



Trade secrets

Chandeliers

In the first of a new series, an expert sheds light on the colourful world of hanging glass ornamentation



Fabio and Maria Bergomi (above) outside Rainbow London, where the chandeliers range from charming single-lamp reproductions at £175 to an 18th-century piece with 18 lamps – ideal for a ballroom and worth £15,000. The shop (top left) also sells colourful droplets that can be attached to any chandelier (top right) for dramatic effect – see over.

Fabio Bergomi's west London chandelier shop, Rainbow London, sparkles with the reflected light of thousands of glass and crystal prisms, droplets and beads. When he first set up the shop four years ago, he sold mainly French furniture and other forms of lighting. But he soon realised that chandeliers were chic again, and now concentrates on them. Fabio sells both originals (sourced in Italy and France by Maria, his mother, who's been in the antiques business for 25 years) and reproductions. 'In a modern setting you can make a statement with one chandelier,' says Fabio. 'Originals are more expensive, but many reproductions have the same effect.'

Most of Rainbow London's chandeliers date from the 1850s to the 1930s – the oldest is a Genoese design from 1817 – but all are restored and rewired before they leave the shop. Two years ago, the family began to create their own

chandeliers, using antique designs as inspiration. The larger ones are made by a company in Florence; the small ones, with about 2,000 beads, are hand-assembled by Maria herself, at home near Lake Garda. Each chandelier takes about two days to make.

The shop's range has recently expanded to include glass droplets handmade in Venice, in three shapes and eight colours. 'We were inspired by the Venetian and Florentine chandeliers from the Twenties, which were the first to include coloured glass,' he says. Fabio only reproduces authentic colours popular in the Twenties such as amethyst and amber which produce a glorious effect when added to a chandelier.

Rainbow London's decorative droplets have become a favourite with customers wishing to update a chandelier, add a contemporary edge to a classic piece, or simply create an effect for a ▶

special occasion. 'Transforming a chandelier is a simple operation,' says Fabio. 'You just attach the droplets carefully to existing chains. I prefer to make a symmetrical arrangement but it's a matter of personal taste.'

Fabio advises simple steps to avoid disaster: 'Make sure you move around the chandelier, don't twist it as you attach the droplets, and lay a thick blanket on the floor beneath you so that droplets won't shatter if they fall! Before you start, make a rough sketch to keep track of what you're doing and always work from the inside out. Working on a chandelier is tiring on hands and arms, so take frequent rests, and when you're finished, clean off any fingerprint marks with an ordinary bathroom cleaner dabbed on a soft cloth, then wipe with a clean, damp cloth.'

And, with so many chandeliers to care for, Fabio knows a thing or two about maintaining glitter. 'If we get a really filthy one in, we spray it with a bath cleaning-mousse, then shower it off,' he explains. 'But usually caring for a chandelier means regular dusting with an ostrich-feather duster and cleaning the crystal now and then. We get out a ladder and clean each droplet with a cloth sprayed with window cleaner or vinegar.' It might be time-consuming, but it's obviously a labour of love.

Droplets by post

Rainbow London's Murano glass droplets (right) come in deep blue, aquamarine, green, red, pink, amber, amethyst and clear. Small teardrops (5.5cm) cost £2 each; large teardrops (7.5cm), £2.50 each; lollipop droplets (5.5cm), £2.50 each. They are available by mail order; p&p for up to 10 droplets is £2 per order. Rainbow London is at 329 Lillie Road, London SW6. Call 020 7385 1323 or visit www.rainbowlondon.com.



Transform a chandelier step by step

Fabio chose red droplets because it's such a festive colour. A single colour produces a more stylish result, but if you prefer a combination of colours, the effect tends to be quite lavish.

You will need

- A sturdy pair of steps
- A pair of small, long-nosed pliers
- As many droplets as you want to use.

Before you start, set up your steps, making sure they are secure – if possible, have someone hold them for you. Move them around as you work round the chandelier by degrees.

- 1 Hold up a droplet and decide on its position.
- 2 Using the pliers, twist the droplet wire and hook it over the chandelier wire. Be careful not to tug on the chandelier.
- 3 Twist the droplet wire downwards until it is secure. Don't twist too tightly – you may want to remove it later.
- 4 As an alternative, you could use lollipop droplets to give an altogether different effect from the teardrops.