

THE GURU

The Tasteful \$114,000 Chandelier

For 120 years, Paris's Delisle has been lighting regal rooms, from Romanov palaces to the Ritz.

BY J.S. MARCUS

Business is booming at Delisle, the Parisian maker of custom lighting. Capable of producing everything from candlesticks and wall sconces to enormous chandeliers and lanterns, Delisle has managed to flourish in uncertain economic times by updating styles named after French kings but now suitable for a contemporary mansion or penthouse.

"In times of crisis, people want something strong," says company president Jean-Michel Delisle, whose great-grandfather, Henry Delisle, founded the company 120 years ago. In 2014, the firm booked sales of \$4.6 million, a 43% jump over 2009.

Delisle is currently restoring sconces for Paris's five-star Hotel Ritz. Other Parisian clients include the new Peninsula Hotel, the Shangri-La and the Four Seasons George V. The company has created lighting for the Palace of Versailles and restored ornate street lanterns for Paris's Place de la Concorde.

Most of Delisle's work, however, is for homes. Mr. Delisle, 62, cites a recent family creation—a 11½-foot tall, gilded-bronze, Louis XIV chandelier. Weighing 1,100 pounds, with a final cost of around \$114,000, the piece is destined for a Moscow residence.

In the hierarchical world of French furniture, Delisle is officially a *bronzier d'art*, or a workshop specializing in fine metalworking. In its early decades, it excelled at creating railings and other types of furnishings, but it made its name by making lighting for the likes of the Romanovs, in the years just before the Russian Revolution, and for its collaboration with Émile-Jacques Ruhlmann, the Art Deco designer.

By accessing an in-house archive of 12,000 drawings and watercolors, which could provide an outsider with an overview of the history of French decorative art, Delisle now cultivates a clientele that is anything but French, as a wave of wealthy home-



Clockwise from top right: Antoine Doyen for The Wall Street Journal; Gilles Cruyppenck; Delisle



LIGHTING LEGACY Delisle created lighting for the opera at the Palace of Versailles, far left; Jean Delisle and Jean-Michel Delisle, top; from archives, left.



ANCIENT HISTORY Delisle maintains an in-house archive of 12,000 drawings and watercolors, top left and left, which are an overview of the history of French decorative art; Delisle's factory manager wires a chandelier destined for London, above; wall sconces from Paris's Hotel Ritz, right, waiting to be rewired and restored.



owners, led by Russians and Americans, breathe new life into traditional Parisian savoir-faire.

Commissioning a piece can take months, as elements from drawings, photographs and other sources are combined into a final design, which will help a sculptor make pieces used to create molds. After pieces are cast, craftsmen create a final finish, often using patinated gold plating. Then it comes time to do the wiring, and the last stage may include the addition of crystal drops.

Private clients typically ask Delisle to light main rooms, like salons and master bedrooms, says Jean-Michel Delisle, but "we can do the full residence" if the commission is "very prestigious." A single project may involve the commissioning of millions' worth of lighting. A current Russian client, who is furnishing a home in London, has spent about \$3.4 million so far, and work is continuing, says Jean Delisle—Jean-Michel Delisle's 35-year-old son, who serves as managing director and co-owns the company with his father.

Jean Delisle says he sometimes has to say no to clients with an unbridled wish for bling. "We educate people," he says, of the company's need to find the right degree of flash. For example, a chandelier comprised of shimmering diamond-like pieces of fine Swarovski crystal, "wouldn't look nice," he says. "It would look like Disneyland."

Messrs. Delisle both agree that the most tasteful way to upgrade a chandelier is also the most subtle—the use of rock crystal instead of glass.

Rock crystal, which Delisle sources in Madagascar, can dramatically add to the price. A popular Louis XVI-style chandelier, with 16 lights, costs around \$42,000; the rock-crystal version could cost around \$114,000.

The lights may be timeless, but news does intrude on business. The rapidly rising Dollar has already led to new inquiries from U.S. clients. But the rapidly falling Ruble hasn't had an impact, says Jean-Michel Delisle—at least, he says, "not yet."

Clockwise from top left: Antoine Doyen for The Wall Street Journal (3); Delisle