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Lava lamp maker expands into contemporary lighting



Bright Source lamps come in four styles, including one with a gold base and silver glitter.

Courtesy of Lifespan Brands

By Jean Murphy
Daily Herald Correspondent

Remember those funky lava lamps you had when you were in high school and college? You probably didn't know they are made by an Elk Grove Village-based company and you will undoubtedly be surprised to know the maker is updating the look by entering the conventional lighting market.

Lifespan Brands is now offering lava lights that are part of larger, conventional lamps with shades and a 60-watt bulb.

"The Bright Source lamps provide two lighting experiences in one lamp. The motion part of the lamp emits a relaxing, soothing soft light, while the table lamp gives off a bright light perfect for any task -- reading, working and more," said Jennifer Courington, vice president of marketing and product development for Lifespan.

The new lamp, which is aimed at a mainstream audience, is 19 inches tall and looks best with a 10-inch angled shade, which does not come with the lamp but can be purchased with it, she said. It will be available later this fall through the Lifespan website at www.lifespanbrandsco.com (<http://www.lifespanbrandsco.com>).

Lava lights or lamps date back to 1963 when an Englishman named Edward Craven-Walker invented the novelty product and called it an Astro Lamp. He and his wife took to the road to promote his invention and ended up at a trade show in Brussels in 1965. That is where Adolph Wertheimer and William Rubinstein bought the rights to manufacture and sell the lamps in the United States, Courington said.

Wertheimer quickly sold his rights to Hy Spector, who began manufacturing and marketing them in the Chicago area.

Over the years the lava lamp became an American icon and a cultural phenomenon. It has been featured in television shows and movies ranging from "Futurama" to "Malcolm in the Middle," and from "The Good Wife" to "X-Men."

Today original-style novelty lava lamps are sold through retailers throughout the U.S., Canada and Europe.

"We wanted to move beyond the novelty lighting business to the \$1.5 billion conventional lighting business. So we are expanding the appeal of these fascinating and beautiful motion lamps by making them functional, as well as attractive," Courington said. "In this way we are expanding the demographic audience beyond the 18 to 24 age group and the over-50 market, which grew up with lava lamps. We are hoping to capture those in between, too."

The lamps come in four colors -- a gold base with silver glitter and liquid in the lamp, a gunmetal gray base with navy wax and white liquid, a silver base with teal and silver glitter and liquid, and, finally, a bronze base with emerald green wax and white liquid. All sell for \$49.99 (\$69.98 with the shade).

"We did a lot of consumer research and found these were the hot home decor colors today," she said. "And for those who like bling, we added glitter to some of the lamps."

The lamp comes with a four-position switch. You can set it to have only the lava lamp on, only the table lamp on, both lamps on or both lamps off.

For many years the company was known as Lava Lite Co. and the brand was known as Lava Lamp. In 2008 the company was purchased by BW Capital and the new owners chose to expand the breadth of the firm's product line. In fact, since the new CEO had years of experience in the bathroom scale business, he added several lines of bathroom scales to its offerings. In January, the company changed its name to Lifespan Brands in order to better reflect its expanding array of products.

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