

Roll & Hill

Antenna
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ROLL & HILL

A Brooklyn lighting collective gives European design a run for its money.

by Matt Bean



GOT A LIGHT?



USED TO be, if a guy wanted to drop a few paychecks on a giant chandelier for his living room, he had three options: Italian, Italian and Italian. To some, this European stranglehold was proof that Americans couldn't back it. But for Brooklyn designer Jason Miller, it was a wake-up call. It was simple: Design aficionados needed a new destination to turn to.

"The three biggest lighting companies all have one aesthetic, and it's High Modernism—very clean, very sterile. And Americans don't really like abstraction — they have a really hard time with that," says Miller, who founded the boutique lighting collective Roll & Hill in early 2010 as an accessible alternative to the sleek Euro sheen. "They like to be able to understand the

designed products for the American market — is alive and well and worthy of being investment," explains Miller. "People in the design world don't spend much time thinking about that market. But it seemed to me that there were a group of designers out there that actually were thinking about it, and when you see it all together you realize that, yes, it exists. We don't just have to buy Italian products."

Launching in the lighting market, where some ornate chandeliers can top \$25,000 or more, wasn't a coincidence. Miller and company offer products ranging from a few hundred dollars to several thousand — a bold price tag in an economy that has left most penny-pinching for days.

"Lighting has a disproportionate importance in interiors, and because of that people are willing to spend more on it," says Miller. "On a pure business level it made a lot of sense to me. The chandelier right over the dining room table or the light in the living room or hotel lobby. These are places you get the most bang for your buck. A couch is roughly the same price as a good chandelier, but you know you can get a box couch anywhere — and it can go from \$300 to \$10,000. When something is that reduced to its essence, it loses all commercial value. But lighting, you spend that

amount of money on it, you're going to get something you can't get anywhere else."

Miller's carefully curated collection of lamps has been garnering attention for the unique spotlight it has shined on the down-home design talent that is not often addressed. The collection is truly greater than the sum of its parts.

"I'm surprised at the power that the group has together," Miller says. "Putting them all together actually makes them more viable commercially."

Creating the right scene and capitalizing on it is how art works, but Miller, called a "patron saint of American designers" by *Waldpaper* magazine, says his ambitions aren't just to move antlers. "I'd like to be a platform for emerging American designers," he says. "All of a sudden there is a story behind the product that's greater than just the product itself. It's a group of American designers, it's a way of seeing work, a specific kind of work that appeals to the American tastes as a group. All of a sudden you say to yourself, this actually exists — and that's a great thing."

Roll & Hill's second collection launches in spring 2011. Visit Roll & Hill's Web site at rollandhill.com or the modern design e-commerce site Design Within Reach (DWR.com) for more information. *

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references. They like to be able to understand the story behind a product. And they like to be comfortable."

Call us uncouth, but yeah, we don't want lamps to look like the shard of prison glass Superman chucked into space at the end of *Inquisition* or a torture rack straight out of the *S*hakespearean *Inquisition*.

So, there: salvation, in the form of bright, grown, high-end design. In 2009, Miller, a Brooklyn designer whose work has been featured in the Cooper-Hewitt museum, assembled a stable of emerging designers and asked each to contribute a piece to the collection.

The line, designed and constructed out of brass, is proof that American design is on the upswing. Wrought cages surround one series of lights; candles glow upward from brass and wood mobiles in another. And Miller's most successful piece is his own, an outgrowth of a 2003 project for his eponymous design studio called the Superb Antler Lamp, featuring an intricate collection of cast ceramic antlers nestled together just so and shot through with rich, natural light.

"The product line as a whole is proof of the American design culture, our brand —



PHOTOGRAPHY Hector De Jesus