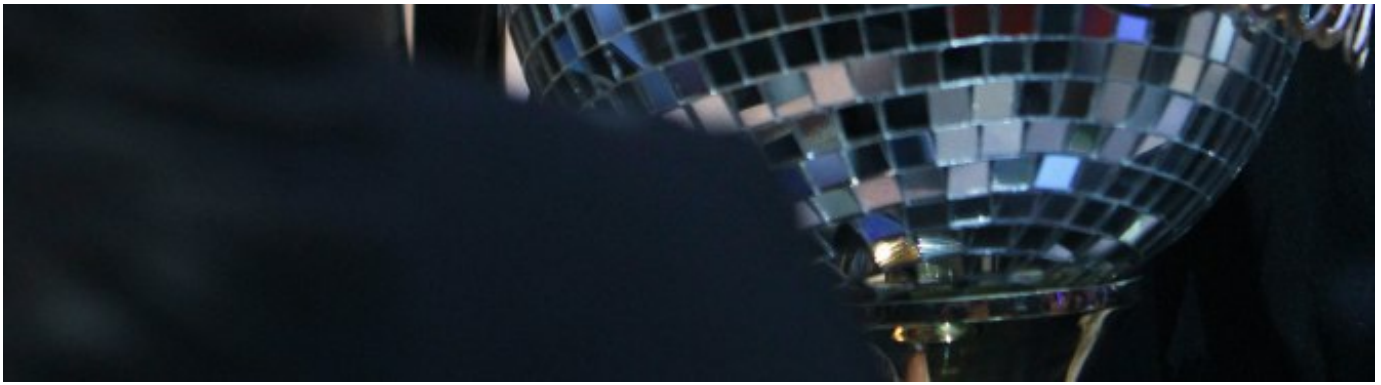


Dancing with the Stars: The Surprising History of the Mirrorball Trophy — and a First Look at Season 25's Prize!

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It's one of the most coveted prizes on television, but *Dancing with the Stars'* Mirrorball Trophy actually comes from a quite humble beginning.

Based on the British reality competition *Strictly Come Dancing*, *DWTS* launched in 2005 with few expectations.

"With all due respect to the show, we didn't think it was going to last more than one season," *DWTS* production designer James Yarnell tells PEOPLE. "But we decided we wanted one that looked more like a trophy than the *Strictly Come Dancing* prize, which was basically a mirrorball on a stick."

So to upgrade the trophy, Yarnell and his team turned to an unconventional source material: a lamp.

"There was a limit to what I could spend, so I bought a 3-ft.-tall brass lamp, unscrewed it and took all the pieces apart. Then I reassembled some of the pieces to make basically what we can have today," says Yarnell. "The original one, the *Kelly Monaco* one, was literally part of a brass lamp and had it put on a wooden base with the mirrorball on it."

But the trophy wasn't camera-ready until a last-minute fix that occurred just before the premiere season's live finale.

"One of the execs from ABC thought the trophy was too short, so we literally unscrewed it and — probably 10 minutes before we went live — we added a roll of parcel tape between the stem and the base and that elevated it by 2 in.," says Yarnell. "We covered it in gold paper and off it went."

The trophy remained relatively the same through season 3.

The trophy remained relatively the same until season 4 when it got an upgrade.

"They stopped making the lamp at Lamps Plus, so we'd run out of options and had to start casting it and put a heavy acrylic base with a brass stem," says Yarnell, who now commissions trophy bases from New York-based company Society Awards.

For the lettering that wraps around the mirrorball, Yarnell uses California Cinnabar Inc. The lettering has changed whenever the show's logo has changed and Yarnell is grateful the series now uses block lettering instead of the calligraphy it used in earlier seasons (like here with Donny Osmond in 2009).