



By Barrymore Laurence Scherer

Émile Gallé, Louis Majorelle, and other exponents of *le style de l'art nouveau*.

Through the pierced atrium ceiling, a handsome skylight illuminates these treasures, supplemented by another forest of chandeliers: early twentieth-century fixtures of glowing cameo glass and curvilinear bronze mingle with an array of mid-nineteenth-century gasoliers by Cornelius and Company, their frosted and etched globe shades held aloft by elaborate, leafy branches of bright gilt brass.

We have entered the Ophir Gallery, domain of its soft-spoken founder, Jack Ophir, and his infectiously loquacious son and partner,

Edo. For three decades astute collectors, interior designers, and museum curators have come here, as have celebrities such as *The Book of Mormon* co-creator Trey Parker, film director Ron Howard, and Kiss front man Paul Stanley.

Prior to his reincarnation as grand seigneur of Ophir Gallery, Jack was a successful manufacturer of women's apparel. During the early 1970s he helped his wife, Thea, open a Manhattan antiques shop, and when the couple moved to Bergen County, New Jersey, they relocated Thea's shop to Englewood, where she ran it until 1984. Jack had long been interested in art nouveau and in the works of Tiffany Studios so

he eventually decided to open a gallery specializing in that field by closing the antiques shop and reopening it as the gallery you see today.

Strolling through the collection, I stop before a highly detailed bronze Indian on horseback mounted on a base of polished petrified wood. "At first glance you might think it's American," Jack says, "but in fact it's by the Viennese sculptor Carl Kauba." Kauba excelled at American western themes—cowboys, buffalo, and exceptionally dramatic Plains Indian subjects. The irony, explains Jack, "is that according to most authorities, Kauba never visited America. He modeled all his Indians from photographs." Edo points out a subtle point that apparently eluded Kauba: "He sculpted his horses meticulously, right down to the horseshoes. But Native Americans didn't shoe their horses."

In contrast to this rugged Austro-Americana, are examples of Agathon Léonard's graceful dancers in gilt bronze, light glinting off the minutely crimped textures of the sculpted drapery. There's also one of Larche's signature pieces, a superb gilt-bronze table lamp in the evanescent form of the celebrated American dancer Loïe Fuller in terpsichorean flight, its two light bulbs concealed in her billowing scarves.

On both floors, one's eyes dart from one beautiful object to another—Gallé cameo glass, art



The Ophir Gallery: Veterans of nouveau

Music ought to accompany your entry to this neoclassical edifice in downtown Englewood, New Jersey. Stirring, scintillating music full of exotic color like the sonorous orchestral waves of Rimsky-Korsakov's *Scheherazade*. The building, with its dignified columns, housed a bank in the 1920s. Today, the bronze tellers' cages and bankers' desks have been replaced by a magnificent trove of art and furniture that distinguishes one of the nation's chief purveyors of art nouveau style. On the floor where mortgages and savings accounts were once negotiated stands a forest of pedestals, some of exotic wood, others of colored marbles or onyx. Each supports a piece of sculpture—on one, a gilt-bronze maiden gazes skyward from a draped rock, nude but for the wreath of laurel in her hair—the work of French sculptor François-Raoul Larche, fashioned as a large, sumptuous inkwell and entitled *L'idée, Allegrie sur un Rocher*. Another supports a richly patinated bronze cast of Antonin Mercié's lithe *David Vainqueur de Goliath* calmly sheathing the sword he has wrested from the defeated Goliath, upon whose severed head the future psalmist rests his triumphant foot. And among the pedestals and sculpture are sinuously carved and inlaid tables, chairs, and cabinetry by



Fig. 1. Jack and Edo Ophir play chess on a (recently sold) chess set by the "godfather" of Lucite, Charles Hollis Jones (1945–), c. 1970. Photograph by David Zimand.

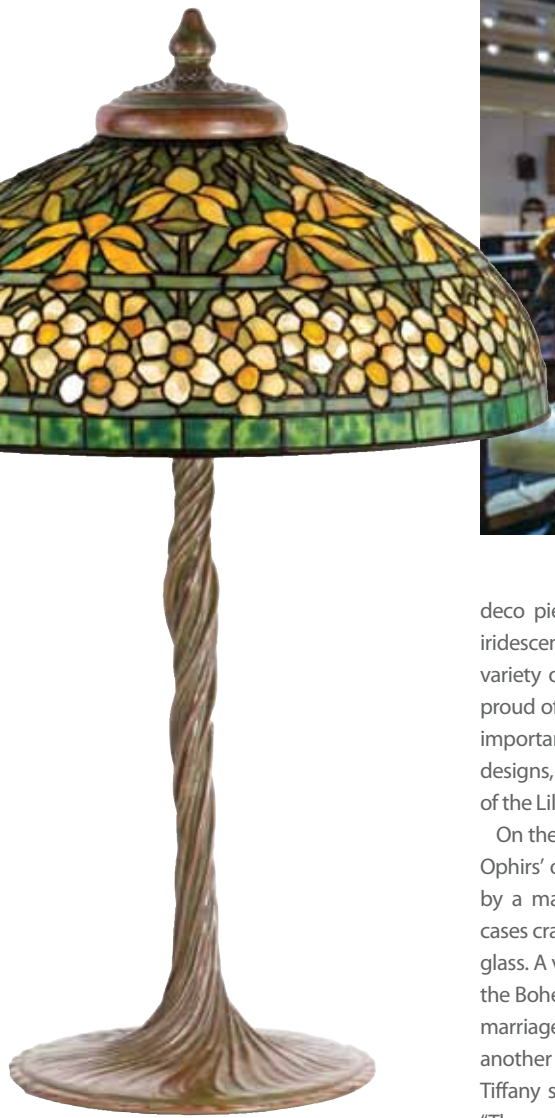
Fig. 2. Dragonfly table lamp by Tiffany Studios, New York c. 1900.

Fig. 3. The Ophir Gallery's interior has a pierced atrium ceiling and a skylight. Photograph by Nadav Havakook.

Fig. 4. *David Vainqueur de Goliath* (David defeats Goliath) by Antonin Mercié (1845–1916). c. 1901.

Fig. 5. *Indian on Horseback* by Carl Kauba (1865–1922), c. 1900.

Fig. 6. Loïe Fuller gilt-bronze table lamp by Raoul Larche (1860–1912), c. 1900.



deco pieces by Daum Nancy and Camille Fauré, iridescent Tiffany vases, and of course the sheer variety of Tiffany lamps. The Ophirs are justifiably proud of that variety, which boasts, among others, important examples of the Dragonfly and Wisteria designs, the Jonquil-Narcissus design, and versions of the Lily lamp with from three to eighteen lights.

On the way to the upstairs gallery, we stop in the Ophirs' office, a comfortable sanctum dominated by a mantelpiece set among ceiling-high bookcases crammed with reference works, bronzes, and glass. A vitrine holds small art glass lampshades by the Bohemian firm of Loetz Witwe, awaiting happy marriages with appropriate Loetz bases. Next to it another vitrine holds small bell- and flower-shaped Tiffany shades, ready to serve the same purpose. "There are probably eighty to a hundred shades

in that cabinet," Jack declares, "and if every one of those shades is valued at around \$2,000, you can see how money-intense the Tiffany field is."

In the gallery upstairs, Jack gingerly removes from a vitrine a Tiffany Studios inkwell of blown Favriile glass in shimmering tones of peach and metallic gold. The melon-form body is mounted in tendrils of gilt bronze, and topped with a cover shaped like a pattypan squash. It is a captivating example of Tiffany's love of organic form. "In forty years this is the first one I have owned," Jack says. "It is so rare that there aren't even original period photos documenting it." Edo adds that, while a damaged example of this inkwell was auctioned by Sotheby's around 2000 or 2001, "it's safe to assume that this one is only the second example to come onto the market in fifteen years."

Fig. 7. Jonquil-Narcissus table lamp by Tiffany Studios, c. 1910.

Fig. 8. A c. 1900 gilt-bronze *Surtout les Vagues* (Embrace) centerpiece by Max Blondat (1872–1925) sits among the stained-glass table lamps and chandeliers in Ophir Gallery. *Havakook photograph.*

Figs. 9. A Nancy Daum glass vase, c. 1925.

Figs. 10. Copper and enameled "Stylized Floral" glass vase by Camille Fauré (1874–1956).

Figs. 11. Enameled copper covered jar by Fauré, 1950s.



From another case, Edo brings out an octagonal enamel-inlaid silver box by Tiffany Furnaces, recently sold to a client for donation to the Dallas Museum of Art.

In addition to his love of early twentieth-century decorative arts, Edo is also expanding the Ophir Gallery's sights to address the interest of many younger collectors in mid-century objects. Thus he has been gathering a selection of turned wood vases by Ed and Philip Moulthrop. "We also have staples of mid-century Scandinavian glass," he says, citing an Apple vase of about 1955 by Ingeborg Lundin. "And we recently sold a killer Lucite chess set, circa 1970, by the person whom I consider the 'godfather' of Lucite, Charles Hollis Jones. These all hit under \$12,000."

While the thrill of the hunt for fine objects naturally inspires any dealer, the Ophirs both consider their greatest inspiration in more humanist terms. "Dealers are ultimately keepers of time, merely temporary custodians of all that we offer," Edo observes. "So what is most important is to create long-term relationships. We are here to hold your hands, to educate and ultimately to satisfy."

Fig. 12. Tea table by Emile Gallé (1846–1904), c. 1900.



Fig. 13. Silver repoussé and enameled box by Tiffany Furnaces recently acquired by a private collector and donated to the Dallas Museum of Art.

Fig. 14. Favrite glass and gilt-bronze inkwell by Tiffany Studios, 1900.

Fig. 15. Turned Lobolly pine vase by Philip Moulthrop.