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MAGAZINE  
JUNE 2016



# All in the Family

Through several decades – and multiple generations – Graham’s Lighting Fixtures, 14<sup>th</sup> Colony, and Colony Imports have been mainstays in Tennessee, as well as the industry overall, just like the Graham family has. BY MARK OKUN

**M**y journey with Graham’s Lighting Fixtures began with my introduction to James M. Graham, Jr. at the Memphis showroom location. After just a short time in speaking with him, I knew I was in the company of a gentleman who possesses a heritage seasoned in the lighting industry and the South. He became my personal narrator of the Graham’s story.

Currently in 2016, the Graham family operates retail showrooms in Tennessee and two wholesale channels that feature domestic manufacturing and fine quality imported fixtures from Europe and around the world.

With tremendous humility and great family pride, James Graham, Jr. shared the beginnings of the company. In 1957, the senior James M. Graham – along with his wife, Dottie – started

their business in a small house in Memphis. And that small five-room home is where it all began, eventually growing into the space that it occupies today. This expansion was accomplished through acquisitions of adjacent homes and additions to the properties.

The story, as told to me by Graham, Jr., was riddled with references to the visionary qualities that the elder Graham had. Drawings of future expansions created by the senior Graham, from decades-old planning, have come to life, as time has passed, and that vision has extended beyond the footprint of the original property.

Sitting with Graham, Jr. and listening to his accounting of the lighting industry from his earliest recollections until today was a history lesson and provided a great understanding of the growth of our industry I won’t forget.



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**TOP:** Clinton Smith, author of *Verandah* magazine's new book *The Romance of Flowers*, was the guest of honor at a book-signing event held at Graham's Lighting Fixtures showroom.

**ABOVE:** Inside Graham's Lighting Fixtures showroom, homeowners and interior designers can find a wide selection of styles from traditional to contemporary.

**THE SHOWROOM**

The story begins with James M. Graham, Sr. — there are three of them — and his vision to build a company. Graham's lighting is rooted in manufacturing that started when Jimmie Graham, after working all day as a salesman, would come home and make lights that his wife, Dottie, would sell.

This humble start developed into a major Memphis lighting retail business that focuses on offering both new and vintage lighting, is a domestic manufacturer of lighting fixtures distributed by retailers' nationwide, and is an importer of quality

European lighting. Aside from an expansive showroom that displays lighting from all of the leading manufacturers, Graham's boasts some very beautiful vintage pieces.

The uniqueness did not end there. Many showrooms today are expanding into furniture, mirrors, lighting, and accessories. Graham's has separated itself from the pack with the addition of the "outdoor living" category, a grouping of a broad variety of items that will enhance any garden or patio space. This venture has been very welcomed and well-received by its customer base. The outdoor living selection is more than just a picnic table and some chairs, however. The outdoor furniture selected by Graham's rivals any interior furniture piece in looks and quality.

The Graham family has imposed their exposure to decades of style and design into the pieces that will make an outdoor space a functional and beautiful part of the home. Including these pieces in the store permits designers and homeowners to build a complete space under the stars. It allows customers to see the impact that a lantern or the landscape lighting has with the furniture it will illuminate. From bar stools to fire pits and everything in between, this is another way Graham's impacts the market.

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In the days of computer-aided machining and 3D printers, Fourteenth Colony foregoes the new methods and completes all the processes that go into the production of their fixtures by hand.



**TOP LEFT:** Graham's product offerings run the gamut from outdoor furniture, mirrors, and tables to decorative accessories and lighting.

**TOP RIGHT:** Freshly made lanterns are awaiting the next step in the manufacturing process at the Fourteenth Colony factory.

**ABOVE:** At the Fourteenth Colony factory, every piece of the brand's lighting fixtures is made by hand.

#### THE FACTORY

The desire to bring quality to the Tennessee marketplace is part of everything the Graham family does. They also share the mindset of quality and excellence with other lighting retailers across the country in the form of its manufacturing business, Fourteenth Colony Lighting.

The factory is headed up by James M. Graham III, or as everyone calls him, Bo. When you enter this family-owned lighting factory, you are immediately greeted by the wagging tails of the company dogs as you take a step back on the manufacturing timeline. In the days of computer-aided machining and 3D printers, Fourteenth Colony foregoes the new methods and completes all the processes

that go into the production of their fixtures by hand. This requires using many abandoned skills of tinsmiths, coppersmiths, and blacksmiths who are hand-cutting, bending, and shearing the sheets of brass, copper, and steel into smaller manageable sizes before forming them into shapes.

The spinning process that takes a flat sheet of material and turns it into a dome or another round three-dimensional shape is mesmerizing. The material is spinning at a high rpm, and the operator takes a variety of tools - known as spoons - and applies pressure to push the material into a wooden mold to create the shape. Other than trimming the edge, no material was removed; it is only shaped.

Watching the assemblers take all of those pieces and then utilizing flame-heated hand irons in various shapes and assemble the components to make a lighting fixture is just magical. This delicate workmanship is not a skill for the novice, although these experts make it look easy.

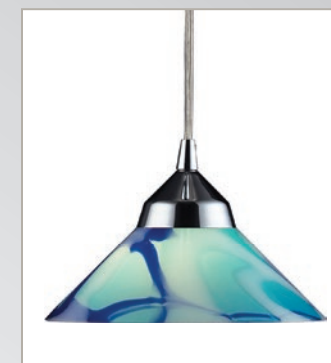
The proud members of the Fourteenth Colony team have been doing these processes to create beautiful lighting for years, some of them for decades. Everything from start to finish is done by hand by people who know and appreciate the art form they are creating. The pride in craftsmanship extends from standard products in the line



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**ABOVE:** Due to the hand-craftsmanship at this domestic factory, a lot of business is in custom orders.

**RIGHT:** Along with new fixtures from all of the major manufacturers, Graham's also offers one-of-a-kind vintage pieces.

**BELOW:** The signage in the Fourteenth Colony factory gives a nod to the company's roots.



to custom pieces that have been used by the film industry; some hang in the U.S. Capitol building as well as in many celebrities' residences.

**THE IMPORTER**

The next chapter in the Graham's Lighting story continues with another arm of the company, Colony Imports. In the early days, the family was associated by business and friendship with the late Harry Gilham, a pioneer and selfless teacher of all things related to the lighting industry. The Graham family members were customers of, and suppliers to, Gilham's World Imports business. Based on the close bonds formed between the two families, the Grahams learned the import business.

Today you can almost detect a cringe when someone uses the word "imported" lighting fixtures, but this was not true of Colony Imports. Sourced from the finest makers in Spain and Italy, Colony Imports brought in quality pieces with an outstanding presence to sell to retailers looking for a refined and sophisticated look. The Colony Imports division is shepherded by Bob Myers, an industry veteran who has one eye on design and another on the customer. His day-to-day activities include working with clients, which keeps him on the cutting edge of the desirable aesthetics that people in the design community are searching for. Myers brings this knowledge to the European manufacturers and creates beautiful bespoke lighting, or he can search out an exclusive vintage fixture that is truly a one of a kind.

Everything that Graham's Lighting Fixtures does is founded on style and elegance. These principles extend into the showroom's advertising and its community. As an advertiser in the home design and décor magazine *Veranda*, Graham's was tapped to host a book-signing for the newly published *The Romance of Flowers* by editor-in-chief Clinton Smith. The book-signing provided the opportunity for a local fundraising event benefitting one of Cathy Graham's charities, "A Way Out." The event featured local floral designers and nationally known chocolatier Philip Ashley Rix, who is a neighbor. Giving back to the community is part of the Graham's Lighting philosophy.

Always striving to be the best of class in every category they participate in, Graham's Lighting, Fourteenth Colony, and Colony Imports are all tremendous accomplishments that Jimmy Graham, Sr. would be proud of today. ❖

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