

Designer Q&A



Kevin Cawley
Lighting Designer

By Helen Frances

Kevin Cawley is a Christchurch based, New Zealand lighting designer and associate member of IESANZ. He has won many national lighting and retail design awards, more recently the 2012 IESANZ Award for Excellence for his work on earthquake-damaged Knox Church in Christchurch (see Lighting December 2012). In the public domain Kevin also designed lighting for Christchurch's Pallet Pavilion and mentored up-coming landscape designer, Bayley Luu Tomes who won a double gold award for the Ellerslie International Flower Show. Kevin's portfolio includes retail, commercial, hospitality, entertainment, theatrical and residential sectors. At present he is working on the Christchurch casino and several residences.

Do you work collaboratively with other design professionals?

Yes. Normally everyone sits around the table and works out a clearer understanding of the client's brief then we all work together to realise his or her dream. For example I need to know what the landscape designer's planting is and what they think they need illuminating then we can go into discussion.

Does your input affect the landscape design?

Absolutely. I let them know what I think from a lighting design point of view and that may change their design. We are all working towards that final result. However every project team is completely reliant on the personalities in the team and every project is different.

What parameters do you consider when designing for public domains?

First and foremost you've got to use practical light. There are regulations you have to abide by such as luminance levels and particular spacings. If there's housing nearby there are certain cut off levels; you can't have spill lights spilling into people's back yards. If you are near an airport there are other restraints. It's about scoping the space and finding out the regulatory boundaries.

Do you take account of light pollution?

I belong to the Dark Sky Society and we are very mindful of light pollution. We consciously use luminaires that throw light down rather than up because it's a waste of energy and it serves no purpose. There's nothing to light up there. It's also about cost effectiveness.

What are the emerging trends?

Coloured LED is now used and colour is great when used for a purpose. Sandstone for example often has

a thread of amber gold through it; using soft amber to enhance would look stunning. Coming from the theatre we use colour to support the production's story that is why there must be a purpose or a reason.

What kinds of technologies do you favour?

I like using sodium and LED - a combination of old and new technology. LED is more energy efficient and less expensive but the less expensive, energy efficient LED chip is cold light and unfortunately is becoming the most popular choice for outdoors because of the cost. Manufacturers have told me that it will be more costly to get warm LED. Again, warm spaces make us feel warm. However in saying this, there is a difference between brightness and warmth. Brightness is the amount of light, and warmth is the colour appearance of light.

You have designed lighting for several projects in the public domain. What were some of the challenges and technical solutions?

For the Ellerslie International Flower Show Bayley Luu Tomes, a landscape design student from Wellington, approached me because he wanted to enter and win his category. He had very little budget but such passion and enthusiasm that I couldn't refuse. The concept was to light a roof top (living art) garden, to make it look stunning but at the same time light the space for practical use. The challenge was all about balancing the light, getting it even without giving too much light. Without dimmers it was up to clever placement of the light and different intensities to achieve visual comfort. The design inspiration came from the planting; the colour of the flowers, and the way that light would enhance the planting at night. We concealed the light fittings in joinery and used LED strip in lengths to suit the required light output and achieve balance. After much testing and playing

with different wattages of strip we came up with a perfect balance. Using LED gave us a great energy efficient solution. The colour temperature was constant and this made the space look and feel warm and welcoming. This design started Bayley's career and he won an outstanding double gold award.

The Pallet Pavilion filled a gap where the Park Royal Hotel had stood before the earthquakes hit. It was an exciting temporary venue for all types of activities, day and night. I was asked to light it for no money but plenty of help ... so I assembled a team. About five percent of my work is pro bono and I like passing on my knowledge. I had to design a scheme that would look impressive and interesting from the outside to entice the public inside. Being an open space was one of the biggest challenges as there were no hanging points overhead. I was inspired by the blue of the pallets and chose shades of blue with gels to create interest and mystery. Since this was a temporary structure lamp life was not critical but power consumption was, so I managed to find 80 watt PAR 38 fittings for the outside that were an aqua blue. That provided great contrast to the blue of the pallets, while using



Ellerslie International Flower Show (Double Gold Winner)



Pallet Pavilion 22

different shades of blue gave the four metre high structure shafts of light and light and shade without using dimmers. I hid the light source in a very simple metal sheet rolled into the form of a cone and painted red for difference, making the fitting and the effect look great. For the inside we were given LED floods and used them to flood from the top and bottom of the building. You could see the shadows of people through the pallets from the outside, which created mystery. The staged light was LED RGB controlled with a simple eight-channel mixer, which achieved some stunning effects using the blue base and introducing the RGB colour palette.

What do you think public domains need more in terms of lighting design?

They need to be a warm and inviting space and have the correct balance of light making the space look and feel special and at the same time making people feel safe. Great lighting design can do this by showing respect for the space. Great lighting design also has the magical power of creating an emotional connection between you and the space. ■