

The History of Tiffany Lamps

What are Tiffany Lamps?

Tiffany lamps are a style of lamp originally crafted and made famous by Louis Comfort Tiffany (1848-1933), the eldest son of Charles Lewis Tiffany, famous owner of the famed jewelry firm, Tiffany and Co.

Glass is a form of matter with gas, liquid, and solid state properties. In a way, glass is like a super cooled liquid which captures light and glows from within. It is a jewel-like substance made from the most ordinary materials: sand transformed by fire.

The History

Before recorded history, man learned to make glass and color it by adding metallic salts and oxides. These minerals within the glass capture specific portions from the spectrum of white light allowing the human eye to see various colors. Gold produces a deep cranberry, cobalt makes blues, and silver creates yellows and golds and copper makes greens and red.

Without any exaggeration, [Tiffany lamps](#) have always been the real pieces of art and the outstanding addition to any living space. This sums up the lifelong idea of [Louis Comfort Tiffany](#) (1848-1933) "to provide good art for American homes". During his life, Louis Comfort Tiffany managed to be a painter, interior designer, collector, world traveler, photographer, manufacturer, and avid gardener. Today he is commonly recognized as one of America's most influential artists, designers and craftsmen of the century, while Tiffany's lamps were and still are known worldwide for their superior design and handcrafted details

Being the elder son of Charles Lewis Tiffany, the legendary founder of the silver and jewelry firm, Tiffany and Co., Louis though chose to pursue his love of art instead of continuing the family tradition. He quite succeeded with his oil and watercolor works during 1860s and 1870s. However, it was in the 1880s, that he turned his attention to interior design, where he stayed till the last day of his life. As mentioned before, Tiffany wanted to bring decorative arts to the same status as fine arts, thus popularizing overwhelming beauty. Tiffany came up with an idea to arrange bits and pieces of discarded glass remains from production of his stained glass windows to form beautiful decorative lamps. By chance, while lighting the first movie theatre, Tiffany collaborated with Thomas Edison, who further suggested making electric fixtures together. Very soon Tiffany began to create lamps, making them as small versions of his exquisite stained-glass windows, practically developing the idea into a new form of art (Duncan A., 1992).

He would always look for some new techniques, and we know Tiffany to have developed a unique process of formulating glass that allowed creating bolder colors, opalescent sheens and a broader range of textures for artisans. This resulted in his patenting four new types of exclusive glass over a 20-years period, and he kept working with teams of craftsmen to manufacture stained-glass windows, lamps and lamp bases. The lamps, as well as all other Tiffany objects were exclusively designed either by Tiffany himself or by artists working under his supervision. Most commonly the bases of the lamps were made in the form of fine sculptures using bronze. Shades were created by thorough fitting hundreds of hand cut glass shapes into copper foil enclosures. As copper foil is light and simultaneously strong, it was made possible to create the shades of large size and uniquely complex design. Every lamp and shade was assigned with a model number to facilitate the filling of orders (Koch, R.1982).

Louis Comfort Tiffany was a designer of extraordinary range and versatility. His unique vision for stained glass secured his widespread popularity a hundred years ago and his continued celebrity today. To finish the short digression into the history of the Tiffany lamps origin, notice that the 1930s and 1940s are considered a recession period of Tiffany style popularity, due to its being “too ornate” for the emerging modern fashion standards of Art Moderne and Expressionism. Having lost their popular appeal, Tiffany objects, though, were rediscovered with great interest by collectors and museums in 1950s. Finally, in 1998, two Tiffany lamps made the Top10 list of US auction prices for decorative arts bringing in nearly \$2 million each.

Tiffany lamps can be generally grouped to form the following categories, each specifying different characteristics: ‘irregular upper and lower borders’ lamps, favrile lamps, geometric lamps, ‘transition to flowers’ lamps, ‘flowered cone’ lamps, ‘flowered globe’ lamps, ‘irregular lower border’ lamps (Neustadt E., 1970).

The term Favrile means ‘handcrafted’. It commonly associated with the first and simplest shades made by Louis Comfort Tiffany himself. When Tiffany obtained his early patent under the name Favrile, it included several types of glass used in the manufacture of stained-glass windows as well as leaded and blown shades. But today this term presupposes predominantly the blown forms such as shades and other types of hollow ware. Favrile pieces are generally inscribed L.C.T. or Favrile, while shades made from leaded glass are labeled with impressed metal signature tags. The abovementioned term ‘geometric’ is used to describe the group of leaded-glass shades with the simplest designs. As the name suggests the decorative ornament of such lamps normally include standard geometric shapes such as squares, triangles, rectangles, ovals, ellipses, and rhomboids used on panel, cone, and globe-shaped shades. Unlike blown shades, the geometric and all ensuing groups were fabricated from pieces of poured glass cut in segments, edged with copper foil and leaded or soldered together to form a complete unit. Later on bronze finish was applied to the lead or solder lines. The geometric group itself is divided into two basic types: 1) shades made from a large number of small glass pieces; 2) those made from a limited number of large glass pieces (turtleback tiles and Favrile Fabrique panels).

The ‘transition to flowers’ style includes globe-shaped shades of basic geometric design with added botanical motifs. Because the motifs in Tiffany’s elaborate lamps were often inspired by his love of nature, some famous patterns feature dragonflies, spider webs, dogwoods, peacock

feathers and beautiful flowers. The 'transition to flowers' group too is subdivided into: 1) geometric shades with borders or belts of flowers and vines; 2) shades with scattered floral or leaf patterns on geometric backgrounds. The botanical patterns, introduced in previous group, are generously used in the cone group (cone shades are straight-sided with circular rims). Because cone shades are easier to manufacture, we can observe a larger variety of shades in this particular category (Koch, R.1982). One of the most popular motifs in this group is the dragonfly. This insect design is developed to a more natural rendering further in the flowered globe and irregular lower border groups, characterized by complex construction and more naturalistic forms.

At the final phase of development are shades with both irregular upper and lower borders. In this group the artificial straight edge of the aperture is replaced by an openwork crown that simulates tree branches or shrubbery. This combination of the irregular upper and lower border is the consummate Tiffany Studios Shade (Neustadt E., 1970).

Today, one has an overwhelming choice of these wonderful artworks. If you don't want your ceiling lights to be a dull routine, Tiffany ceiling fixtures will grace the top of your room with unique jewels. There is a wide selection of admirable buffet lamps, starting with orange dragonflies with red jewel eyes on the sea blue background; continuing through the mixture of red, lavender, and white flowers hidden in the thickness of green leaves; and finishing with some mission style lamps with accents of orange, green, and beige (Neustadt E., 1970). As to the types of Tiffany lamps, the unusual Honey Locust sconces will decorate your walls, matching the breathtaking same style floor and table lamps in your living room. Finally the Honey Locust dripping down from above in the form of a large six-light chandelier will definitely fascinate your most gourmet guests. The striking abundance of styles will probably confuse anyone willing to own this piece of art.

You may choose among 'American Flag Design', 'Pansy Style', 'Peacock Style', 'Jeweled Geometric Iris Style', 'Jasmine Style', 'Garden Style', 'Fleur D'Lis Style', 'Cabbage Rose Style', or 'Animal Style', etc. Other criteria while gaining Tiffany merchandise depend on whether you are looking for a reasonable price purchase or a precious addition to your collection, or a cozy source of diffusing, ambient light for your habitat. Whatever the reason, 'Tiffany' is a trademark, piece of art and the way to brighten your everyday life in a right way – all in one, as once initiated by the founder of this commercial art. In fact, your choice of lighting doesn't have to be a battle of form versus function – lighting can serve both purposes. A Tiffany lamps will both offer plenty of light for reading or handiwork, while adding style and grace to a room. Obviously, you should choose a lamp that complements the room and fits well into your available space. If you have limited table space, consider a floor lamp. To direct the eye upwards and add drama, a beautiful chandelier may be just the thing. In his lamps, Tiffany's fascination with color, nature, and light coalesced, and through them, he gave the world an opportunity to join in his own pursuit of beauty.

About Our Tiffany Lamps

All of our stained glass art lamps are handmade using the traditional copper foil method which has been used for over a hundred years. The shade is constructed from hand cut, polished, and shaped pieces of stained art glass. Copper foil is wrapped around each piece of glass and lead soldered. The following details the process.

The Copper Foil Method

Each lamp shade has numerous pattern pieces that represent all the individual glass pieces of the shade. A heavy card board pattern is made for each individual piece of glass. A number and glass color is written on the pattern piece. The pattern piece is laid on the flat art glass. A line is drawn on the glass following the outline of the pattern piece. The glass pieces are then cut using tools to score and glass and then break it. Each glass piece must then be grinded into the perfect shape. Once shaped, the pieces are cleaned and ready to have the copper foil applied. The copper foiled is adhered around the edges of each glass piece. All of the glass pieces are then laid out on a form that's the shaped of the finished shade.

All foiled joints must be completely soldered to create the metal web that holds the shade together. Soldering begins by brushing flux on the foil seams. With the hot soldering iron in one hand and the solder in the other, the stain glass artist places the iron tip directly on a foil seam and touch the solder to the top surface of the iron tip. The solder immediately melts and the iron tip is used to coat the foil. The tip of the iron is moved slowly along each seam, continuously adding more solder, filling gaps and covering the foil. The idea is to build up solder on the seams until it forms a rounded bead. All exposed foil must be coated with solder, including the outer edge.

When the solder is done, the shade is cleaned to bring out the beauty of the stained art glass. A chemical patina is often used to make the solder look uniform in color or create an old look.

Due to the hand made process of stained art glass and Tiffany lamp making, every fixture is different with unique colors, shapes, and sizes. This is what makes each piece so special and a true on-of-a-kind.

There are no short cuts or machinery other than simple hand tools used in authentic Tiffany style stained glass.