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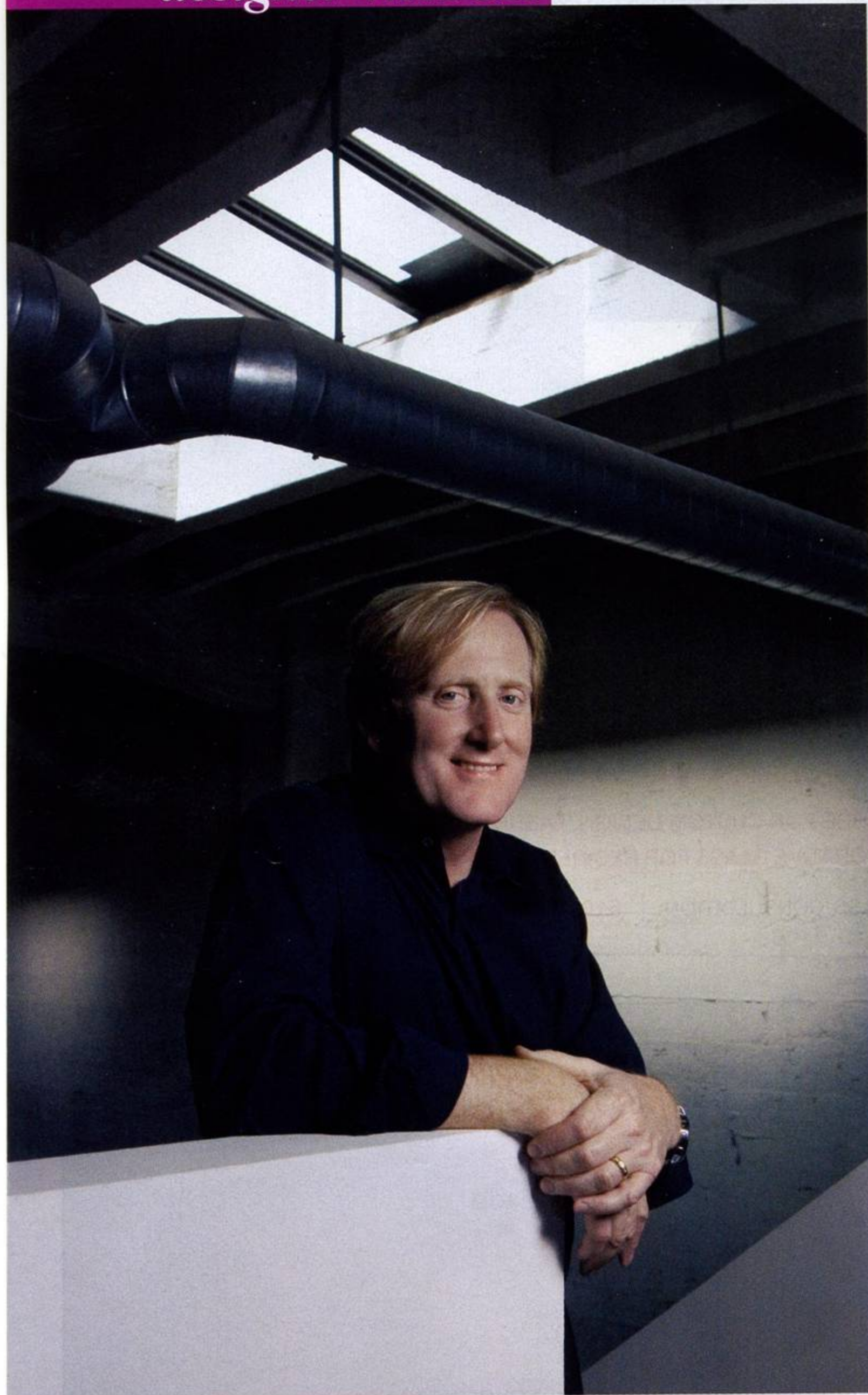
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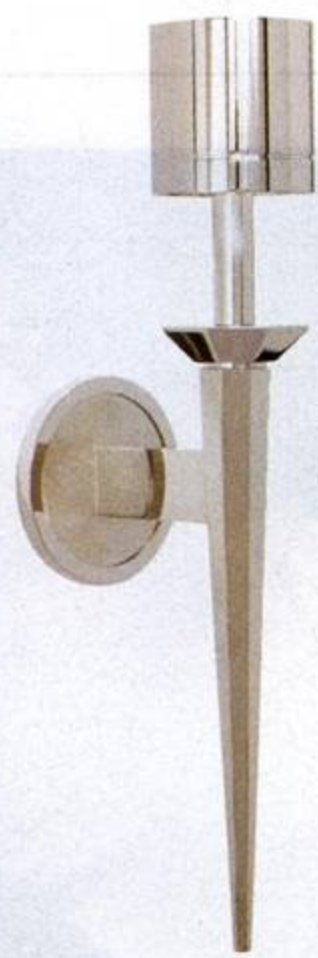


LIGHT FANTASTIC

Jonathan Browning delves into the past to find a fresh take on lighting.

BY LYDIA LEE

When Viennese lighting company Kalmar wanted to bring back its designs from the turn of the century, it placed a call to the other side of the globe—to San Francisco lighting designer Jonathan Browning. “I think they saw a kindred spirit in my aesthetic,” says Browning. “I try to walk the tightrope between rococo decoration and serious industrial design.” Working from old vellum drawings (his drafting skills come from studying architecture at SCI-Arc), he re-envisioned the lights in luxe materials like cast bronze, rosewood and lead crystal.



The commission was a joy for Browning, who launched his business four years ago to fill the demand for classically inspired, well-crafted lighting amid a sea of cheap reproductions (“If I see one more Greene & Greene mica lantern knockoff, I’m going to pull my hair out,” he says). He works primarily in cast bronze, which results in pieces that are precisely detailed as well as virtually indestructible. In his former life, Browning spent 16 years creating retail environments for Esprit, Gap, Levi’s and Guess; then, as the executive vice president of design at Starwood Hotels, he directed the look of properties such as the W Hotel in Mexico City. “I would fall over all the gorgeous furniture and wall coverings in the showrooms, but I got frustrated when it came to lighting,” he says.

Jonathan Browning gives designs from the early 1900s a fresh spin, including the Zylinderzug adjustable-height chandelier (far left) and Keule sconce (left). ABOVE: The Vincennes sconce is from his Particulière line.

Just four months after he set out on his own, Browning received validation when Tiffany & Co. purchased his Garonne chandelier—which was inspired by a pair of hammered-silver candlesticks—to illuminate its San Francisco jewelry department. Today, Browning is represented by Holly Hunt and De Sousa Hughes, and recently opened a new SoMa studio. Holding one of his newest designs, an outdoor light that resembles a pedimented building, he says, “I want them to outlast me and end up in an auction house.” ■

