

# HOMEFRONT

THE ART AND DESIGN OF LIVING WELL | Edited by Stellene Volandes



Christopher Spitzmiller  
in his Manhattan studio

## The Lights Fantastic

*Rich, colorful glazes and handcrafted detail have made Christopher Spitzmiller's lamps fixtures in all the right places.* **BY STELENE VOLANDES**

**O**ne blustery morning in New Hampshire, during an otherwise idyllic parents' weekend at Proctor Academy nearly 20 years ago, a then 17-year-old Christopher Spitzmiller told his mother he wanted to be a potter. "She pulled the car over to the side of the road," says Spitzmiller, "turned to me, and just said, 'No.'" Mother, it seems, does not always know best.

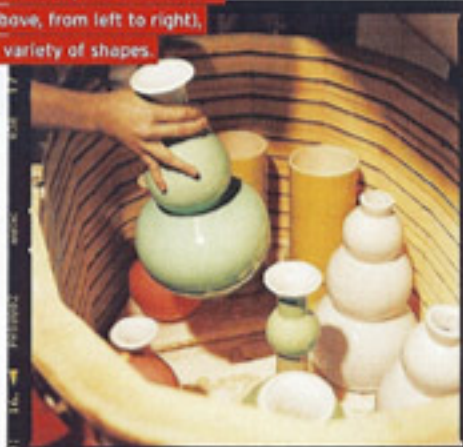
Today Spitzmiller's hand-thrown, highly glazed ceramic lamps have acquired cult status. "In quite a short amount of time they've become a design-world classic, a must-have," says Robert Rufino, vice president, Creative Services of Tiffany & Co., who put pink and platinum Spitzmiller styles in the Palm Beach store and platinum, gold, and coral lamps in the Fifth Avenue flagship. "Whether you need one or not," says decorator Albert Hadley, "Chris's lamps



The life of a Spitzmiller lamp begins in a plaster mold (above) and is then hand-trimmed, glazed, and fitted with a gold base (right).



The lamps, such as the large single gourd, the Delft, and the medium double gourd (above, from left to right), come in a variety of shapes.



are just beautiful to look at; they're never overdone." The forms, such as his signature single-, double-, and triple-gourd styles, are classic, says Spitzmiller, 36. "I didn't invent anything new," he says. "I just try to use better colors, better bases, better fittings."

Which may explain why clients buy in multiples. (Also, in today's market the prices, from \$850 for a Lindsay single-gourd lamp to \$3,000 for a large Alexander, seem almost gentle.) Jeweler Mish Tworowski counts seven in one house. Decorator—and fellow Proctor Academy alum—Eugenie Niven discovered Spitzmiller's work while flipping through *Architectural Digest*. "I saw a lamp on the cover, looked in the back, and saw Chris's name," she says. Soon after, Niven bought two cobblood single-gourd lamps. "I want some for my living room, front hall, bedroom, maybe even my kitchen."

Spitzmiller, hardly the prototypical plaster-splattered potter in his neatly pressed khakis and Borelli shirt, still throws all his shapes on a potter's wheel at his studio in Midtown Manhattan. The signature double-gourd lamp begins with two parts. "I throw two pieces that I let dry for a day, join them, and let them dry another day. Then I trim to refine the shape," he says. After about a week, they're fired. All that to create the mold. When the forms are removed, he trims and fires again. Then the glazing begins. The Spitzmiller palette ranges from an exquisitely pale blanc de chine to a deep Prussian blue. There's claret and coral, chartreuse and platinum. (Custom colors and shapes are also available.) The base of every lamp is hand-turned and gilded; each lamp takes about six weeks to complete. "All these details are what make the lamps special," says Spitzmiller. "They have life in them. I want to remember every piece."

It helps that many of the styles are named for loyal supporters. The Lindsay and the Cameron are for Spitzmiller's siblings, the William is for decorator William Hodgins, and the Patricia for Pat Grey at Mecox Gardens, the home-design boutique where Spitzmiller was an artist-in-residence in the late nineties and where his lamps are now on prominent display. There are, he admits, models waiting to be named. "My mother, for example," says Spitzmiller, "often points out that there is not one for her. Yet." ■

Christopher Spitzmiller lamps are available at 212-563-1144 and christopherspitzmiller.com.