



LIGHT TALK

A YEAR IN THE LIFE OF LIGHT

Extract

MARTIN KLAASEN
LIGHTING DESIGNER

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Published and Distributed by

Klaasen Lighting Design

Suite 9, Level 3, Springvale
907 East Coast Road, Siglap
Singapore 459107

T: +65 6242 3210

E: singapore@kldesign.co

W: www.kldesign.co

Production House (Editorial Support and Graphic Design)

Trade Link Media Pte. Ltd.

101 Geylang Lorong 23

#06-04, Prosper House

Singapore 388399

T: +65 6842 2580

E: info@tradelinkmedia.com.sg

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KHL Printing Co. Pte. Ltd.

57 Loyang Drive

Singapore 508968

T: +65 6543 2222

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lighttalk@kldesign.co

Acknowledgement

When I set out to write my daily blog I had no thoughts about publishing it into a book. But the encouragement I received along the way while writing my daily blog entries and the continuous support I received from family, friends and colleagues in the lighting industry for the idea of publishing the book has been the drive for my commitment and dedication to create Light Talk, the book compilation of my one year blogging.

My guiding light is without doubt my grandmother to whom this book is dedicated. "Mamie" as we called her, was an architect, a writer and an educator. I was her first grand son. I admired her spirit and dedication to her work which she relentlessly pursued regardless of what people thought or whether people liked it. I know she would have been proud of my achievement.

There are so many people who have supported me and encouraged me in this project and I wish to acknowledge them with all my heart.

First my dearest family: My parents Henk and Monique, who have always been there for me, supported and encouraged me through all my highs and lows. My dearest and lovely children Ingmar, Valentine and Kyra I am proud of you, thanks for your love and encouragements. Alex, my love and everyday support, thank you for always being there for me, for your ever listening ear and down to earth valuable comments. My sister Veronique with her sharp as always observations, my brothers Luc and But and their families, Peter, Suzanne, Sacha, Laura, Jana, Bo-Elle, Marleen, Sarah and Michel.

My core team at KLD, Stan, Grace, Cheryline, Matt, Galih, Tamara, Ika and most of all Amanda who has been my "partner in crime" to get all the text and artwork organised. The blogs have been a constant platform to share my daily experiences as a lighting designer with my team, my colleagues and business relations, so this book is also an expression of my gratitude towards everyone who has contributed to my blog and worked with me over the duration of my blogging as captured in my book.

My gratitude also goes out to Joachim and Alison Ritter and their team at Via-Verlag, the publishers of the Professional Lighting Design magazine, for hosting my blog Light Talk on their PLD website. It is without doubt that hosting my blog on one of the prime reference websites in professional lighting design has added to the status and recognition of my blog.

My heartfelt acknowledgement also goes out to the team at Tradelinkmedia, the publishers of Lighting Today Magazine for which I have been a columnist since 2003, who have done a fantastic job in making this book a reality. Steven, Cynthia and the whole team at Tradelinkmedia, thanks for your dedication and creative ideas in publishing Light Talk, the book, a dream come true!

To all the lighting manufacturers, suppliers, agents, researchers and educators around the world with whom I have dealt and worked with as a lighting designer and who all have contributed in some form of way directly or indirectly to my blogs, thanks for your continued support. Lighting designers work constantly with the lighting industry, we need each other!

If I have left out anyone it is unintentional. Thanks everyone and I hope you will all enjoy reading the compilation of my one year of blogging and most of all I hope to bring a ray of light into your lives by sharing my expertise and experiences.

Introduction

ABOUT THE BLOG:

Sometime in 2009, I saw the movie Julie and Julia (starring Meryl Streep and Amy Adams) in which Julie decides to blog about her experiences trying out one new recipe a day! Later that night I began to hook on to the idea of blogging and thought why don't I blog about lighting, my passion, each day for a year! In my job as lighting designer I travel a lot, have projects all over the world and meet so many exciting people in the industry. Bring into the mix my many years of lighting experience, the world events and local happenings ...so much to share and talk about! And so the idea was born.

As it happened a week later I attended the Professional Lighting Design Conference (PLDC) in Berlin and I decided that it would be a great starting point for the blog. During the event I shared the blog idea with the organisers and got asked whether I would mind having the blog featured on the Professional Lighting Design (PLD) magazine website and the rest is history as they say. Now, 365 days later, I look back on the exploit...I managed to write my blogs each and every day without fail, even when stranded in snow storms in Northern China without internet connection!

The style is intentionally "light" hearted (Light Talk) and meant as introspection, food for thought or as a trigger for someone's own experiences on the topic. Unless relevant or agreed to by the subjects, persons or companies are not mentioned by name to keep the blog neutral and to not offend anyone, which is of course never my intention. I do however consistently refer to my location, company or environment at the time of writing to give the blog some context and give the reader a bit of background of the surroundings influencing me.

Initially only about 200 words, it gradually grew to a level where I had difficulty to keep the blog within 400 words! Unexpectedly the whole blogging experience had grown on me and became quite addictive. While I had no idea what to expect and whether I would have sufficient "material" to blog about each day when I started, I had a simple rule; just take each day as it comes and let yourself guide by what happens in your work as a lighting designer, people you meet or events that happen in the world or around you, as long as it had a relation to lighting and lighting design. As it turned out the combination of daily events and my more than 30 years of experience in the lighting industry proved to be a rich pool for subjects and hardly any day was I shy of a subject (even though I had created a small file with "emergency" subjects).

Though not every reader submits comments, I have many loyal followers who read my blog every day. So much so that one day one of my blog readers sent me an email asking if I was alright as he had not been able to receive my blog for 2 days. As it later turned out it was his provider that had been down...Aside from many spam comments, it has really been nice to see the engagement of the readers with comments I received from all corners of the world. The reactions have been a great motivator for my commitment to the blog. Relevant comments have been added to the blog entries. My heartfelt thanks to all the contributors!

THE LIFE OF A FLYING DUTCHMAN

Being the subject of several blogs, I would like to give some background information on how I became a lighting designer, what lighting design is, and what I actually do as a professional lighting designer. First of all, how did I become a lighting designer?

In 1979, when I finished my Master's degree in Industrial Design at the Technische Hogeschool in Delft (University), I went to apply for a job at several big companies, and Philips in Eindhoven, Holland, was one of them. At the time, they had several jobs on offer, and one of them was a lighting designer's position. Lighting Design? Fresh from my studies, I had no idea that there was such thing as lighting design, and the first thing that came to my mind was that they were looking for someone to design light bulbs and the like. But intrigued as I was, I went for an interview, at the time it was called the Lighting Design and Engineering Centre (LIDEC). I was blown away by the 40 odd people who were doing lighting design on mega projects - such as the Olympic Games, urban developments, hospitality projects, exhibitions, as well as doing research and studies on a variety of lighting-related subjects and applications - such as road lighting, office lighting - while working closely with the product divisions to assist in the development new lighting systems. It was love at first sight, and I never looked back.

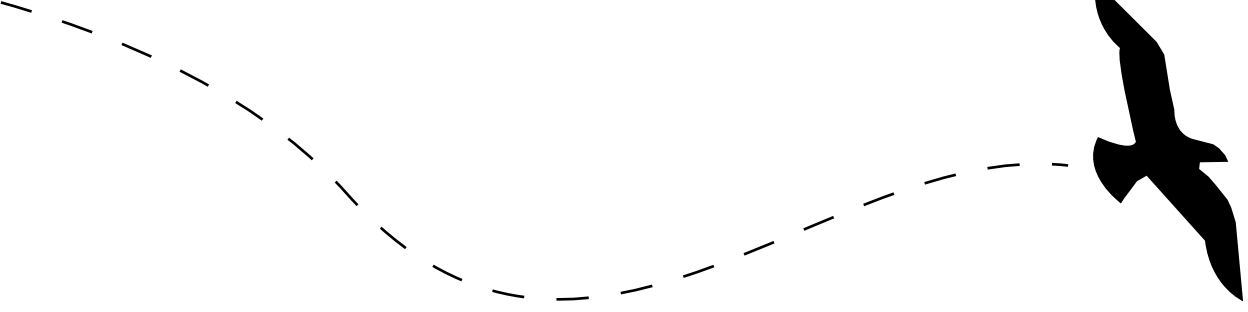
Philips provided me with an incredible environment to hone my lighting design skills. I was surrounded by leading experts in the field of floodlighting, sports lighting, interior lighting, road lighting, and so on. And all of them contributed to my development as a lighting designer. Philips' training programmes, and its involvement in shaping the industry's lighting standards and application guidelines, were instrumental in building my knowledge base of lighting and lighting design.

Gradually, I grew from my first technical research assignment (on the damaging effects of lighting in museums) to becoming a senior lighting designer and project manager. My language and communication skills got me to travel more, and by 1985, when Philips acquired LITA, a French architectural lighting brand, I was relocated to France to assist in the worldwide development of architectural lighting within Philips. I started to travel to the Middle East, and later to the Asia Pacific region, to represent Philips Lighting in projects and promote awareness of better lighting.

By 1988, I was posted in Singapore to start the Support Centre for Professional Lighting Singapore (SCPLS), which basically overlooked the training and support for projects of all Philips sales offices in Asia Pacific, from Australia and New Zealand, to Korea and Japan, and all countries in between.

A big part of my work was training the staff and educating designers, specifiers, developers and end-users in becoming more professional and lighting application oriented. It is during this time, and through the many training courses and seminars that I organised and led, that I met many in the lighting industry, who today have established themselves as leading and successful professionals in their field, and most of all have remained as my friends in the industry.

Through my work with Philips in Asia, I started to meet independent lighting designers, a profession I did not realise existed. By 1991, I had made up my mind and decided to leave Philips to throw myself into the deep end, by becoming an independent professional lighting designer; first with Lumino Design in Singapore (1991-1997, and later with Lighting Images in Australia, China and Singapore (1997-2010), I



built successful lighting design practices with high profile projects around the region. Unfortunately, we were badly affected by the economic turmoil in 1997, and later again in 2008. But I came out wiser and better, and today in 2011, I have embarked on my final venture with Klaasen Lighting Design, a place where I can fully express my passion for lighting design, and which is the culmination of all my years of experience as a lighting designer.

The following is a reproduction of the column that I wrote in the June 2010 issue of *Lighting Today*, which describes the daily challenges of being a lighting designer:

“Being a Lighting Designer, or the Life of a Flying Dutchman”

One of the first questions that people ask when you meet socially is generally: “What do you do for a living?” And when I reply, “I am a lighting designer”, I indifferently get responses such as: “Oh, cool, but what do you actually do...? Most people have no idea what a lighting designer does. If there is any association at all, it is being related to the design of decorative light fittings or to theatrical lighting. Architectural lighting design has still a long way to go before becoming a familiar profession in the general public’s knowledge.

To make the actual work a bit more understandable, I start comparing our work to architects and interior designers, a profession more familiar to the general public and explain, “Like an interior designer selects the furniture, the wall and floor finishes, to create an interior, we as lighting experts are hired to design and select the lights to create the appropriate lighting mood and ambience. We do that for any type of application, whether it is a shopping mall, hotel, corporate office, home, and even urban city environments, public buildings, sports facilities, and so on”. The response is general, “Wow, how interesting!” To impress further (Don’t we all like to be a bit special...?) I add that our projects are all over the world, and that we travel to many destinations to meet with our clients and commission our projects onsite. Sometimes, I get compared with an electrician, but then I quickly explain that electrical engineers are people with little creative imagination and are usually involved in boring engineering works, like the electrical circuiting, cable ducting, air-conditioning, switch boards and circuit breakers...“Look”, I say, “Electrical engineers do all the work concealed behind walls, floors, ceilings or in-risers and cabinets, we do all the visual and exciting stuff...”

There is definitely a glamorous and adventurous side to the profession, certainly if you like to travel to foreign destinations. It is even better if you can do that while being paid as part of your work. It also brings us in contact with many different cultures, and as far as I am concerned, it helps to widen our views on humanity, and gives a better understanding of the world we live in. But it also has its perils in the form of bad weather (I was stuck in Northern China a few months ago due to heavy snowstorms) or potential terrorism. These are real issues that we face, and which we have to approach sensibly. Jetlag, frequent climate changes, and local food, are some more ingredients that can make life on the road quite challenging. I obviously speak mostly for myself, and other lighting designers may have very different life experiences. But I know that those who have projects abroad and travel like me do encounter similar challenges.

So how does a typical workday for a lighting designer look like? Well first of all, I don’t think there is such thing as a ‘typical’ day. Every day can potentially be different. While we have our design work and deadlines cut out, and we have a rough plan for the days ahead, our profession is very volatile. One phone call or email

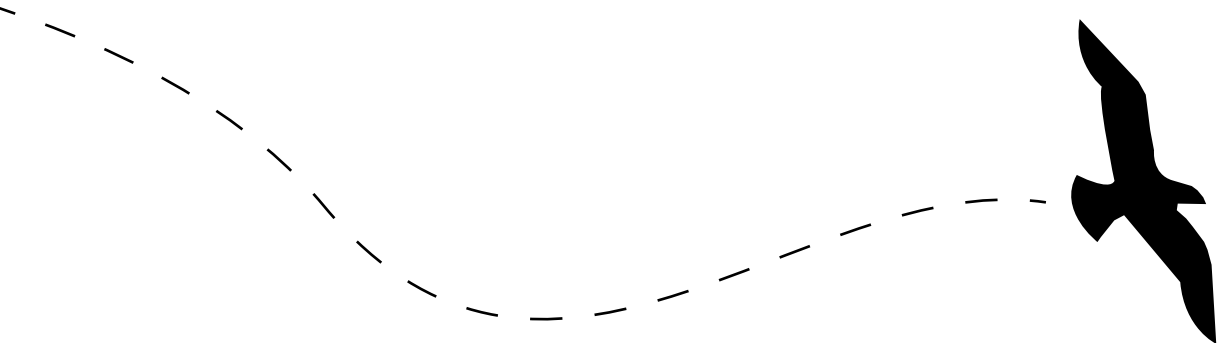
in the morning can change the complete profile of the day. It can be a client asking for something urgent; it can be a potential new client ringing in, a supplier/manufacturer popping in or it could be a site issue that requires immediate attention. And if you are in charge of running the design office as I do, you can add staff and company administration matters into the mix. The truth is that in reality, I only spend just 10 percent of my time actually and creatively designing light.

So with time being our main commodity, time management becomes one of the necessary acquired skills to run a lighting design business. Priority setting does not mean responding to the clients who shouts the loudest... so it is important to coordinate and communicate a good work planning with the team. I do that generally once a week or whenever I am 'in town'. With the workload distributed, another key element is to assure the quality of our work. This is the part that will be submitted to the scrutiny of the client and therefore will have to meet the professional quality standards that the client is expecting from us. Quality of the work comes with the quality of the staff. It is my responsibility to assure this, and where inexperience is lacking, I need to train and educate the staff of what is expected from us. Sharing my experience in the design process is a big part of my daily work.

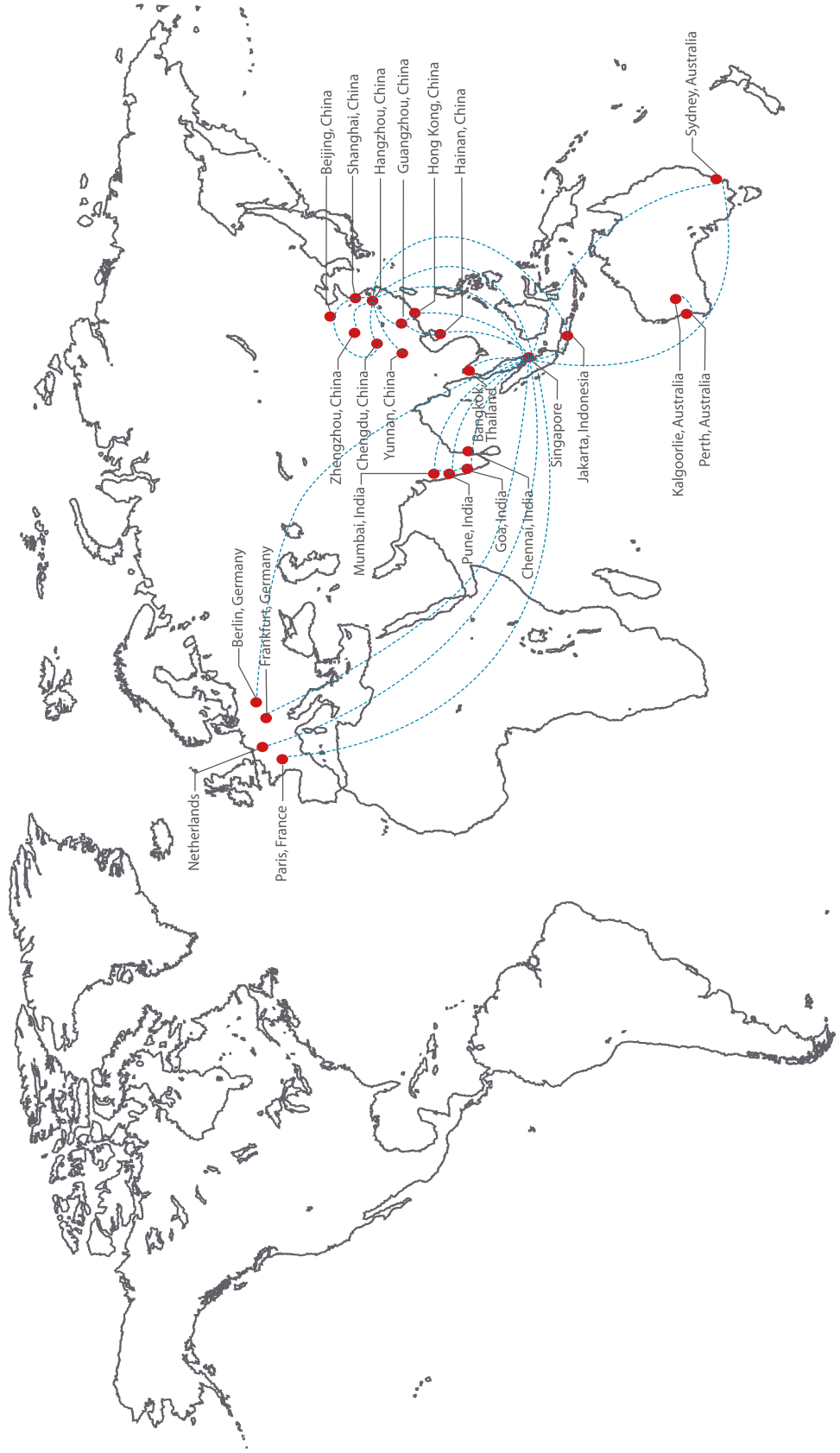
With the design done, the next step is the presentation to the client, a task that is often falling back to me as the principal, certainly for key presentations. Clarity and convincing justification are critical to obtain the clients acceptance and approval on our lighting design, which in turn is key for us to proceed to the next stage of the works.

In the technical documentation required for procurement of the lighting, our main challenge is to make sure we meet the client's budget. This is where value for money requires us to make choices between quality and the budget the client is willing to spend; often a very delicate process, as both generally are in conflict. Then travelling again happens for the final stages of the project, site coordination meetings, final testing and commissioning. Some projects have up to 30 trips for design and site coordination meetings...

I don't know exactly the origins of the 'Flying Dutchman' title, but several famous Dutch people who spread their wings around the world have had this nickname, notably Anthony Fokker - the aircraft designer, Tom Okker - a famous tennis player of the seventies, and more recently, Pieter van den Hoogenband - an Olympic swimmer...



Martin's travels during his blogging



The Lighting Reflections Project

Thursday 29th October 2009,
Berlin, Germany

Today was the first day of the Professional Lighting Design Convention in Berlin, the second edition after the historical and inaugural one was held in 2007 in London. The convention offers an array of different subject presentations, ranging from lighting application case studies, daylighting and sustainability (a big issue with regards to climate change), lighting design and research, as well as practical issues concerning the management of a professional lighting design practice.

A bit about myself... My name is Martin Klaasen and I have been in lighting design for 30 years now. I started in the Philips Lighting Design and Engineering Centre, Netherlands in 1979 and started my own lighting design practice in 1991 while based in Singapore. Today, my practice, called Lighting Images International, has offices in Australia, Singapore and China, and provides our lighting design service for projects throughout

the world, with emphasis on the Asia Pacific region.

Why this Blog? Some of you may know my Reflections column in the Lighting Today magazine, which is published four times a year, with a strong readership in Asia Pacific. I have written my articles about the trends, happenings, and experiences in lighting over the past 5 years, but I would like to share my knowledge, observations and experiences in a more dynamic and interactive way, and most of all, more instantaneously.

However, I want to set myself a task as well. I want to reflect daily on something I have observed or experienced that relates to lighting with focus on "green" lighting. And I want to do that initially for one whole year. By blogging about it on a daily basis, I want to create awareness about lighting and how we can improve our world with sustainable, renewable and holistic lighting, though at

times I may side step to lighting-related subjects

At the end of the year, I hope to have compiled an interesting compilation of daily reflections on lighting subjects that can improve our daily lives. It is a project in progress; it is not an end destination but rather a voyage to the future of lighting. I am not sure what to expect in terms of public reactions, but will welcome them if any and include them in my compilation.



Lighting Magic and Energy Saving

Friday 30th October 2009

Berlin, Germany

It is actually past midnight as I write this entry... But hey, I went on a city tour earlier in the night with many of my convention friends; we had dinner and went clubbing afterwards, all courtesy of Se'lux, the sponsor for the evening. Thank you! So my reflection of the day has to be on the city tour, where our tour guide introduced us to some of the city's great landmark places such as the Brandenburg Gate, the Reich's Tag, Gendarme Platze, etc.

My first impression (as compared to my Australian and Asian experience) was of a well-organised and strategized lighting for the City. Obviously a lot of thought (and money) must have gone into developing and implementing an attractive lighting plan to bring out the city's enormous heritage. I am not sure how much is government initiative and how much private building owners, but fact is that there is a level of serenity and attractiveness to the lighting of the places we visited. There was a pleasant balance between the building's feature lighting and general lighting for circulation. But while the general feeling is pleasant and attractive, there is an underlying concern for energy wastage through glare

and light loss. This is particularly discernable to the trained eye of professional lighting designers.

And this is exactly the key reflection for the day: How do we find the right balance between creating that wonderful and magical light effect that attracts us to enjoy the buildings and urban environment at night Versus the need to curb energy, minimise glare. The new legislation and compliance regulations towards energy saving and light pollution is getting more and more demanding (e.g., LEED, etc), which will pose ever increasing challenges to the lighting designer in pursuit of that magical environment.



Lighting and Destiny

Saturday 31st October 2009

Berlin, Germany

As tonight may turn out to be another late night, I better post my entry now while I am still thinking clear and sober. For today, I would like to reflect on the following: Are there destinies in lighting... And are some things meant to be? The thoughts were triggered when I coincidentally bumped into people during lunch break. As you do, you mingle and network. So as I joined a table, I was introduced to someone who turned out to be one of the overseas keynote speakers, but more interestingly, the head of a lighting research company we had been approaching and communicating with for assistance in one of our project. I had no idea he would be at this convention, let alone as one of the keynote speakers (I guess I could have if I would have studied the programme before arriving, but as always you only do that on the day). As I introduced myself, I mentioned the person I was communicating with, upon which he introduced me to his companion... Yes indeed, the person we had been communicating with all along! So it felt more than a coincidence... It straightaway reinforced my belief that we had made the right choice in contacting them... We were meant to work together!

On a grander scale, is it a coincidence that the LED technology is taking such enormous steps forward, right at this crucial point in time where we are in desperate

need of energy efficient lighting systems to combat global warming? Isn't it destiny that it's meant to be? Is there a universe out there that regulates life for us?

P/S: I am not sure about mentioning names, as this whole blogging mania is rather new to me. Likewise, I have no idea of the ramifications of doing so, and neither do I know whether the people I meet wish to be mentioned, so for the moment I elect to preserve their privacy. I may change this position as I progress with this blog, probably also based on the feedback that I might receive.



“Vorsprung Durch Technik”

Sunday 1st November 2009

Berlin, Germany

As it is my last day in Germany, it is probably fitting to use this well-known slogan, used by German carmaker Audi in their advertisements. It loosely translates as “being ahead through (or because of) technology”. We had the PLDC gala dinner last night at the old Berlin Convention Hall, and what struck me was how modern lighting technology was introduced in the old building space, which looked to be a great heritage example of the past glory of German architecture. The big and majestic space with its period light fittings was enhanced with modern LED technology and sophisticated multimedia to create the ambiance for the night. Modern lighting technology definitely gives us many advantages as compared to the conventional way of lighting things.

However, it is important to reflect on the challenge, and possibly even the need, of integrating modern lighting technology into older (or even heritage) building environments. Besides the fact that we may not be able to install and integrate the new lighting systems into the existing building fabric, the challenge really is on finding a balanced way of marrying the benefits of the new technology within the old building environment... Assuming the merits of doing so make sense.



PLDC party

Circadian Passport

Monday 2nd November 2009

Singapore

As I travelled back from Germany to Singapore, I was pondering on all the informative and exciting presentations that I had attended at the PLDC in Berlin. One of the prime topics was obviously the increased relevance of lighting in relation to our circadian rhythms. One of the presenters mentioned that nowadays, we spend about 60 percent of our lives under artificial lighting! If that is not a reason to make sure that our lighting designs consider the needs of our biological clock! It has become clear that the circadian system has peak sensitivity in the blue end (around 480nm) of the spectrum, while our visual system responds best around the 555nm area of the spectrum. Our circadian rhythms seem to vary over time and age and it probably varies from person to person as well.

As I went through the Immigration checkpoint, I could not help but think that maybe in the future, we would all carry our own "circadian passport", which would contain our personal biological "blue print" (How appropriate the term "blue print" now seems!) As the Immigration Officer glances through your passport, he would probably say, "Please take the blue (light) channel on the way out!" Far-fetched?

P/S: Please note, as I travel through different time zones, it looks like my laptop is at times confused and shows a different date, but this is my entry for Monday, 2nd November.



Age and Wisdom

Tuesday 3rd November 2009
Singapore

As we are all supposed to grow older and wiser, the question arises if there would come a time where lighting designers should consider retiring. Lighting design is very much a matter of experience and passion, so it seems that as time progresses, we become better and better... We become vintage designers, so to speak.

It was a pleasure to listen to William Lam's acceptance speech and his wise words, upon being conferred the lifetime achievement award for his lighting design work, at the PLDC gala dinner. However, I would venture out to say that as we

grow older, we generally become less flexible in our ways of designing, relying more and more on proven concepts and lighting technologies. We are gradually "rusting" in our comfortable routines and it becomes more and more difficult to be open for new innovations, new ideas and accept that things that have always worked for you may have been overtaken by new technologies and common public acceptance.

I believe that in our profession, we can continue working as long as we have our mind, faculties and more specifically our senses, working well. I don't think there is really an age limit if we are passionate about what we do. But it takes wisdom to understand that with age, we may have to accept that the new generation are the leaders of tomorrow. Hence, the roles of the "elderly statesmen" of lighting design should shift to that of mentor and role model.



Jet LED

Wednesday, 4th November 2009

Sydney, Australia

Jetting back to Australia, I flew Singapore Airlines brand-new Super Airbus, the A380 double-decker plane. As far as I know this is the most modern super jet in commercial use at the moment. Besides the latest gadgets and modern, comfortable seats, to my knowledge, the airplane boasts one of the most sophisticated LED lighting systems applied in the airline industry to date.

Each and every lighting point in this plane is LED, from the reading lights and indirect lighting to the mirror lights and emergency lights, all controlled by sophisticated touch screen panels. I am sure the lighting has contributed to the efficiency of the airplane by reducing its power load, and thus, the fuel required to power the electricity on board. I noticed that even the emergency light has a blue light function when switched to inflight mode!

I can't help but reflect on the fact that as technology advances and the need for energy saving increases, we will see more applications move into using 100 percent LED lighting systems!



Light...Medicine of the Future?

Thursday, 5th November 2009

Sydney, Australia

Today, I spent most of my time in a hospital, supporting my sweet love as she underwent a surgical operation. Though her operation was not life-threatening, an operation of any kind under full anaesthetic costs quite a lot of energy, both physically as well as mentally, not in the least because recovery means that practically all our body functions (including our body clock) need to be restored.

With PLDC still fresh in my mind, I remembered one of the speakers saying that recovery under "blue" light would greatly enhance the speed of recovery. Unfortunately, the present medical system is still very conventional and alternative healing methods are still far from being accepted in public mainstream. This brings me to reflect on one of the first books I ever read on the subject called *Light, Medicine of the Future* by Jacob Lieberman. In his book, Lieberman describes how light impacts on our lives and our

body clock and has some real life case studies where he applied light (colours) to heal patients with specific ailments.

Though written more than a decade ago, I believe it still remains one of the few authoritative publications on the subject. There is no doubt in my mind that we are still in the infant stages of discovering how much impact light has on our health and wellbeing.

