

CULTURED

November 19, 2024
By Lee Carter

Look Inside the Family Business Quietly Illuminating the Farthest Reaches of the Art and Fashion World

Lucifer Lighting has been illuminating culture for decades—lighting everything from history museums to Cartier’s glass vitrines. But for the family of collectors behind the brand, the best part of their work is the chance to celebrate fine art.



Gilbert and Suzanne Mathews. All photography by Casey Kelbaugh and courtesy of Lucifer Lighting.

People typically don’t think about the lighting arrangement overhead when perusing the shiny baubles at Cartier, or communing with culture at SFMOMA or the Shed in New York. The Mathews family of Lucifer Lighting would like to keep it that way.

"We have this expression: 'Design. Define. Disappear,'" explains Gilbert Mathews, [Lucifer](#)’s founder and CEO, in the company’s impeccably shadowless Tribeca showroom. "The design element relates to the minimalism of the fixtures, in which advanced optics can shape light to perfectly define any object while disappearing into the ceiling, so all you see is the brilliance of the space."

The San Antonio, Texas–based family—Gilbert; his art-specialist wife, Suzanne; and their daughters Alexandra and Roselyn, who both rank highly in the company—has cultivated an eclectic portfolio of clients over four decades in business. Projects range from the [National History Museum](#) in London to the [Dior](#) flagship in Soho (while we speak, Roselyn pulls out her phone to share a photo of architect [Peter Marino](#), clad in his signature black leather uniform, admiring a Lucifer-dotted ceiling). But it’s in the illumination of fine art that Lucifer—which means "bearer of light" in Latin—truly dazzles.



Jammie Holmes, *Black Horse*, 2023, installed at Lucifer Lighting's Tribeca showroom in partnership with Marianne Boesky Gallery.

"Think about [Rothko](#)," muses Roselyn. "There are so many layers in his paintings. When light shines on them properly, you can see the depth, texture, and drama." Roselyn once worked at Phillips auction house on its evening sales, where the most important lots go under the hammer. "One season," she recalls, "we were selling Ai Weiwei's 12 [Zodiac Heads](#). They're gold-plated bronze and extremely reflective, but the light was hitting them poorly and bouncing in everyone's eyes. I brought in a lighting designer who's a close family friend. Now Phillips uses him to light the art in all of their sales."

Unsurprisingly, the Mathewses are art collectors. Gilbert and Suzanne, a former gallerist, have formed a deeply personal collection reflecting their interest in books, design, and fine art, which not only fills their homes, but Lucifer's San Antonio campus as well. Contemporary pieces are the crown jewels of the brand's showrooms in San Francisco and Tribeca, where large-scale paintings by emerging Dallas-based artist [Jammie Holmes](#) currently hang as part of a loan organized by [Marianne Boesky Gallery](#). "He has the most incredible story," says Suzanne. "He was an oil field worker until he picked up painting. He's completely self-taught, but his brush is magical."



Alexandra and Roselyn Mathews.

The family's passion for fastidious presentation can be traced back to [Frost Bros.](#), a luxury retail chain headquartered in San Antonio, under the direction of Irving Mathews, Gilbert's father. Before closing its doors in the late 1980s, Frost Bros. was the pinnacle of high-end shopping and personal service, the sort of place where European designers, ascendant in the postwar years, could mingle with wealthy Texas ranchers and oil tycoons.

"My father was close friends with Aldo Gucci," says Gilbert, noting that Frost Bros. once owned a [Gucci boutique](#) in Boston. "It's interesting how things come full-circle. Now, we're lighting Gucci stores."