

# NEWH

The Hospitality Industry Network

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A former  
patent attorney  
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# man in the mirror

James Mischel, president and  
chief designer, Electric Mirror



# Man in the Mirror

**A former patent attorney helps change the face of bathrooms**

By Alia Akkam

In 1996, James Mischel, Jr. took over his parents' garage to launch his company, Electric Mirror. "The first big job I did in my parents' house and I nearly destroyed it," he recalls with a laugh. Today, the small, homespun operation has evolved into the Everett, Washington-based company known for its distinctive portfolio of backlit mirrors and mirror TV technology. "These two products have changed how people view the bathroom," Mischel explains. "It's more of a place to relax; there's much more pampering going on in the bathroom these days."

A patent attorney who studied physics, Mischel's background may be unconventional for an entrepreneur in the business of developing bathroom amenities, but his devotion to precision and technology has clearly steered Electric Mirror's success, just as much as customers' increasingly discerning taste in luxurious bathrooms. "We're the only company of its kind that makes everything in-house from start to finish which gives us some unique advantages. We do tons of prototyping for clients and have a huge research and development team. We really dive into technology. People come to us," Mischel says.

After building solely mirror defoggers ("it was a tough business to be in"), Mischel and his team decided it was time to expand, creating a full lineup of mirror products, such as polished and framed back-lit mirrors, the waterproof North Star Spa TV, makeup mirrors, and fog-free mirrors for the showers. Now, Electric Mirror's clients include hundreds of well-regarded hotels, including the Four Seasons chain, the Ritz-Carlton in Dubai, and the Trump properties in Las Vegas and Chicago. "Each one of our product concepts took at least a couple of years to get some traction; it takes time to get ideas out there," Mischel notes.

At this year's Hospitality Design Exposition & Conference (HD Expo), Electric Mirror plans to unveil a few new concepts, including their Forte MP3 stereo system, where mirrors will feature a docking device. "That's going to be a very impactful product as far as guest perception goes. The younger generation all have their iPods and MP3s. Now they can take a shower and listen to their favorite music with an incredible stereo sound in the bathroom," says Mischel. Another breakthrough will be their hospitality-ready television, compatible with IP television.

As the economy takes its toll on business, though, how does Mischel view the impact on Electric Mirror? "We're in the luxe hotel business, so our products are more expensive. There has been a slowdown but hotels are buying the best products. We made a major push to go global and that has helped us quite a bit because we're doing jobs all over the world." In fact, the company recently opened offices in China and the UK.

The hospitality industry's trend toward sustainability is not lost on Electric Mirror either. They promote low-mercury lamps, have even launched a line of their own 50,000-hour lamps that offer two to three times the lifespan of a standard fluorescent bulb, and use woods made from renewable resources. They also recycle all their glass, metal, cardboard, and wood. "Environmental stewardship is important," says Mischel. "A lot of companies push environmental products, but how many are environmentally friendly themselves?" ■

Opposite page, clockwise from top: The Impression Mirror TV in a bathroom at the Regent Bal Harbour in Florida, designed by CMMI; the Silhouette Mirror TV in a bathroom at the Club Ten at the San Luis Resort in Galveston, Texas, designed by Interior Designs Unlimited; and James Mischel, Jr. (Regent photo by Doug Thompson; San Luis photo by Trey Hunter; and Mischel photo by Jason Koenig.)

