

by Anne Flynn Wear

Nancy Lonoff is the creative director and chief product designer of Crystorama, a family-run lighting company founded over 65 years ago by her father, Abraham Kleinberg. Crystorama has been synonymous with its distinctive designs and collections that work for the real-life, modern-day home. Nancy was raised in New York and knew she wanted to be in the creative field from a young age. She joined the team after receiving a master's in art and design from New York University. Using the cityscape as her canvas, Nancy draws inspiration from every corner of New York culture.

Your father founded Crystorama in 1958. What does it mean to you to continue his legacy?

My personal goal is to continue with my dad's values. We are all so lucky that he was such a strong influence on our family. My brothers and I want to continue what he started including the fact that he had such a positive impact on people's lives. My dad values respect, kindness, and integrity. He is a true gentleman, and his nickname was the 'gentleman of the lighting industry'. We all strive to celebrate that, and we find joy in keeping that going. Crystorama is known as the company that respects both customers and employees. The great thing is that he gets to see his legacy continue because, at the age of 96, he still comes to work and answers phone calls two days a week.

Did you always plan to work in the family business?

Not really. It's bizarre since lighting was always a part of my life. That's all I knew. Both my dad and my mom worked with lighting and accessories in both retail and wholesale. I knew I wanted to be involved in the creative process. So, I went to school for graphic design and received my Master of Art in Design. Initially, I dabbled in art education and worked at a graphic design agency. But eventually, a light switch went off (pun intended) and I decided I wanted to be in the creative department at Crystorama. It was a great opportunity and it occurred to me later that I should embrace it. I really enjoy working with my brother Brad and my dad. Why wouldn't I want to be a part of something like that? But my family never pushed me into it. It was completely my choice and that made it an easier decision since I was not pressured into it. But I realized at Crystorama my creativity could just blossom.

What perspectives have you gained from working with your father and brothers?

Well, not unexpectedly, we are always talking about work even outside the building. We constantly exchange ideas. Our parents instilled in us the principle that we need to work hard to succeed. So, honestly, I never come to work and have a bad day. We usually agree on things and if there is a collection I'm excited about I talk about it with my brother Brad. If he disagrees with something, it's more of a dialogue than an order. It's never negative. It's more of a collaboration between all



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the departments, that's what makes Crystorama so strong.

Where do you get your inspiration for the lighting pieces that you design?

I was raised in New York City with all the fashion, art, architecture and I was constantly bombarded with texture, color and shapes. I take all of that and kind of figure out what I can do with those sources of inspiration. Sometimes I'll see something I like and think, "How do I make that into a functional design for a chandelier?" I have so much at my fingertips. My current favorite material is jute and I just love natural fibers.

How does being a lifelong New Yorker affect your design aesthetic?

I always think about how something will look when it's illuminated. We are focused on natural right now and I consider how the light is going to come through. I think about what

shapes I want to create and what scale to use. Sometimes, for example, I'll think about a great building that's not shaped like a drum but stacked. I put my own spin on things that I see in the city. I have piles and piles of designs that I keep at my desk with samples of texture, scale, colors, etc.

What is your design process?

We have a team that helps with the design process. I'll start by generating something on the computer then I'll figure out materials and color and will it be a complete collection or a standalone piece. I communicate overseas and they make a CAD drawing then we go back and forth to refine the idea. Then they create a prototype. The whole process could take a year or two. And, generally, we are working this way on 10 collections at a time. My New York influence means that I like darker colors, like black lampshades that are more simplistic. But I force myself to constantly evolve and go out of my comfort zone. Our team is varied and we all bring a different perspective.

Can you share a defining element of your personal style?

I think it's hard to pin me down to one style. I'm always changing and evolving, and I discover new styles. I really love the laid back, natural vibe now with its organic materials and soft textures. But in the next month, I will likely move on to something else. Most trends have a life span of a few years but eventually that style will come back, whatever it is. It will be reborn with a new twist. I do like to marry historical with contemporary innovation, putting old and new together.

What is your favorite collection?

Right now, my favorite collection is Jayna with its oversized drum shades made from natural jute. It reveals a geometric pattern when it's illuminated. People have been asking for larger sizes of this collection.

What is the biggest risk you've taken?

My biggest challenge is that I think I can do it all. I am constantly trying new things which are all risky. My dad started the company with crystal and cast brass but when I came aboard I went down another avenue. I wanted to go more fashion forward. To him, that was a risk. He would say, "But we've always done it this way." But he never said no, he was always supportive. I tried mixing materials and using new materials and they have been well received.

How do you balance work and home life?

It's so challenging to navigate work successfully with my husband, three boys and a dog. My mom worked and I looked to her as a role model. She worked and was successful but still found time for her family. We

all survived having two working parents and now we are functional adults. I remember when my son Mason was 14, Crystorama won the ARTS award for Best Manufacturer. He called me and said, "I'm really proud that you are my mom and about our business." At that moment, I felt like I had done something right as a mom. I do think that when you're home you need to be fully present and give them your all.

What does the future of Crystorama look like? Will there be a third generation in the business?

It's a wonderful company and I think we will have a bright future. I have three boys and my brother has children, but we won't push them into the family business. However they want to contribute to society is wonderful. It's an amazing thing to be able to pass on a family business and continue to grow and succeed.

JUST FOR FUN

How did you earn your first paycheck?

Right out of college, I worked for a graphic design agency in the city for Milton Glaser and it was a master class. I remember going in and going up the stairs and sitting at drafting table and I was literally diagonal from him. That was an amazing opportunity, especially right out of school. The job was very exciting and fast paced.

What is your favorite family memory?

During the summers, we all go up to Maine with my parents, and all my brothers and their families. We have cabins rented out for a week and it's a nice time to just relax. There is a big lake by the cabins, so we wake up and jump in the water. We can canoe and ride bikes. We are away from the city and away from craziness.

Do you have any hobbies?

My favorite hobby is listening to music and I like a little bit of everything. This past summer, Peter Gabriel was playing in Ireland. We went to see him, and it was magical. We sat in the third-row center and I felt like he was singing right to me.

What do you wish you could do better?

I would love to just appreciate the moments. I am always so busy rushing to meet a deadline. And rushing to the next meeting. Or, rushing to see a kid in a play. I need to stop and take a deep breath. Be in the moment.

What are you currently reading or streaming?

I really enjoy streaming biographies. The latest one we watched to Quincy Jones, who was an immense talent.