

Hurricane Lamps

When I was growing up, hurricane lamps were not for decoration. We lived a little bit off the grid, and electricity was sporadic. There were bad storms, and the hurricane lamp was about the only thing that you could depend on. I was pretty amazed by the design at the time, and I still am. Hurricane glass lamps may look simple, but they are an extremely elegant solution. They can keep a fire lit in gale force winds - no small task. For countless lighthouse keepers, fishermen, and all manner of other nautical folks, a hurricane lamp could mean the difference between life and death.

Growing up thinking of hurricane lamps as a pretty rugged type of tool, You can bet that I was surprised seeing hurricane candle holders. I never really associated the design with beauty before. It seemed somehow noble, austere, powerful, but not cute or decorous. Nonetheless, looking at it a second time, I can see that it is. My grandmother loves hurricane candle holders. She loves anything that is made out of glass in organic shapes. She has a pretty drafty house too, so for her hurricane glass candles really do serve a purpose. Normal candles Tend to flicker and smoke in our house, but they don't when behind a protective cover.

I have actually thought about making my own hurricane lamps. I have been taking some glassblowing classes, and have had a chance to experiment with them. A hurricane lamp is actually a deceptively difficult thing to make. The glass is pretty refined. It has to be completely even or else it will not fit into the base of the lamp. It also has to be very thin or else the light will not penetrate undiluted. I'm not saying that it is the most difficult glassmaking project - far from it - but it does require more experience than I have. Nonetheless, I have been working on it.

The best place to get hurricane lamps is in a fishing town. Nowadays, few people actually use kerosene lamps for anything. They have been completely supplanted except as a means of decoration. Nonetheless, the craft is still alive and well in fishing towns all up and down the East Coast. People keep them in their houses, sometimes for generations. What was once a workhorse tool of the nautical trades is now a rare and valued collector's piece. I guess that, as handmade things give way to machine-assembled crafts, people get nostalgic for the old days.