuela Szewald, adding that "decorative lighting fixtures are increasingly used as objects that make a design statement in their own right."

Massimo Buster Minale, founder of Buster + Punch (*busterandpunch.com*), whose workshop and showroom occupies a railway arch in Battersea (open by appointment only), also makes brass lighting. Buster + Punch's brass Hooked lights are finished with olive oil, which allows only a small amount of air to make contact with the metal and causes it to become darker and more golden over time. "Minimalism in lighting is dead. People now want products layered with detail and texture, with a story behind them," says Minale, whose company will be showcasing its wares at Lightjunction, a lighting display at Designjunction, this September.

Clockwise from left: Lights from Zero, which will feature at LightJunction, £212; Riddle Table Lamp from Bert Frank, £504; pieces from Kaia; and TM Lighting, £270

Meanwhile, Chiswick-based Bert Frank (*bertfrank.co.uk*), a purveyor of elegant, mid-century-inspired brass lighting, proffers pieces designed to be durable and acquire a patina over time. One of its best-selling creations is its Revolve table lamp, with a brass and airforce blue finish. Another firm, Decode (*decodelondon.com*), manufactures pieces dreamt up by London designers such as Benjamin Hubert and Samuel Wilkinson only, some of which will be exhibited at Clerkenwell Design Week, the annual design event held in May. One of Decode's most popular confections is Wilkinson's Vessel P pendant or table light with a rather 1970s-retro, smoked-glass shade. Endearingly asymmetric and organic looking, the light – as seen in new London restaurant Story – also highlights its functionality since it flaunts its filament-like, energy-efficient Plumen lightbulb.

In fact, a concern for environmentally friendly lighting – encouraged by the EU's 2009 directive for phasing out conventional, incandescent bulbs – is changing the course of lighting design. Take Hammersmith based TM Lighting (*tmlighting.com*), whose TM Picture Light is powered by 3W LED lights that consume one-tenth of the energy of a conventional 30W incandescent picture light. Moreover, the light, conceived by the company's owners Andrew Molyneux and Harry Triggs, borrows, they say, from "the latest technology used in galleries, which we've translated into artwork lighting for the home."

It's innovative for two reasons: it distributes light evenly over an entire painting (whereas traditional picture lights only illuminate the top few centimetres) and it has excellent colour rendition – meaning that its light has a full colour spectrum which mimics natural daylight. (Many light sources emit only 80 per cent of a colour spectrum, making colours look comparatively faded).

Today's lighting is bold yet understated and it's meeting increasingly specialist needs, too. Now that's a bright idea.