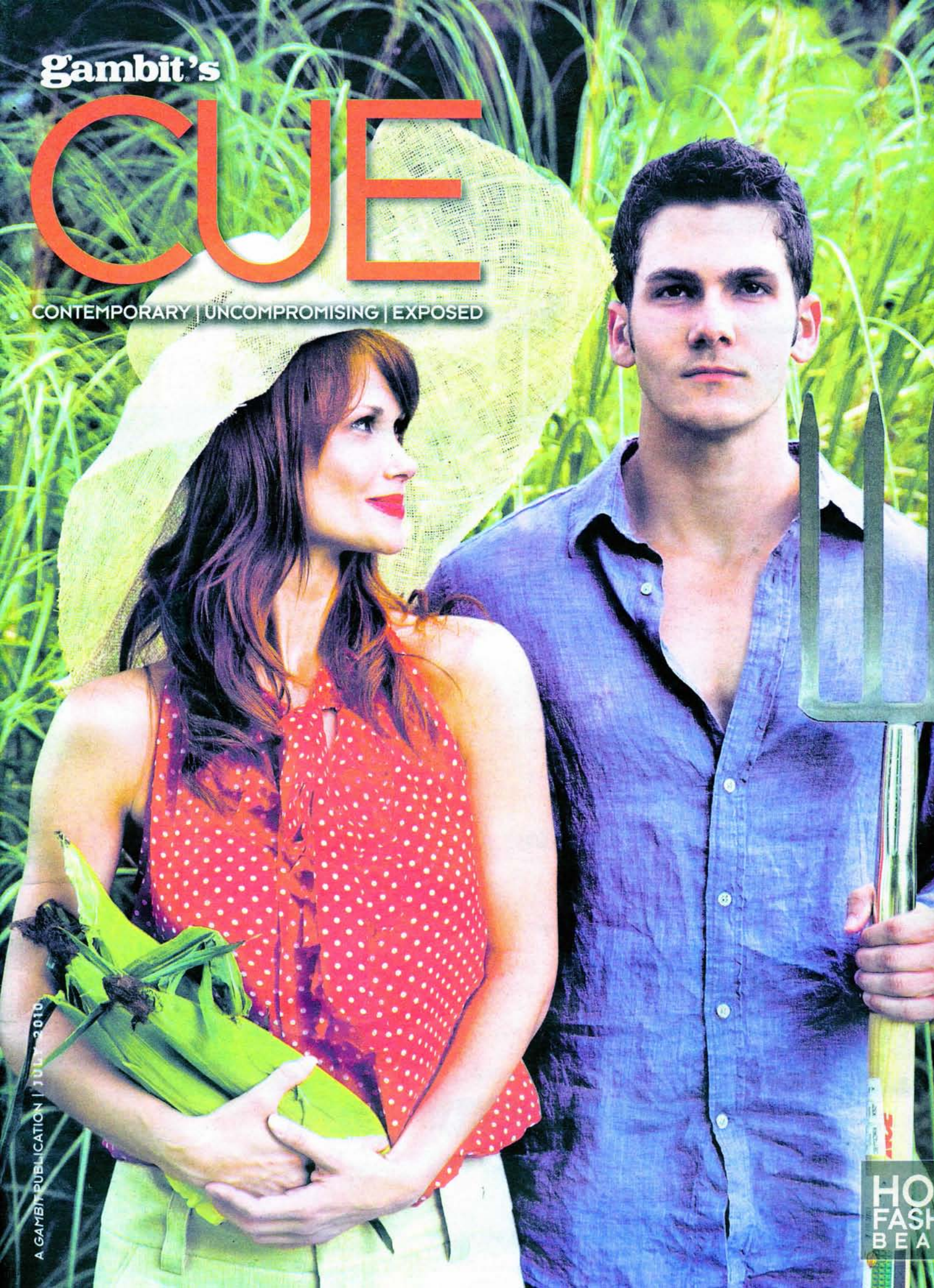


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W BEVOLO IN THE AL STREET SHOP GRANDFATHER BISHED IN 1945.

LIGHTING THE WAY IN THE VIEUX CARRE

BY MARY CROSS | IMAGES BY ABBYPHOTO



Whether driving past the Louisiana Superdome's gleaming, massive roof, gazing up at the St. Louis Cathedral's spires or strolling by Jackson Square's wrought iron fences, it's obvious that New Orleans is a city rich with architectural innovation and visual symbolism. As synonymous with the heart of the city as the fleur de lis, the French Quarter gas lantern has effortlessly exhibited a fusion of form and function since the 1700s. **Bevolo Gas and Electric Lights** (521 Conti St., 318 Royal St., 522-9485; 68467 Hwy. 59, Mandeville, 985-249-6040; www.bevolo.com) has kept the tradition of these gas lanterns burning throughout New Orleans since the company's birth in 1945.

"We're looked upon as a leader in the gas industry,"

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says Patty Palmer, media placement and marketing representative for Bevolo Gas and Electric Lights. The secret behind the company's success is a combination of the craftsmanship and the family bond, which has formed the backbone of the company for four generations.

The Bevolo business originally began as an ambitious venture by "the grandfather of the current company president, Drew Bevolo," Palmer says. An Italian immigrant, Andrew Bevolo Sr. had a knack for encountering figures of mechanical and architectural genius. After arriving in New Orleans, he collaborated with Andrew Higgins in shipyards to create Higgins' renowned World War II landing vessels. Once he became settled within the city as a master craftsman, he honed his coppersmith skills in order to open his own shop creating and repairing light fixtures. Christened Bevolo Metal Crafts, the new shop provided the setting for a meeting between Bevolo and nationally renowned architect A. Hays Town that is now New Orleans legend.

Town was conducting research for designing the School of Architecture at the university now known as the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. Town was strolling through the French Quarter sketching lights when the gas lanterns hanging outside Bevolo's Royal Street shop captured his attention. Town entered the store, turned to Bevolo and said, "Hey, mister, can you make me a light fixture?" Bevolo replied with

what would become the company's slogan: "If you can draw it, I can make it."

Bevolo and Town developed the design for the famous French Quarter lantern, which would eventually earn its place among the city's most iconic monuments. "They're everywhere, from the Cabildo to Jackson Square. We're still based in the Vieux Carre as a company, but most of the business comes from a national capacity," Palmer says.

The little shop on Royal Street has now branched out globally, shipping more than 500 combinations of lights to all 50 states and 28 different countries. The original French Quarter lantern remains the company's most popular product. Bevolo also provides a diverse collection of works, including colonial Williamsburg fixtures, London street lamps and traditional coach house lanterns. In addition to being displayed in prominent hotels and restaurants, Bevolo lights can be spotted flickering in a number of films, such as *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *All the King's Men*, *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*, *Interview with the Vampire* and *The Pelican Brief*, and in several television series, such as MTV's *The Real World* and HBO's *Treme*.

What transforms the lanterns from mere street lamps to handcrafted pieces of utilitarian art is the unmatched method of construction. Coppersmiths trained in traditional metalwork create the lights. "We still have craftsmen who install copper rivets



GAS LANTERNS HAVE ILLUMINATED NEW ORLEANS SINCE THE 1700S.

on each piece. Rivets are the little nails that exhibit major strength as strong bonding agents and sit in the seams of the light," says Palmer. Rivets also contribute to the longevity of Bevolo's lanterns, making them heat resistant.

With its durable lanterns, Bevolo Gas and Electric Lights has a green initiative. The fixtures utilize natural gas, the cleanest fossil fuel, and feature low-burning gas tips. Built with sustainable materials and infused with the latest technology and long-lasting burners, the lanterns are as reliable as they are beautiful.

"They are a lifetime investment, and we never discontinue a product," Palmer says. [C]



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