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THE GOTHAM STORY

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gotham®



GOTHAM'S ORIGINAL  
CORPORATE HEADQUARTERS  
37-01 31st Street  
Long Island City, NY

NYC Municipal Archives

Gotham was founded in 1938 in New York City by Harry Gerstel, a devotee of well-known architect and lighting pioneer Richard Kelly. Gerstel was driven by the convergence of two significant trends of the day...



...one was the advancing technology of electric lamps, which were quickly replacing gas lamps. The other was the growing international influence of modernist architects, whose preference for minimalist interiors called for light sources that were hidden from view.

Gerstel and his team saw an opportunity to build an organization that would optimize new sources and create the kind of lighting alternatives design professionals were looking for.

From the beginning Gotham concentrated on developing luminaires that would enhance the appearance of modern spaces without calling attention to themselves. The company's focus on architectural integration, optical performance, reliability and innovative manufacturing processes resulted in Gotham quickly becoming one of the most respected names in architectural lighting.

The firm's working relationship with Richard Kelly's office established an extraordinarily high standard in downlighting that became Gotham's trademark and has served as its heritage ever since.



**HARRY GERSTEL** Gotham began circa 1938 in the Long Island City section of the Borough of Queens, NYC. Harry Gerstel was the idea man and sales department; Milton Nebenzol his financial partner. Together they set their sights on revolutionizing the application of light in commercial environments. Harry understood that modernist architecture called for a new approach to lighting, and he was in touch with advancements in lighting sources that were on the horizon. Harry put two and two together.



**RICHARD KELLY** A close associate of Harry Gerstel in the early years of Gotham, Richard Kelly was a leading architect and the pioneer of lighting design. Kelly's principles about the relationship between perception and the understanding of light and space were based on a belief that the brain processes visual information by filtering past experiences and intuition and connecting them immediately to our emotions. Kelly's categorizations of light—such as “focal glow,” “ambient luminescence,” and “play of brilliants”—have become his greatest legacy, quoted often in books, articles and lectures.

## GOTHAM'S POST-WAR HEYDAY

During World War II construction slowed in the New York market, and Gotham shifted its attention to supporting the war effort by making electronic components for military radios. However in the late 1940s the company was back in the lighting business—in a big way.

The war's end ushered in a new era in architecture, placing increased emphasis on the de-ornamentation of interior spaces. Many contemporary architects rose to prominence during this period, and Gotham rose with them because of its reputation for uniquely appropriate lighting solutions.

During this time the company was widely known for its firsts. In 1957, Gotham was awarded a U.S. patent for the low-brightness recessed downlight. Again in 1958, Harry Gerstel designed and patented the “recessed accent light” that was easily adjusted, providing vertical aiming up to 45° and a full 360° horizontal rotation. Other significant optical innovations included small-aperture recessed downlights with ellipsoidal optics, precision-machined die-cast baffles, and velvet black finishes to improve optical control. Gotham was also the first to use deep-finned heat radiating socket assemblies to increase lamp life.

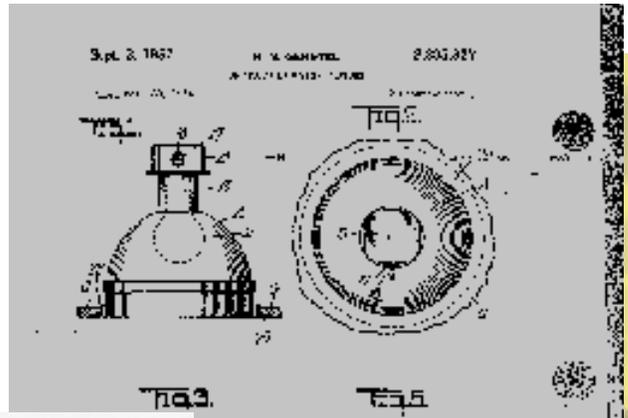
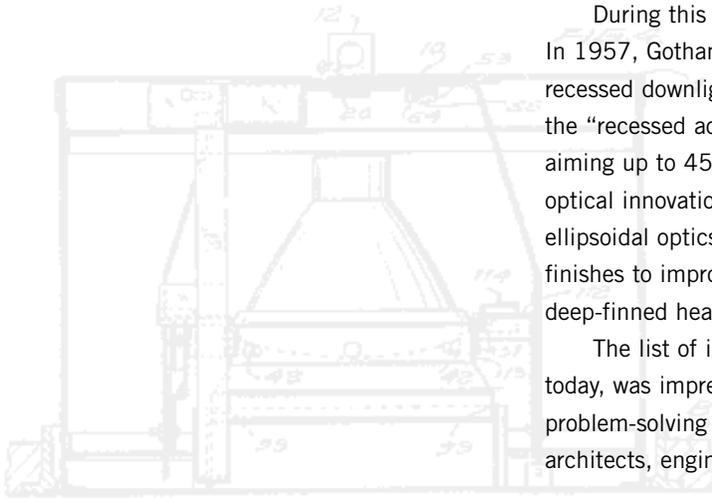
The list of innovations, many of which are used in various forms even today, was impressive. All these products were born of Gotham's unique problem-solving mentality and its close, collaborative relationship with top architects, engineers and lighting consultants of the day.

Oct. 7, 1958

H. M. GERSTEL

RECESSED ADJUSTABLE ACCENT LIGHT

Filed Oct. 29, 1954



June 1, 1965

H. M. GERSTEL ET AL  
LIGHTING FEATURE

3,187,174

Filed Dec. 7, 1960

2 Sheets-Sheet 1

FIG. 1

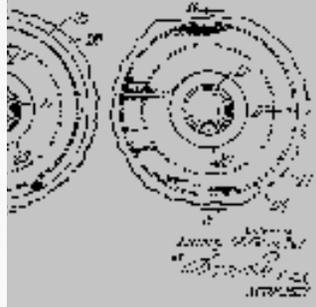
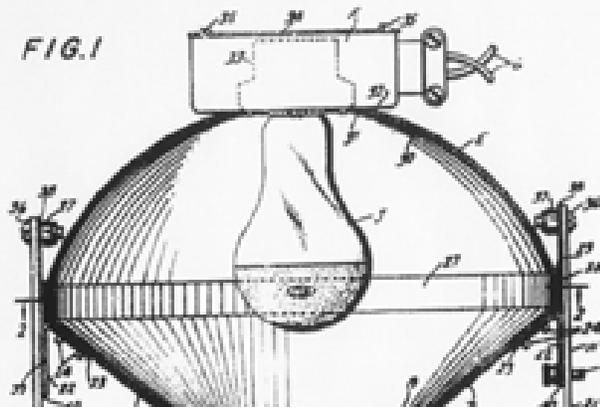


FIG. 2

FIG. 3

FIG. 4

FIG. 5



FIG. 6

FIG. 7

FIG. 8

## GONE AND BACK

In 1970 Harry Gerstel sold Gotham to the ITT Indoor Lighting Group, and within two years ITT moved the company from New York to their Vermilion, Ohio headquarters, where it was joined with two other acquired companies, Art Metal and Wakefield. The new management team saw fit to de-emphasize the marketing of Gotham products to the specifying community, and the name fell from sight.

Fortunately, in the late 1970s Lithonia Lighting's Hi-Tek Group was exploring the idea of moving into the HID downlighting business. Market studies indicated a growing demand for these products. And since Hi-Tek was already a leading supplier of HID industrial products, it seemed a simple matter to transition from one market to the other. The company launched its Contemporary Architectural Lighting (CAL) line of downlighting products, but within a short time realized that this transition would not be so simple. Lithonia decided the best path would be to acquire a firm with an established presence in this highly sophisticated market.

By 1980 Lithonia learned that the ITT Indoor Lighting Group was available, and it purchased the Group and all of its assets, including what had been the Gotham product lines.



Early Gotham installations in NYC included the following landmark buildings. **FROM LEFT** McGraw Hill and Celanese, CBS, Seagrams, and Lever House



McGraw Hill & Celanese: Ezra Stoller ©Esto  
CBS: Courtesy of Avery Architectural Library  
Seagrams: Ezra Stoller ©Esto  
Lever House: Office for Metropolitan History

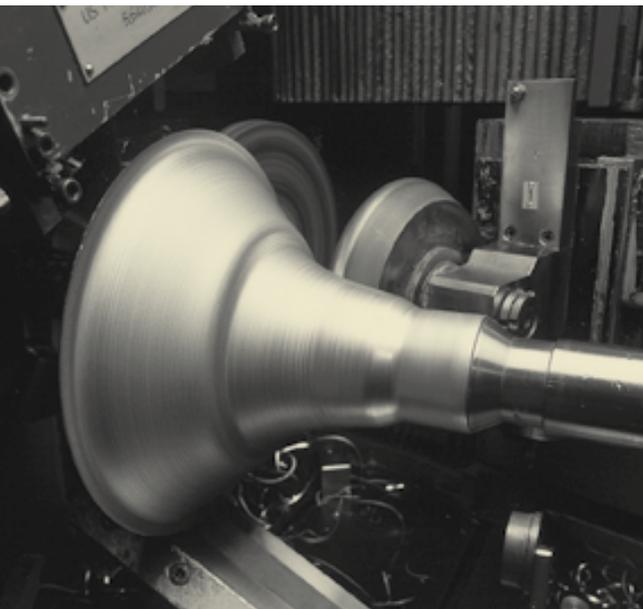
## A NEW GOTHAM EMERGES

Lithonia knew that in order to reestablish the Gotham name to its rightful position within the design community, it was imperative that its products be recognized as high-quality specification grade downlighting. As a result, they discarded all Wakefield products, and kept for their new Gotham family only those ITT offerings that had been well-received by specifiers.

Recognizing the importance of continuing in the Gotham tradition of stringent quality standards, in 1981 Lithonia purchased Major Metal Forming in Chicago, at the time the newest and largest anodizing facility in the United States. Over the next several years Lithonia invested millions of dollars in the facility to ensure that the quality of Gotham downlighting reflectors manufactured there would be the finest in the industry.

Meanwhile, Lithonia's newly formed Lighting Technology Group was hard at work to re-energize the heritage of downlighting innovation that had for so many years been Gotham's signature.

Optical experts began focusing on minimizing the impact of reflected lamp image, or "flash," visible from downlights. Importantly, this led to development of the patented Bounding Ray Optical Principle™, a means by which to develop downlighting that exhibits far greater optical control, increased efficiency, and a uniform low brightness aperture—regardless of source.





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