



Sandra Liotus

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ERIC SLOMANSON





**Sandra Liotus** is a principal of Sandra Liotus Lighting Design, LLC (SLLD), based in Newport, Rhode Island, and New York City. Her accomplishments in custom lighting design for fine art and interiors are recognized internationally. Sandra is a graduate of Carnegie Mellon University (Bachelor of Fine Art in industrial design, 1984), and has 35 years of professional experience. Her interests include traveling, drawing, painting, pets, museums, classic cars, classical music, architecture, preservation, preparing vegetarian meals and entertaining.

Discovering our creativity is eye-opening and invigorating. I first knew I loved art in the second grade, when I had a wonderful nun for an art teacher. I loved combining colors and found purple and blue to be my favorite mix. Sister Patricia raved and raved. My first confidence boost in creativity!

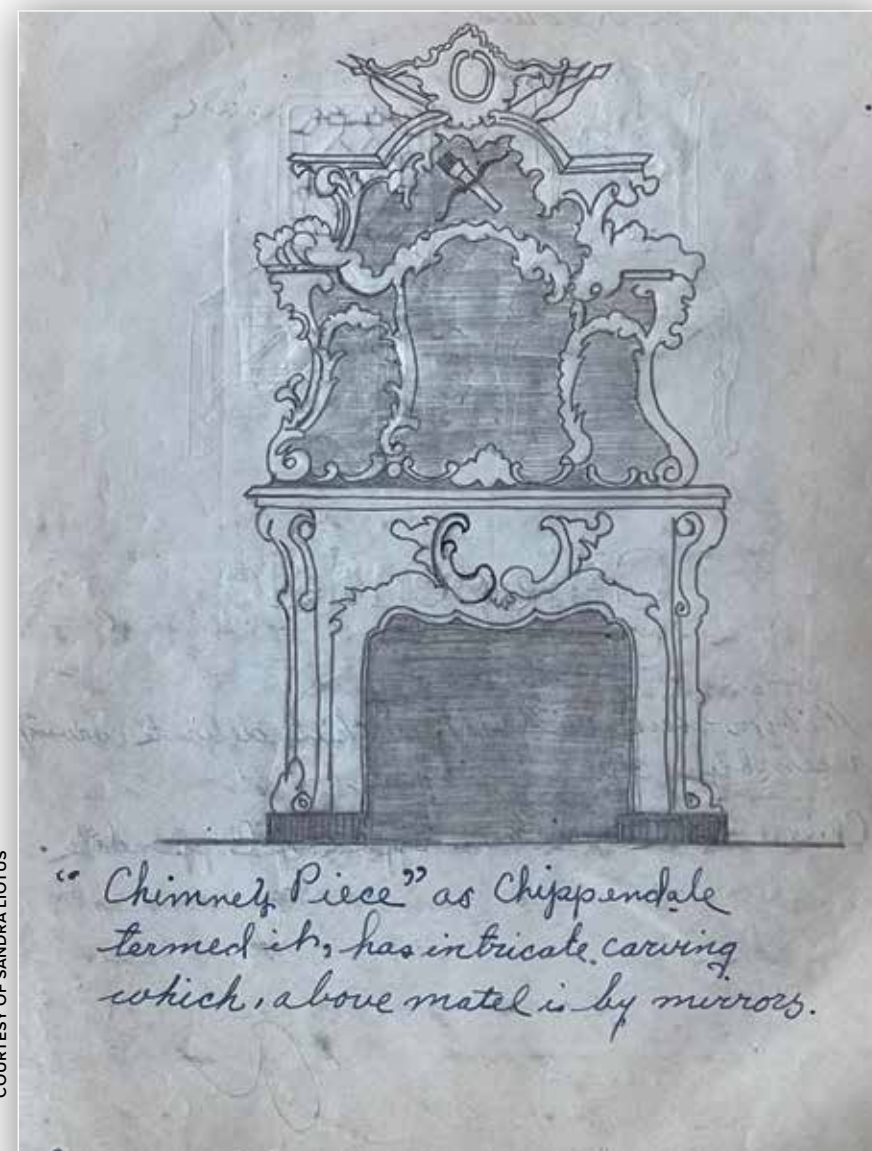
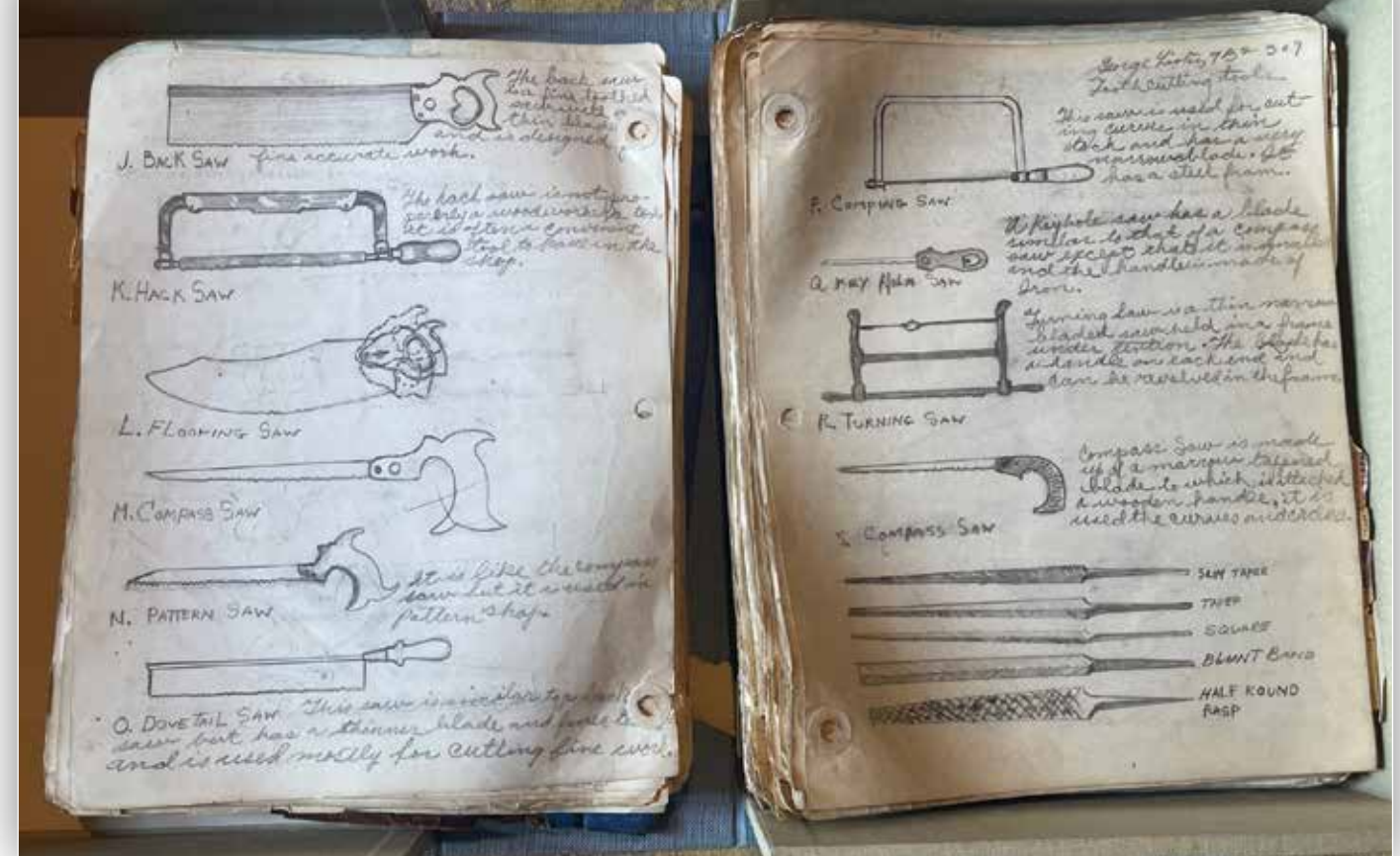
I had many surgeries as a young person with complex knee constructions and tumor removals. I spent a lot of time alone and in a cast over long, hot summers. Even with a big family with lots of siblings, time was spent alone and I enjoyed it and could entertain myself easily. I began teaching myself to draw and loved it.

My father was a cabinet maker and furniture maker. I recall finding his book of intricate drawings of tools and furniture done in school. I was so fascinated and inspired by his work. I have his book and his drawings to this day and still gain inspiration. The innocence of his talent was mind-boggling to me, as no one had taught him, nor did he probably realize how good he was.

After high school, I knew I wanted to do something in the creative arts, but I also knew I had to earn a living. I first went to a local art school in my hometown of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and dabbled in illustration, photography, painting and graphic design. I was able to build a portfolio of work to then apply to a major university. I looked at all the great schools, including Rhode Island School of Design in Providence, Rhode Island, and Carnegie Mellon University (CMU), in my hometown.

CMU won out as I found it to have a wonderful design department where I could focus my attention on building a professional career in the arts that was both creative and one that I could earn a living at. I applied and handwrote a letter stating why I wanted to be a student there — and my letter and portfolio were accepted.

I truly enjoyed the academic and artistic experience of the university, and it was an experience that changed my life and provided a confidence that I never had.







COURTESY OF SANDRA LIOTUS

Sandra and David  
in their Newport  
Workshop.

After graduating from college, I knew I wanted to live in New York City. I had visited my roommate from college at her home in Brooklyn and could never get over *The New York Times* Sunday “help wanted” section, which was as thick as our hometown newspaper. Every job imaginable was advertised.

I had a library background, as I worked in local and university libraries to help supplement my college education, and a law library position was my first paying job in Manhattan. It was a perfect job as I had to go all around the city to service the small law firm libraries, so I really got to know the city very well and very quickly.

One Sunday, I read the perfect ad in *The New York Times*. This, I thought, was **it**. It was with a lighting design firm and manufacturer looking for a right-hand person to work with the owner. This position would allow me to use my industrial design degree. I had to handwrite a letter describing why I was the perfect person for the job and submit my resume with it.

I was called to be interviewed and spent a great deal of time with the owner, who hired me and took me under his wing. I worked for him for about six years, learning all about designing products as well as manufacturing and promoting the products. It was a wonderful beginning to my career in design and, specifically, lighting design. I did a little bit of everything: marketing and graphic design; exhibit design for trade shows; product research and development; product design; sales and assembly instructions. It was ideal.

My mentor also treated me well, providing me with memberships to museums in New York City and helping me put a down payment on my first apartment without a roommate. He was very supportive of me and treated me like a daughter. I was lucky.

After I further evolved and left that position, I found another working with a different lighting firm, where the main emphasis was on lighting private homes and art collections. My mentor there was the first lighting designer at the Met Museum and created the department of lighting for the museum. Before that, there was not much thought of lighting in museums. It just happened with whatever was available at the time.

My mentor was at the stage in his career where he was doing private consulting work designing lighting for private homes and art collections.

Here, I learned a completely different area of lighting. I was interacting with very high-end clients — millionaires and billionaires — and seeing homes and artwork that were fit for museums. Viewing these incredible art collections was like working in a different museum each day, and learning about the art of lighting art was new and exciting for me. It was creative and I enjoyed the interaction with sophisticated people.

I also learned a lot about the art I was lighting. Even though I had an art and design background, it inspired me to learn more about fine art, both classical and contemporary, and to appreciate it all.

After my mentor became ill and was forced to retire, I took over the clients we had and became exclusively interested in fiber optic lighting technology, which was in its infancy. It was the most creative lighting I had used, and it made the most sense. It was miniature, energy efficient, and gave infinite control on the lighting beam spread. I wanted to take this technology to the next level and not rely on any other lighting.

At this time, I was so fortunate to meet my partner, David, who was working as the key engineer developing the technology over in England. When we met on a project in New York

City, we were both at that age where we were experienced, seasoned professionals and wanted to be independent from working for others. David had the engineering background and I had the creative design background; it was a match made in heaven.

We decided right away to start building a consulting business together and fill a gap that was missing in the lighting world: properly thought-out and executed lighting designs for interiors and art collections using the fiber optic lighting technology we both knew could be advanced to its next level.

“Self-trust is the first secret of success.”

— RALPH WALDO EMERSON







COURTESY CHRISTIE'S IMAGES LIMITED

A client we will always remember with grace and appreciation, David Rockefeller Sr. filled his collections and homes with the finest art and antiques.

We have been doing that now for over 30 years and have designed our technology so that we are preserving the art and fabrics we are lighting, avoiding all ultraviolet heat and bulbs at output. Our clients are some of the top art collectors in the world. We work with architects, interior designers, art advisors, art dealers and artists directly, as well as public museums and house museums.

Every job is a challenge and so creative, especially when working in existing homes and mansions that were built in the late 1700s through the early 1900s. Since many of these properties were built without modern lighting, we must study the spaces carefully and thoughtfully to work

out clever ways to disguise the technology so it is hidden in the historic space. I look at our technology like a painter looks at his or her paint on an empty canvas: How can the lighting be designed so that the interior space feels organically, naturally lit, and not harsh or glary?

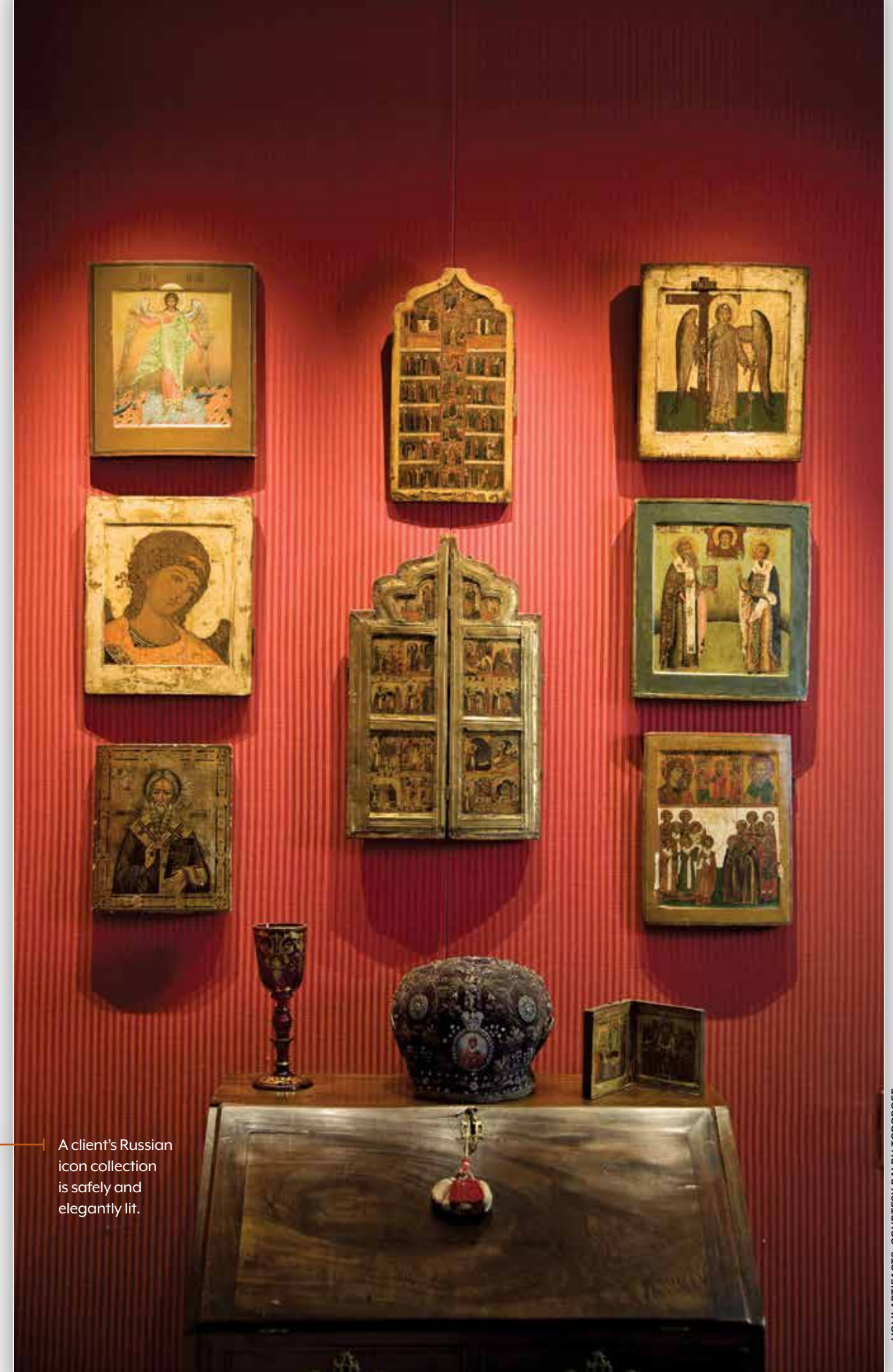
This also applies to new homes and mansions that are being built. We work closely with the architects and designers to learn and study their building design and the interior finishes and fabrics. My goal is always to provide that balance of lighting and flexibility of beam spread so that the light can be washed or focused as needed into the environments.

Our clients are located all over the United States and abroad. They discover us mainly via word of mouth or at exhibits we have done in New York City and Europe.

Sometimes, we are asked to light just one object or one painting that might mean a lot to the client. Most of the time, however, we are asked to look at the complete home and interior, designing the lighting so it feels cohesive throughout the spaces, in conjunction with the interior designer's decorative lighting layers.

“Be resolutely and faithfully what you are; be humbly what you aspire to be.”

— HENRY DAVID THOREAU



A client's Russian icon collection is safely and elegantly lit.



Every project is a new challenge and always unique and different. When we work with clients outside of our local areas, we might start with an architectural drawing, a call, or a Zoom meeting to learn more about their needs. Sometimes, we can put together a proposal based on that initial information. Other proposals might be more complex to produce, depending on the extent of the project.

When we design a plan, we look at art areas and ambient lighting solutions. We design the space so that it is flexible for whatever the client displays, and our lighting can be refocused for any future hang. Our lighting allows us to “paint” the interiors and collections with a gentle lighting. It is like bringing sunlight into a home without the damaging effects.

Art goes beyond paintings. Tapestries are fugitive and require safe lighting so as not to fade colors or cause damage to the thread and fabric. We have a variety of art in our home studio to show clients how we light pieces, and always invite clients, architects, interior designers, art advisors and art dealers to tour our studio so they can experience our lighting directly.

We then demonstrate how ambient lighting can feel like sunlight coming into the room and the ways it brings rugs and fine fabrics to life instead of keeping them in the dark. With lighting for art, we demonstrate how we can adjust the beam spread from a very tight one to an infinite soft focus beam.

Having the studio space set up this way allows a lovely opportunity to experience the lighting firsthand together.







PHOTO BY KEVIN A. BRUFF



COURTESY OF SANDRA LIOTUS

“Dare to live the life you have dreamed for yourself. Go forward and make your dreams come true.”

— RALPH WALDO EMERSON, *SELF-RELIANCE*

Where we do our work is special. I started the business first in Park Slope, Brooklyn, where I lived for 12 years building my career. After we started our business, I began reaching out to prospective clients. I read an article in *The New York Times* about Newport, Rhode Island, and all of the Gilded Age mansions there. I decided to call up the curator of the Preservation Society of Newport County to schedule a meeting, as surely they must need lighting!

I was happy to get us an appointment and we were taken to all the mansions and asked to give an extensive proposal for various challenges. We were hired for several of those challenges and spent a few weeks in Newport and, like most people who visit, fell in love with it and its diverse architecture and the history within its narrow streets.

While there, we noticed little white signs on many of the Colonial architecture buildings that read NRF (which stands for Newport Restoration Foundation). These properties were purchased and carefully restored by the foundation, which tobacco heiress Doris Duke founded in the 1960s. The properties were meticulously restored by local craftsmen who were hired by Ms. Duke. She selected all of the paint finishes and was involved in every detail. Each property was then listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and each had a name on it with the year built.

We ended up moving to Newport and living in one of these charming properties and grew our business there over the last 26 years. It has been a sanctuary and our workshops are also right on the same street.



We also always wanted to keep a property in New York City, so I purchased a small pied-à-terre about 13 years ago, and that is where we have our home lighting studio. This building is Beekman Terrace, which is a 1925 building designed by Treanor & Fatio. It is inspired by Venice and the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston. I fell in love with the apartment, with its garden courtyard and iron gates directly in front of us as our view. This lovely home works beautifully for the time we spend in the city with clients and projects.

I work on drawings for our projects here and in our Newport studio. In between our own architectural lighting design and drawing work, I am also able to do creative drawings and pastel work in both homes. Over the years, I have found that drawing as much as possible allows me to study what I see for the pure joy in it as well as using my brain and hand coordination to refine my work as much as possible.

For all the years since being in Newport and the New York pied-à-terre studio, we have always had kitties surrounding us — starting with one and then ending up with three. They are a joy to behold and are wonderful to have

around wherever we are and whenever we can take them. They come with us back and forth, enjoying traveling to their two little homes in the travel baskets that I found at Fortnum & Mason in London years ago.

When I say, “We are going to New York,” they all hop into their baskets and are ready to go!

**Sandra**

[www.SandraLiotusLightingDesign.com](http://www.SandraLiotusLightingDesign.com)

Instagram: SandraLiotusLighting





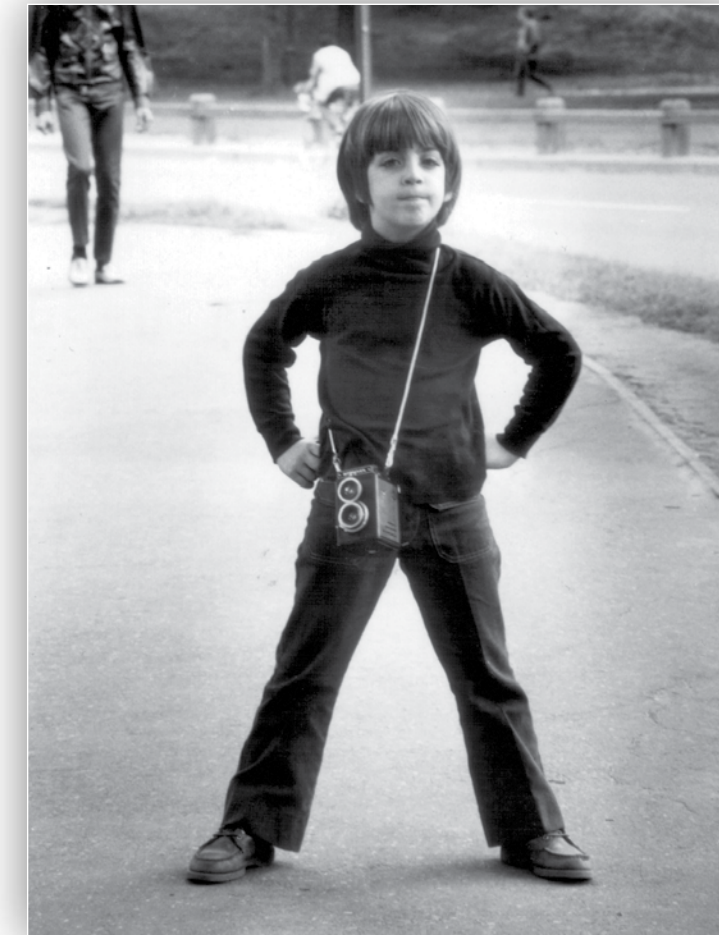


**Eric Slomanson**'s evolution as a photographer was natural and predestined. He was born and raised in New York to creative parents — his mother a writer, and his father an architect — so they naturally encouraged his artistic endeavors. Eric's first camera was a Rolleiflex, which he used at a summer camp where he spent as much time in the darkroom as he did in the sunshine.

His first inspiration to become a photographer was his father's slides of European vacations. Every October, Eric couldn't wait for his parents to come home to see his father's cinematic magic as light pierced darkness from a Kodak Carousel slide tray across the living room onto a white screen. He can still hear the sound of each slide dropping as the tray moved forward: poetry of which Don Draper waxed.

In college, Eric double-majored in anthropology and film before he knew he wanted to become a professional photographer. If you distill those subjects into a demi-glace, it encapsulates his desire to deeply observe people and express himself visually.

For over 30 years, Eric honed his skills capturing peak moments and emotions while telling stories for national and international newspapers, magazines and wire services. He is a contract photographer for Zuma Press. Eric also specializes in corporate events, trade show photography, portraiture, weddings, marketing and lifestyle photography.



**Eric**  
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