



Light Bulb Saving Time

In design circles, an energy law sparks anxiety and stockpiling.

By DENISE COHEN

BUNNY WILLIAMS, the no-nonsense decorator known for her lush English-style rooms, is laying in light bulbs like canned goods. Incandescent bulbs, that is — 60 and 75 watters — because she likes a double-cluster lamp with a high- and a low-watt bulb, one for reading, one for mood.

"Every time I go to Costco, I buy more wattage," Ms. Williams said the other day. She is as green as anybody, she added, but she can't abide the sickly hue of a twisty compact fluorescent bulb, though she's tried warming it up with shade liners in creams and pinks. Nor does she care for the cool blue of an LED.

It should be noted that, like most decorators, Ms. Williams is extremely precise about light. The other day, she reported, she spent six hours fine-tuning the lighting plan of a project, tweaking the mix of ambient, directional and overhead light she had designed, and returning to the house after dusk to add wattage and switch out lamps like a chef adjusting the flavors in a complicated bouillabaisse.

She is aware that there is legislation that is going to affect the manufacture of incandescent bulbs, but



JUST IN CASE Darren Henault, a New York decorator, is stockpiling silver-bottomed bulbs.

she's not clear on the details, and she wants to make sure she has what she needs when she needs it.

So does John Warner, a restaurateur in Washington, D.C., whose new bistro, Le Zinc, will open next month on Wisconsin Avenue. He has signed a 15-year lease on the place, which is layered in warm woods, with lots of art and photographs and 50 light fixtures, 17 of them designed to hold an incandescent bulb. By estimating that his lights will be on for 15 hours a day, and factoring in the package's promise of a 2,000-hour life span per bulb, Mr. Warner has calculated that he will need 600 of these bulbs to last through his lease.

"I have a light-enough carbon footprint in the other aspects of the design," he said, "so I can allow myself a lighting splurge."

Darren Henault, a Manhattan decorator, has already splurged on light fixtures in his Millbrook, N.Y., farmhouse, which dates from the early 19th century, and he is fearful that the bulbs sold in the future won't be up to snuff.

"We went to great pains to keep it looking like an 1800s farmhouse," he said. "We used reclaimed woods, kept the old hardware and the old doors." He also added a dozen custom light fixtures, he said, including "one in particular that cost an arm and a leg, and only works with these particular incandescent bulbs."

He has filled the basement with antique-style Edison bulbs — the clear bulbs with the fuzzy filaments that restaurant designers are so fond of — as well as

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CHRIS LORBER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

BULB LOVERS Bryan Batt, the actor and decorator, above, isn't stockpiling incandescents, but he does travel with a four-pack of 60-watt bulbs to replace the ones in his hotel rooms. "I look better in 60 watts," he said. Ann Pyne, far right, cleared a storage room in anticipation of bulb buying and was intrigued to find the fruits of previous stockpiling episodes, including toys and 10 boxes of hazmat suits, bought after 9/11. Darren Hensault, near right, with



BARRY SCHERER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

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silver-bottomed incandescent bulbs, which throw light on the ceiling in an appealing way, both of which he buys in bulk at Gracious Home. (The former cost \$19 each; Gracious Home is no Costco.)

"My electrician said they were being phased out," he said. "It isn't wrong, I'm going to kill him." As it happens, Mr. Hensault's electrician is wrong.

Late in his second term, George W. Bush signed into law the Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007, which requires light bulb makers to improve the efficiency of incandescent bulbs by 25 percent. The details of the law dictated a phase-out of the manufacture of certain bulbs in their current incarnation, starting with 100-watt bulbs next January.

The law does not ban the use or manufacture of all incandescent bulbs, nor does it mandate the use of compact fluorescent ones. It simply requires that companies make some of their incandescent bulbs work a bit better, meeting a series of rolling deadlines between 2012 and 2014.

Furthermore, all sorts of exemptions are written into the law, which means that all sorts of bulbs are getting a free pass and can keep their energy-guzzling ways indefinitely, including "specialty bulbs" like the Edison bulbs favored by Mr. Hensault, as well as three-way bulbs, silver-bottomed bulbs, chandelier bulbs, refrigerator bulbs, plant lights and many, many others.

Nonetheless, as the deadline for the first phase of the legislation looms, light bulb confusion — even professed light bulb anxiety — is rolling the miles of many. The other day, Ken Henderlong, a sales associate at Oriental Lamp Shade Company in Lexington Avenue, said that his customers "say they want to stockpile incandescent bulbs, but they are not sure when to start. No one knows when the rules go into effect or what the rules are."

Probably this is because articles about light bulb legislation are incredibly boring, and articles about the end of the light bulb as we know it are less so. Certainly they stick in the mind longer.

For years, Glenn Beck, among other conservative pundits and personalities, has proclaimed the death of the incandescent light bulb as a casualty of the "nanny state" (never mind that the light bulb legislation is a Bush-era act), and he has been shouting his listeners to hoard 100-watt light bulbs (along with gold and canned food). This year, conservative politicians took a leaf from his playbook, introducing bills like the Light Bulb Freedom of Choice Act, courtesy of Michele Bachmann, the Minnesota congresswoman, that would repeal the 2007 legislation.

The bulbobs have been deeply irritating to light bulb manufacturers and retailers, who have been explaining the law over and over again, to whom they will listen. At a Congressional hearing in March, Kyle Piroo, a representative from the National Electrical Manufacturers Association, a trade group that represents makers of light bulbs, among others, patiently but clearly dispensed advice that the law banned incandescent bulbs. He listed the law's points and averred light bulb makers' support for the law. As usual, it seemed as

if no one was paying attention.

Last week, for example, in the middle of Light-fair, an annual trade show for the lighting industry, Philips unveiled a winged LED bulb with a promised life span of 25,000 hours and a price tag of \$40 to \$50. The Associated Press reported its cost as \$50, and Fox News ran the story with the headline "As Government Bans Regular Light Bulbs, LED Replacements Will Cost \$50 Each." Mr. Beck, Rush Limbaugh and conservative bloggers around the country gleefully pounced on the story, once again urging the stockpiling of light bulbs.

Joseph Highze, a spokesman for the electrical manufacturers association, offered his take on the situation: "Unfortunately people do not yet un-

Fans of the look of old-fashioned bulbs have no love for their twisted sisters.

derstand this lighting transition, and mistakenly think they won't be able to buy incandescent light bulbs. This misconception has been promoted by a number of media outlets. Incandescent light bulbs are not being banned, and the new federal energy-efficiency standards for light bulbs do not mandate the use of CFLs. My hope is that the media can help the American people understand the energy-efficient lighting options available, as opposed to furthering misconceptions."



CHRIS LORBER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

THE BULB MAN David Brooks, of Just Bulbs in Manhattan, has a customer who is secretly ordering thousands of incandescent bulbs. "She doesn't want her husband to know," he said.



TOM GORRELL FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES



MICHAEL WARTNER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

a hostess gift, instead of showing up with a bottle of wine, bring a case of light bulbs."

ONE weekend recently, Ann Pyne, the 60-year-old decorator, cleared out a storage room in her Park Avenue apartment in anticipation of bulb-buying (mostly 60-watt incandescents).

She was fascinated by what she found there because she had forgotten about amassing it in the first place: toddler-appropriate Christmas presents for her two children, now 28 and 30; cell-phone containers of floppy discs; 10 boxes of her book, a collection of icy and affecting short stories called "In the Form of a Person," published in 1992; and 10 boxes of white hazmat suits with masks that she ordered online after 9/11, along with two covers and a breathing apparatus for her dogs' cages.

Her excavation prompted a reverie. "I guess this stoves some light (pun just popped out) on the bulb-buying," she wrote in an e-mail. "There are probably some people who feel safe just knowing they 'have' the things, and move on after that."

She added: "Not all share any point of view. I keep thinking of my CFL friend who proselytized so energetically and filled his house with them, but whose wife compensated by using so many candles — and turning off all the nauseous-looking bulbs. Is he a light-bulb liberator?"

One thing is true: It's a good moment to be in the light bulb business. Big box stores like Home Depot are selling more bulbs because they have more in stock: incandescents are up 74 double digits over last year," said Brad Pashen, the company's light bulb buyer.

But so are compact fluorescents, he said: "People are moving to different product types at a higher rate than I anticipated."

Even so, he noted: "I understand that four out of five people still don't know about the regulations. The ones that do, you're going to get reactions across the spectrum. Folks that think it's a good thing in order to save money and energy. Others who have an affection for incandescents are a little disappointed."

You wonder why there will be disappointment if light bulb makers are selling a new, improved incandescent.

Mr. Piroo, the National Electrical Manufacturers Association representative, was asked what the incandescent substitute for a typical 100-watt bulb would be, and he described a 75-watt equivalent. The reason most Americans won't find it on the shelves this week, he said, is that most shipments went to California, which has bulb legislation that kicked in a year earlier than the federal regulations. Starting next month, he said, the new bulbs will be on shelves everywhere.

The reporter tried out one of the new, more efficient incandescent bulbs (the Philips Eco-Advantage in Soft White, which will sell for \$2.97 for a two-pack) and found it. And yet, on a recent weekday, when the bulb section of Home Depot's Manhattan store was empty of customers, she plucked two six-packs of old-style 75-watt GE Soft White Bulbs (\$3.47 each) and stuck them in her basket. It can't hurt to set aside a few packages.