

SCENE

IN NEW YORK

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IN GOOD LIGHT

FROM NEW YORK TO THE OVAL OFFICE, CHRISTOPHER SPITZMILLER ILLUMINATES THE WORLD

TEXT BY ELIZABETH LANDERS

PHOTOGRAPH BY DARCY ROGERS

When I reach the 17th floor of a Garment District building near Penn Station, the elevator doors slide open to reveal a floor-to-ceiling display of ceramic lamps that stretches the length of the foyer. They are organized by color, with shiny yellows distanced from swirly blues. This is the world of a rare type of artisan in New York. It's the atelier of Christopher Spitzmiller, a designer and lampmaker who has been working in the city for 15 years.

"Lamps are something everyone needs in the utilitarian part, but we make objects that are very filled with life, and they're timeless," Spitzmiller says, dressed in a trim button-down shirt. His workshop consumes the entire floor. Lamps

are arranged in a linear fashion so they can move easily from one production phase to the next. There are different alcoves for throwing the clay, molding, firing in enormous kilns, glazing, attaching the gold-plated wooden base and finally installing the electrical wiring. With more than 60 different shapes—from the gentle curve of a gooseneck gourd to the recognizable ming vase adorned with dragons—clients can dream up whatever they please.

Spitzmiller hand-designs and crafts every lamp. He studied at St. Lawrence University but participated in design programs at Central Saint Martins and the Rhode Island School of Design, transitioning after college to D.C., where he worked as a White House intern and later worked in event planning. Though he left for a residency at Mecox Gardens

in the Hamptons, he still has ties to American politics. He has made lamps for the last three administrations, and a pair currently sits in the Oval Office.

Though one might think he draws inspiration from travels to St. Barth with P. Allen Smith and Punta Cana with close friends Bunny Williams and John Rosselli, Spitzmiller calls himself an "auction house junkie." Traces of early 18th-century luxury are apparent in his latest best-seller, its creamy marbled finish akin to what many fashion designers have shown on the runway of late. When making 30 to 35 lamps per week and only keeping an inventory of about 250, one must strike a balance between timelessness and trendiness to match fickle tastes. Spitzmiller seems to have achieved both.