

# A HERTER ARCHETYPE

**'The Sunflower lantern is an archetype to the style that Christian Herter was to develop'**

The Herter Brothers were well respected for their crafted furniture design in the Aesthetic style, the European equivalent of the Art Nouveau movement. The story of the Herter Brothers signifies the shift of power from Europe to America. The Herter Brothers trained within German cabinetmakers workshop followed by a professional European tour, and finally immigrated to New York (Gustav Herter in 1848 and Christian Herter in 1859). The Herter Brother where part of successful American firms like Kimbel & Cabus and Tiffany, and their works can be found in the finest museums in the world.

The Herter Brothers were artisans in the old style, their products had attributes that derive from English design mingled with elements of French Neo-Grec characteristics, and with Moorish, classical or Renaissance forms and motifs, often using rich material and finishes. In 1869, Christian Herter became convinced that the Oriental style was something to examine closely (Frankel, 1994). Christian Herter would experiment with Japanese and other oriental styles for the rest of his life (see figure 1). The Europeans on the other hand would not overcome some



FIG. 1

Fig. 1. Designed by Christian Herter, executed by Kiritsu Kosho Kaisha, Tokyo. Vase (one of a pair; far left). 1883. From Illustrated Catalogue of Japanese Art Exhibits at Foreign Exhibitions (Boston, 1883). Courtesy, The Winterthur Library, Del., Printed Book and Periodical Collection.

of their dependence on the old style until the 1890s, twenty years later. This is a conceptual shift, that Herter Brothers had undergone from the Beaux-Arts thinking which depends on highly structured layout relative to the Japanese free-flowery layout style.



FIG. 2

Fig. 2. Herter Brothers. Turkish Room. John D. Spreckels residence, San Francisco. Photograph, 1900. From *The Wasp* 67 January 6, 1912), pg. 15. San Francisco Public Library, San Francisco History Room, San Francisco Archives.

This conceptual shift was not only part of the changing taste that the public experienced, but a methodological enterprise that experimented with different styles from Japan and the Orient. Christian Herter worked in different styles and media designing unique art. The 'Sunflower Lantern' was part of those experiments.

In 1872, Christian Herter designed sixteen bronze lanterns and posts for the Tyler-Davidson Fountains in Cincinnati, Ohio (see figure 3).

That period of the mid-1870s and early-1880s witnessed an immense vogue for Japanese decorative art of all kinds. It is during this time that he experimented with several preliminary designs. One of those designs still survives is the bronze Sunflower Lantern believed to be designed around that period.

Fig. 3. Designed by Christian Herter. 'The Tyler Davidson Fountains given by Mr. Henry Probasco', by William F. Poole, Robert Clarke & Co Publishers, Cincinnati, Ohio 1872.



FIG. 3

It has six-ribbed structure similar to the six-ribbed design of the Tyler-Davidson Fountain lanterns. It also has the fundamental principle of the division of parts.

This solid bronze Sunflower Lantern is divided into two parts, which the top body of lantern, the upper section is situated on the central axis of the main body.

**The Sunflower Lantern is an archetype to the style that Christian Herter was to develop.**

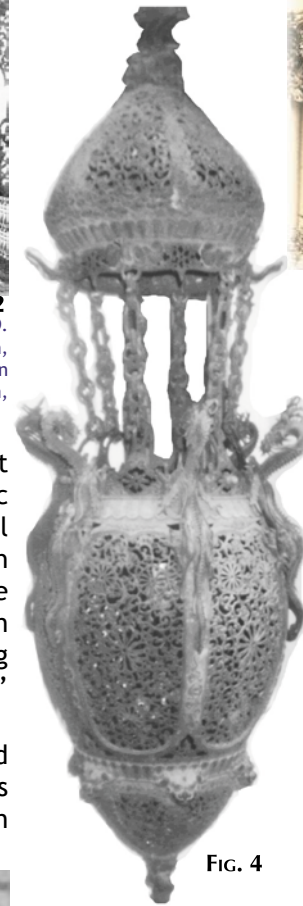


FIG. 4

Fig. 4. Designed by Christian Herter. Sunflower lantern, estimated date 1870, private collection.

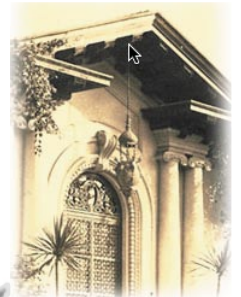


FIG. 5

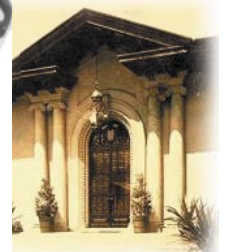


FIG. 6

Fig. 5, 6. El Mirasol Estate. Santa Barbara, California. Built in 1909, this Herter family estate was dedicated to the legacy of Christian Herter. The Sunflower lantern displayed above entry to front mansion.

Although it is riveted in the Japanese style, it has some unique features that differentiates it from other Japanese works.

The lantern in its overall shape is Moorish in style similar to other 'teardrop lanterns', intersected by six 'three-claw' (mystical royal) dragons that divide the piece at 60-degree angles. The teardrop form is supporting a dome-like structure with six Indian-style (modern) elephant's tusks support unique 'hinged' chain-links that the

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dragon's claws hold at the other end. This style of combination is part of Herter's style of blending designs for which he became famous. This pattern would later inverse itself and the sunflower would take the all-dominant role and be dispersed in a Japanese-style flower arrangement.



FIG. 7

Fig. 7. Designed by Christian Herter. Sunflower lantern, estimated date approx. 1870, Private Collection.

However, the Sunflower lantern as a source of inspiration goes further. In fact Christian Herter received patents for twelve different lighting fixtures in September and October 1875 (see Note). One which is especially important is an unusual hanging lamp from 1875 patent no 8,701 (fig. 8) with a square form encasing a colored-glass globe within looks surprisingly modern in appearance, resulting from a simple overall concept.

The metal supports that further embellish the piece are a reduction of the Sunflower lantern's style of dragon and elephants. The square lamp has at the top corner of each square has a hook that resembles the dragon curvatures in the Sunflower lantern. Added embellishment takes the form of four brass rings, held in the mouths of stylized dragons, suspended from the bottom of the fixture that have

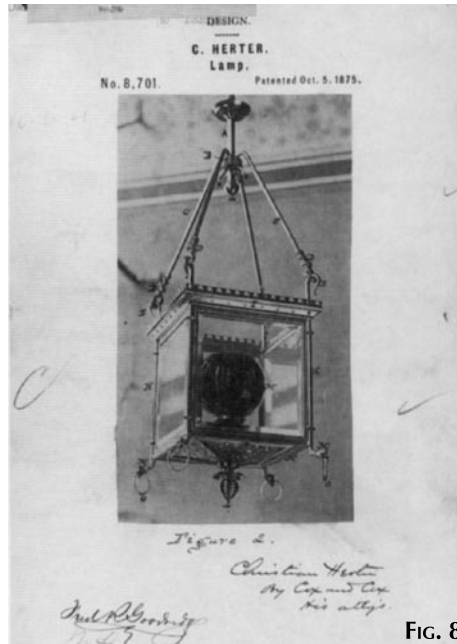


FIG. 8

Fig. 8. Designed by Christian Herter, Lamp Design patent no 8701 October 5, 1875, National Archives Washington, D.C.

replacing the Sunflower lantern's elephant tusks that carry the rings.

The 'Sunflower Lantern' in a twist that only history can devise, reemerged after Christian Herter death in 1883.

In 1905, his wife Mary Herter moved to Santa Barbara, California, shortly thereafter built the new Herter family estate called the 'El Mirasol' (*Flower in the Sun*).



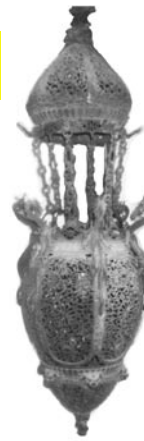
FIG. 9

Fig. 9. El Mirasol Estate. Santa Barbara, California. Built in 1909, this Herter family estate was dedicated to the legacy of Christian Herter.

This estate was the showcase for artwork of the Herter family. The Sunflower Lantern was transported to California together with other Herter Brothers masterworks for this estate.

The Lantern's visual pattern, as a logical inspirational step of inversion, was shown in the sunflower motif decoration of the El Mirasol Herter mansion.

This unique lantern that stimulated Christian Herter to design other pieces (like the lamp from 1875), was hung on the mansion's front entrance.



This property was decorated by their son, Albert Herter and his wife Adele Herter, both well respected artists. It was converted into a luxury hotel in 1914, and the Sunflower lantern remained at this property until 1969.



FIG. 10



FIG. 11

Fig. 10. Designed by Albert Herter, El Mirasol Hotel Keychain (back-side sunflower). Private Collection. Albert Herter converted this five acre family estate into a luxury hotel in 1914.

Fig. 11. Designed by Christian Herter, Sunflower motif wallpaper. Interiors of the El Mirasol Hotel. Santa Barbara, California, 1969. Herter received several patents for wallpaper designs.



### Bibliography

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### Notes:

Christian Herter design patents for lighting devices, nos. 8,605 (Sept. 7, 1875), 8,694-701, 8,706, 8,707 (Oct. 5), 8,748 (Oct. 26). United States Department of Commerce, Patent and Trademark Office. Four of the patents were witnessed by Charles Atwood, an architect in Herter Brothers employ, and seven were witnessed by Mary Miles, Christian Herter's mother-in-law.

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