



Making a Statement

Lights from Carolina Lanterns do more than light up a home

BY ALLISON THOMAS | PHOTOGRAPHY BY HOLGER OBENAU

So many homes in the Lowcountry are fabulous by day. But Jan Clouse, owner of Carolina Lanterns, believes it's during the night when they really shine.

Her Mount Pleasant-based company supplies exterior and interior lights for homes, businesses, neighborhoods and historic areas in the Lowcountry and

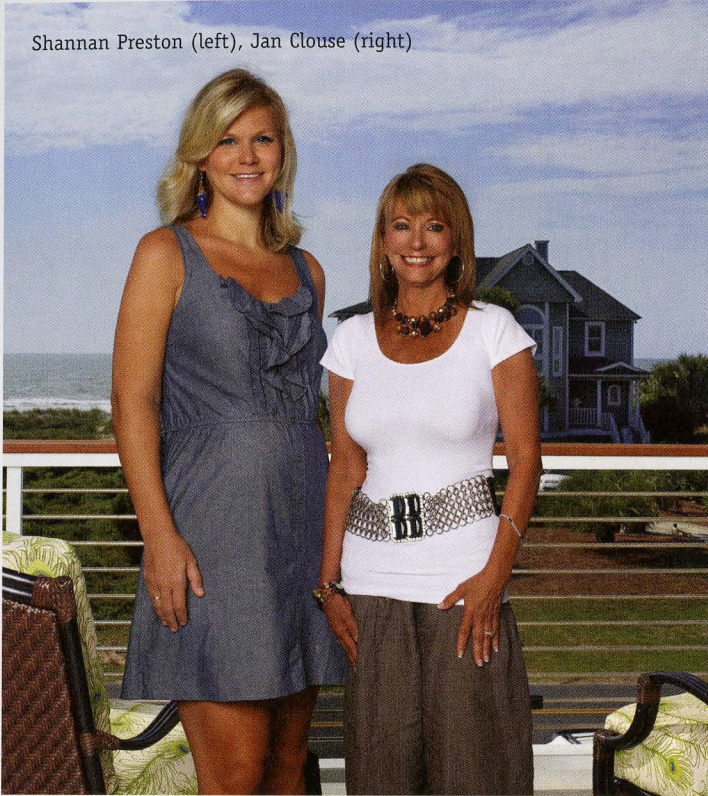
nationwide. Her company is about quality products, customer service and helping clients create just the right statement with their lighting. "Reading or romance? We have the lights you need," Jan says with a smile.

Jan started her company selling gas lanterns, a Lowcountry icon. But she

quickly expanded to carry a wide variety of exterior and interior lights, including the exclusive Jan Collection.

Her store, Carolina Lanterns' Lowcountry Lighting Center, is chock full of eye candy. It's a veritable 5,000-square-foot idea center staffed by knowledgeable employees who cater not only to shoppers, but also to

Shannan Preston (left), Jan Clouse (right)



those who tag along.

“Every customer is offered a drink when they come in the store,” Jan says. “We have a little area set up here with a bar and a television. The guys love that we have a

place for them to hang out and watch the game while their wives are walking around, dreaming. We even have coloring books for children.”

Carolina Lanterns is known for its copper

lanterns, which can be powered by gas, propane or electricity. (Typically, gas or propane lanterns are put at the entrance of a home and electric lanterns are used elsewhere on the exterior.) There are seven

collections of lanterns, each with numerous unique designs in the series. Lanterns come in a bevy of different sizes, from small and quaint to large and magnificent. Most lanterns, whether gas, propane or electric, have the ability to be turned off and on, but some homeowners like to leave their gas lanterns burning 24 hours a day—a nod to olden times.

“We like to call our lanterns ‘house jewelry,’ because they’re the finishing touch on your home and make all the difference in the world. It’s what makes a statement,” Jan says.

In addition to classic lanterns, Jan makes sure to stock the latest trends—from lamps made of recycled bottle caps to cork shades to LED light bulbs.

An Instant Makeover

Jan says a current trend is for homeowners to give their houses an economical makeover by simply changing out the light fixtures.

“Lights and ceiling fans can really date a home. But you can change fixtures without having to pull a permit, so you can have a new look without major effort or expense,” she says.

She suggests, for example, sprucing up a space by replacing an outdated ceiling fan with a new fan that offers clean lines; brightening up a dining room with a new chandelier; or adding a crystal chandelier to a walk-in closet or master bathroom.

The kitchen is a special place where lighting is crucial for working as well as for creating an atmosphere. After all, the kitchen is where everyone ends up during a get-together. Jan suggests replacing fluorescent lighting with pendants or swapping ceiling fans for wall-mounted fans.

For those who want more than just a few light fixtures, Carolina Lanterns provides turnkey service—from design to installation. Representatives even make house calls.

During site visits and house calls, the store’s representatives will assess your space, as well as your lighting wish list, and create a lighting and electrical plan that takes out all the guesswork.

“We are trained to ask questions you may not think about,” Jan says. “They may seem like simple questions, but we’ll ask you everything from where you chop your vegetables to where your children do their homework. You want the right task lighting in the right location.”

To understand the length to which Carolina Lanterns goes when it comes to customer service, one must first understand how Jan started the business. Back in 1999, Jan was moving into a home in Park West, the first neighborhood in Mount Pleasant to offer natural gas. She, of course, wanted gas lanterns for the exterior of her home. She popped into a local lighting showroom to inquire about gas lanterns. The salesperson asked what Jan’s budget was, told her it was too small, then turned away to work with



Photo by Holger Oberman

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Stunned but determined to have beautiful gas lanterns on her porch, Jan set out on a mission. "I found someone upstate who made gas lanterns," she says. "I drove up there and bought two lanterns for my home. Then I realized that I couldn't be the only one who wanted these. So, I bought everything they had made that day. Then I drove to Staples and had a business card printed after coming up with a name for my business on the spot." She went home, put together a plan and started making calls.

Jan quickly realized she had found her niche. It didn't take long before Carolina Lanterns was supplying lanterns to developers at Park West, I'On, Daniel Island and more. "We've supplied 90% of the lights in I'On and on Daniel Island," Jan says. Carolina Lanterns also supplies lanterns to SCE&G, which operates the gas lanterns in downtown Charleston.

Carolina Lanterns has also achieved national success. The company has been

featured on *Extreme Home Makeover* twice, and in idea homes by *Southern Living*, *Cooking Light* and *Cottage Living*.

Top-Drawer Service

One high-profile project Carolina Lanterns finished this spring exemplifies the company's dedication to customer service. A homeowner in the Florida Keys ordered 47 lanterns for the exterior of their high-end home. The homeowner wanted a particular finish on the lanterns, but once in place, the finish began to flake due to ocean spray.

"We cautioned against the finish, but they insisted," Jan says. When the finish began to flake, it became a big issue. Even though Carolina Lanterns had warned the client about the finish, and suggested a natural copper finish instead, Jan decided to offer the ultimate in customer service. She flew two employees down to the secluded property to restore each and every lantern by hand.

"We had to have special clearance to access the private island and could only work certain hours to accommodate the owners," Jan said. "But we cleaned all the lanterns down to their natural finish and put them back in place. It was quite a task, and we covered the expense. When the builder and designer saw the finished results, they said, 'We'll not only refer you for projects, we'll send you a letter of recommendation.'"

"We were there for the sale and for the solution," Jan said. "I take great pride in that." ➤

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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