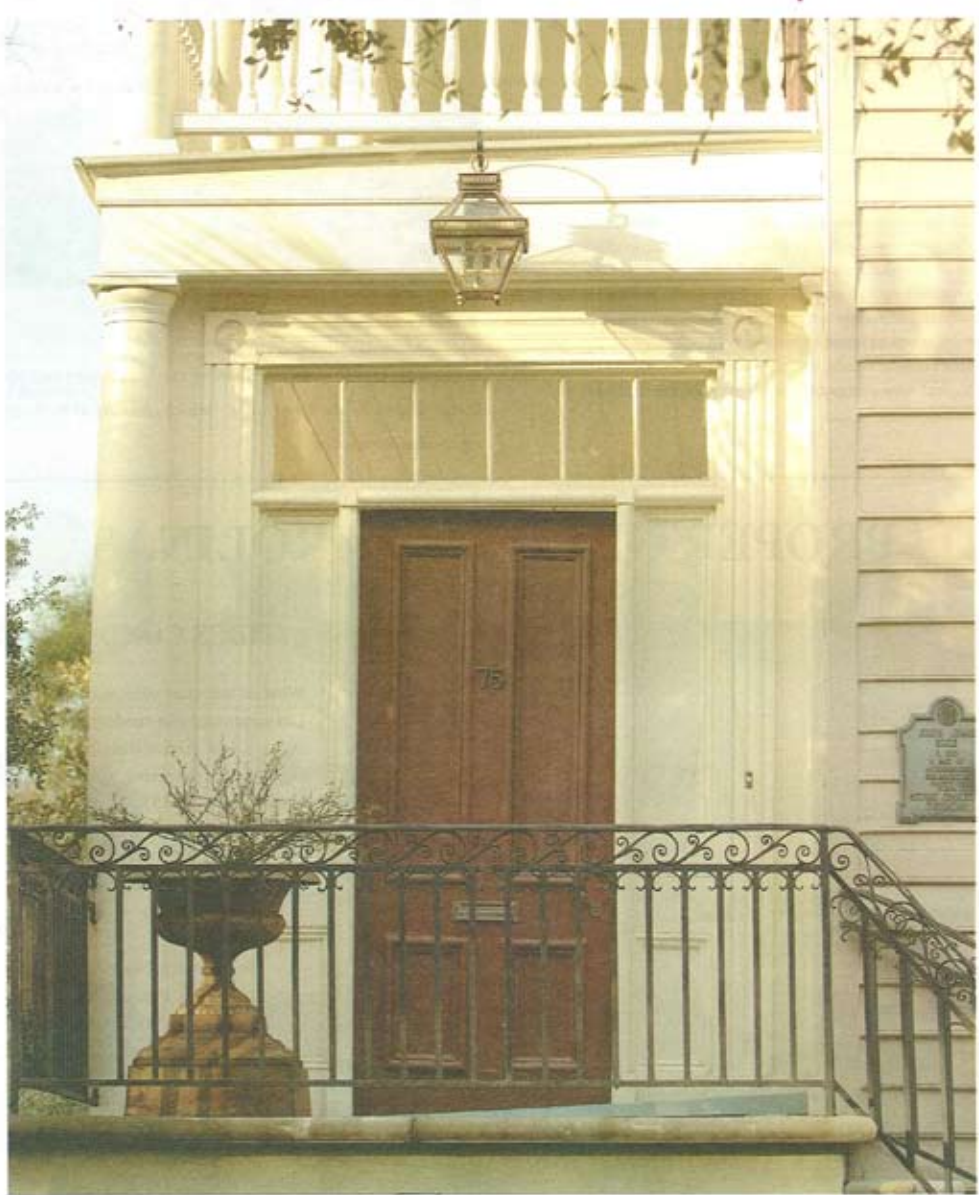




Story by SHELLA WATSON | Photographs by CHARLESTONPHOTOGRAPHER.COM

Brightening the Lowcountry

Urban Electric Co. has an eye for design



LUXURY LIVING
SPRING 2007

THE URBAN ELECTRIC CO.

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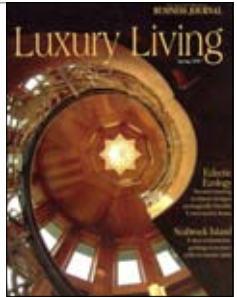
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Thomas J. Watson, an early 20th-century scientist, once said: "Good design is good business."

That quote would make a good motto for the Urban Electric Co., an upscale lighting fixture company that recently relocated to a huge manufacturing facility in North Charleston.

Now going into its fifth year, business is definitely good, considering Urban Electric's designs, especially its custom-designed fixtures, have translated into a growth rate of 70% to 80% for each year of the company's existence.

"The main issue is keeping up with demand," said Dave Dawson, who co-owns the business with his wife Jennifer. "A lot of people like our standard line, but many of our customers like our willingness to customize to fit their needs."

One of those customers is David Rawle, who knows a thing or two about design. As founder and chairman of the Charleston-based advertising, marketing and public relations firm Rawle Murdy Associates, he has an appreciation for Urban Electric's ability to take design "far beyond utility."

"There's an extraordinary sense of satisfaction when you see the designs," Rawle said. "People are increasingly appreciative of great design, which is not something that shouts in your face, but has classic elegance and has to endure."

Rawle has three exterior lights that were custom designed by Urban Electric, and the challenge was achieving not only an appealing design but also one that would be appropriate for Rawle's classic Charleston home.

"The house was built in 1800, so we wanted lights that were appropriate (for the era) but also slightly idiosyncratic," he said. "We wanted an acknowledgement of that time period, but we also wanted to reflect some sense of the contemporary."

Rawle described one of the lights, based on the classic Charleston lantern, as "so much more interesting and distinctive. They take a classic design and give it so much more character."

One of the lights reminded him of the old-fashioned torches in Italy, Rawle said.

"To me, that image is not only beautiful but also welcoming," he said. "For one of the doors, they made me a lantern-type fixture set at an angle; it's like a nod to



This Belmont wall fixture is one of Urban Electric's traditional designs.



Dave and Jennifer Dawson's Urban Electric Co., is lighting up Lowcountry homes and business with an eclectic variety of fixtures, ranging from the classic to the contemporary.

someone outside, welcoming them in."

Rawle praises the skill and technique of Urban Electric's creative director, Michael Amato.

"It's not only the design but the materials he uses," Rawle said. "He engages you in everything."

Jennifer Langston also has high praise for Amato's designs. The home she and her husband purchased in Mount Pleasant's Old Village, like Rawle's, was built in the early 1800s.

"We bought it mid-renovation, but we got to finish everything," Langston said. "And we used Urban Electric for basically all of our exterior and interior lighting."

The renovation took 1 1/2 years.

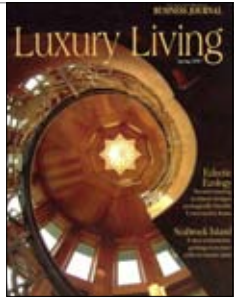
"The good thing was we got them on board immediately," she said. "They worked with us and figured out what we wanted then delivered exactly that."

Amato, Langston said, can look at an old home and keep the traditional flair of it.

"He'll take an old light fixture and paint it just the right color. He looks at everything. And he knows just what will work in spaces."

Take, for instance, the light fixtures in the kitchen.

"The kitchen lights are a set of three old British stage lights that (Amato) found and painted to match the cabinetry," she explained. "I saw them before and didn't have a vision of what he was going to do. But he painted and rewired them, and they're perfect. It's not something you'd find in



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anyone else's kitchen, and I find that appealing."
Another element Langston likes is the variety of glass available.
"You don't realize what a different glass will do for a fixture," she said. "They have innovative ways to age copper and brass and metal. We're collectors of antiques, and we've seen quite a few things, modern and antique, that we liked. And they are able to work with all of it. It brings that history to the house. They're brand new lights, but they look like they've been there forever."
Enhancing the history appeals to Rawle as well.

*"People are increasingly appreciative of great design, which is not something that shouts in your face, but has classic elegance and has to endure."
~ David Rawle*

"You want what's authentic, and these homes are," he said. "So why complement them with a reproduction? Complement them with something that respects their period but also is designed in our period."
"I've never liked reproductions of anything. What's great about Charleston is it's not a reproduction. It's a living city. The old buildings are very much alive, and the choices you make in and around those buildings should be respectful of the time of the buildings, but engaging in what we know about design and what pleases today."

This fixture, based on a classic Charleston lantern, lights the exterior of David Rawle's historic downtown Charleston home.

