

October 23, 2013

# Yes, That's Right: Sconces

By RIMA SUQI



Why do you need a sconce? Brian McCarthy can give you a list of reasons.

For starters, “there is no place you can’t use one,” said Mr. McCarthy, 53, a decorator who worked at Parish-Hadley before starting his own firm 20 years ago.

A sconce creates another layer of light, he said, and “you can get wonderful shadowing and pattern” (an effect that can be seen throughout his new book, “Luminous Interiors,” out next month from Stewart, Tabori & Chang).

It can also be used to define space and focus attention on a particular part of a room: a pair of sconces can create a frame, he said, “whether on a wall, above a fireplace or flanking a doorway.” With folding ruler in hand — a legacy of his days working for Albert Hadley, who was rarely seen without one — Mr. McCarthy set out to demonstrate what he was talking about.

He began at Maison Gerard, in the Village, where he found the New Leaf sconce by the artist Marc Bankowsky. “I love the organic quality,” he said, “and the wonderful light and shadow that it casts from behind.”

Mr. McCarthy, who installed the sconce in multiples in a client’s Swiss chalet, added: “There’s no limit to where this can be used: in a bathroom, a living room, an entry hall. It steps up to the plate

and does what it has to do, wherever you put it.”

On a nearby wall, he spotted a pair of patinated and gilt-bronze oval sconces by Hervé Van der Straeten that looked as if they were meant to hold candles, but actually had tiny hidden bulbs. “For me, this is about the silhouette,” he said. “It is equally beautiful from every angle, which is really important.”

Achille Salvagni is an Italian designer Mr. McCarthy has had his eye on, but he had never seen his demure-looking brass-and-onyx sconce hanging on another wall. The placement of the onyx sphere, he noted, looked like “a moon against a brilliant sunset, casting a beautiful glow,” and the variations in texture showed evidence of the artist’s hand.

Choosing a great sconce is all about paying attention to details like that, and over the course of the day, Mr. McCarthy took care to point out subtleties that others might miss, like the way the faceting on the Lens Sconce by Alison Berger, at Holly Hunt, refracted and reflected light. And how the Knotty Bubbles sconce by Lindsey Adelman, at the Future Perfect, was cleated to the bracket. “It’s incredibly original,” he said, “and really elegant in a casual way.”

But the curvaceous sconces he picked out at Bernd Goeckler Antiques would surely have jumped out at anyone. Made by Stilnovo in the 1950s, they seemed to dance on the wall. “These are bigger scale and, when lit, you get a great reflection of light and show,” he said. “They’re modern, midcentury: chic, chic, chic.”