



Otero pendants

# BEST OF THE BEST IN LIGHT

Chris and Clare Turner have been creating luxury lighting for their company CTO lighting for 20 years. A favourite amongst north London, you can also find their designs in the likes of the Chiltern Firehouse in Marylebone and the Gilbert Scott Restaurant at King's Cross. We find out how they develop designs that stand the test of time.

*By India Block*



Chris and Clare Turner, founders of CTO Lighting, at home in Muswell Hill

**CHRIS AND CLARE TURNER** have a unique method of stress-testing their products. The husband and wife team behind CTO Lighting, formerly of Kentish Town Road and now of Upper Street, subject each and every one of their designs to a ruthless and lengthy process. It's not exactly white lab coats and wind tunnels, though. Instead, each light has to stand the test of time in their family home in Muswell Hill.

"It's not a science; it's a bit of an art form," explains Clare. "You've got to live with something to see how you'd use it. Most of the lights



Nimbus pendant

*"There's trends that come and go, but we take a long time developing something because we want to get it right. We don't want to go off it next week."*

Acropolis lamp



we have here are things that were prototypes. We've never tired of them, they're sort of classics now."

The pair enjoy being able to work to their own time frame. Rather than churn out a certain number of designs for each season like the big design houses, working for themselves means they're free to only release the designs they're 100 per cent happy with. By making sure they've lived with something long enough to love it they know their clients will love the product too, long after the initial thrill of spotting it in the showroom and bringing it home has worn off.

"You've got to like something for a long time. What we do is not throw away, it has longevity," says Clare. ▶



ABOVE: Oscar floor light in brass BELOW: Pluto lamp



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As a testing ground their home is hard to beat. They bought the beautiful red brick Edwardian house so typical of the area ten years ago and renovated the interior, taking out interior walls and adding a small glass box extension.

“We wanted a space that was flexible,” says Clare. “I get bored very easily, so the furniture moves around a lot. One day the dining table is over there, the next it’s over here.”

The lights have a starring role, of course. A row of brass and bronze ring cluster pendants hangs over the black marble monolith of the kitchen island, the light bouncing off the white, hand shaped ceramic tile splash back. A glowing alabaster table lamp sits next to a low, dark velvet sofa. Above the dining room table their signature lunar pendant hangs, more sculpture than light.

The warm, white walls provide a perfect canvas, although they’re not blank by design. “Although at CTO we

*A glowing alabaster table lamp sits next to a low, dark velvet sofa. Above the dining room table their signature lunar pendant hangs, more sculpture than light.*

work together and it works well, if we want to choose a painting or something for the house we struggle. Design-wise we’re both quite fussy,” says Chris.

“That’s why there’s not much art on the walls!” chips in Clare.

“When you buy a painting it’s so expensive and we can never agree. Clare will love it and I’ll go it’s okay, and the one I love she thinks is just okay. So we don’t bother,” laughs Chris.

Art indecision aside, their tastes mesh well together. “We’ve always liked similar sorts of things,” says Clare. “We’re a typical creative couple; we go to lots of exhibitions. That’s what we spend our weekends doing, we drag the children around galleries. We’ve always been quite in tune. And travelling together, you’re always inspired when you travel.

“We also have differences as well, which is quite good. We can challenge each other, that’s quite an important

thing as a couple when you're working together."

Clare worked as a buyer for Marks and Spencer while Chris, a trained engineer, worked for Arup. They set up CTO on the side, with Chris creating the prototypes himself in his workshop. After their first designs were picked up at Top Drawer by industry heavyweights including Heal's and Habitat they gradually went full time. Now they're celebrating the company's 20-year anniversary.

Clare's background as a buyer and her current work as an interior designer is a boon when it comes to Chris designing a new light.

"That's the most useful thing, Clare being an interior designer. Designers tend to think 'oh I'll just design a beautiful floor light' without thinking about how it's going to be used in an interior," he explains.

"Between us we attack it from two sides. She gives me briefs that I try to fulfil, but also I'll come up with some of my own ideas. I'm a pen and paper man. I come up with a concept based on ideas typically from antiques and mid century designs, then modernise them."

"Sometimes it will come from a need," adds Claire. "For example an irregular shaped pendant because



Array pendant

we've got a quirky space, and then other times it will come from a beautiful piece of alabaster and what shape works well with that material.

"We don't always know the outcome. We sometimes we start with a material and see which forms and shapes the material lends itself to."

The pair have a network of artisan craftsmen and suppliers, each with the unique skills requisite to get a particular finish for a certain design. "Because we're both from manufacturing backgrounds we like things being made. We love going to a factory, we love seeing the thing being made," explains Clare.

"We find for our metal workers, the skill is always in the finishing," says Chris, indicating the Lunar pendant. "Each ring is individually hand rolled to a different shape, then it's hand ground back, cleaned, patinated bronze and then they sand back the insides and that takes it to the raw brass finish so you get the two tone.

"People love that, it's been one of our best sellers for a number of years."

The fine vertical ridging alabaster lamp, for example, came about because they discovered a mason who preferred

to hand carve his pieces rather than machine them. The result is a nod to a ruched fabric lampshade realised in lovely glowing stone. The silhouette is minimal, with some metalwork details left exposed to add interest.

Their approach is minimalist in the sense that clutter and confusion are cleared away to make room for order, but it's so bare as to be stark. This, combined with the calibre of the material and the handcrafted elements elevate the lights to luxury status.

"Modern design is not all about white rooms any more," says Clare. "It's about simple clean lines but the materials are luxurious and the colours are rich. Even the whites are rich white."

"Our style is soft modern," says Chris. "For us it's in the detail and the quality of the materials. Simple but well made and beautifully finished."

"I'd say it is luxurious modern," adds Clare. "The materials have a richness to them. They make you feel good. They make you feel that they're precious. They're not ordinary; they're something you'd be prepared to save up for.

"They're something worth aspiring to." ♦



Carapce pendant