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You Don't Have to Put on the Electric Light

Old-fashioned (and cost-efficient) gas-burning lamps are flanking even the most modern front doors.

By STEVE GARBARINO



Paul Costello for The Wall Street Journal

GLOW WITH THE FLOW | Gas lanterns illuminate the exterior of a 1950s house in New Orleans.

After living for five years in a colorful 100-year-old Creole cottage amid the opulent historic mansions of New Orleans's Uptown neighborhood, Ashley and Skipper Bond felt that a clean slate was in order. So three years ago they decided to lease-to-buy a midcentury modern residence in the city's Lake Vista suburb. One embellishment staple of their old neighborhood, however, came with the brick-and-glass structure: a set of copper gas-burning lanterns, affixed to the exterior.

Both were pleased with the effect. According to Ms. Bond, who runs a parenting blog, the flickering natural-gas-fueled beacons "provide an overall sense of warmth. There's that austerity to moderns, which can feel a tad cold," she said. "On a less traditional house, they're a distinct alternative to glaring electric lights.

The 24-7 illumination makes it appear we're always home and the cost is inconsequential."

Yet despite all their charms, gaslights have been typecast as Deep South and Sherlock Holmes-ian props. With origins dating back to 18th-century London, today in the States they're also found in historic districts and upscale enclaves in cities such as Charleston, Savannah, San Diego, Cincinnati, Baltimore, Kansas City, Mo., and in New Orleans, where they're emblematic of the city's haunted aura.

What isn't widely known about them is how economical they can be. Or that they can enhance nearly all building styles, adding subtle drama and focus to entrances, gardens, pool areas and ugly service ways. And for most lantern owners, the 2-to-3-inch flames are seldom extinguished, costing on average \$7 to \$14 a month in gas bills.



The French Market Yoke lantern, in copper, lights New Orleans's French Market. bevolo.com



The copper Coach House lantern works well on New England-style homes. bevolo.com

Constantine Georges, a former federal prosecutor in New Orleans, who owns a circa-1810 Creole cottage, said he installed five gas lamps in his alleyway and courtyard for their cost-efficiency. "They're the cheapest form of lighting," he said, "and the lanterns

complement the *tout ensemble* of it all; they're mood inducers." They also, he said, remain burning when bad weather blacks-out the city's electricity.

With no shortage of natural gas, "It's the 'green'-est lighting on the planet," said Drew Bevolo, owner of the New Orleans-based Bevolo Gas & Electric Lights (since 1945), considered to be the oldest existing copper-lantern hand-crafters in the U.S.

Bevolo's hand-riveted gas lamps—"basically a pilot light with a fancy cover on it," said Mr. Bevolo

—last for decades. "Electric lamps have to be replaced every three to five years," he said. Once an electrician has connected the service to a residence's gas line, homeowners simply have to open the door to their lantern, light a match to the burner tip and, said Mr. Bevolo, it will stay flickering uninterrupted for 50 years. While they're "ambient, not *task* lighting," he added, gas lights can appreciate the value of a home, saving the costs of additional lighting, and yes, interior designers.



The classic French Quarter lantern is a repro of a 1940s original. bevolo.com



The Acadian, from Carolina Lanterns, has a bracket made of black iron. carolinalanterns.com



Paul Costello for The Wall Street Journal

Natural gas-fueled Bevolo lanterns illuminate a side alleyway leading to a courtyard at the circa-1810 Creole cottage of Constantine Georges in the French Quarter of New Orleans.

-- All pictured fixtures can run on natural gas or liquid propane, and can be wall-mounted or hung.

