

# THE EMERGING PROFESSIONAL

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## STEP BEYOND YOUR COMFORT ZONE

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People discover lighting in a host of different ways, often by accident, and not always with the expectation that it could be the stuff of a fulfilling and creative career. However, when people do have their own “aha” moment with lighting, it sparks a passion and a career begins to form.

As soon as I was exposed to the transformative quality of light in theater, I discovered that it was a powerful medium in both an artistic and psychological way. It wasn't until a year ago, when I finished my studies at the Lighting Research Center (LRC) at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, that I realized just how deeply we are all affected by light. I fully understood that,

in order to effectively design lighting for the built environment, one must consider not just how light will make the architecture appear and affect our perception of space, but also how light will affect people emotionally, psychologically and physiologically. Doing research simultaneously with design projects made it clear to me that architectural lighting design is a unique blend of science and art, and in order to be truly accomplished as a designer one must be skilled in both.

### FILLING IN THE GAPS

For my undergraduate education, I studied fine arts with a focus on sculpture. During those years, *light* took a back-

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seat to *form* as my main area of inquiry. However, I began thinking about light as an expressive tool while working on theatrical lighting for the dance department. I explored this new medium in my own artwork and, upon graduation, started working as a freelance theatrical lighting designer and electrician in New York City. After five years of working in theater in New York, I felt limited in my trial-by-fire education and understood that a true education in the science and technology of light and lighting would be an invaluable experience toward reaching my full creative potential. In other words, I had to take the creative core of my personality (my right-brain) and complement it with a more rigorous, technical (left-brained) layer of lighting knowledge.

By recognizing my own deficiencies, I made the choice to fill the gaps in my knowledge and abilities by enrolling at the Lighting Research Center. My two years at the LRC as a student and employee renewed my passion for lighting design and opened my eyes to the full range of ways lighting touches people's lives. That move helped me to achieve the next step in my career: joining an architectural lighting firm back in New York City. Keeping my head down in the world of theater, as fun as it was, would not have allowed me to learn how lighting could be useful for more than entertainment. Studying light's effects on human circadian rhythms, the science of color perception and color rendition

of solid-state light sources transformed the way I thought about the importance of lighting design.

### SELF-EVALUATION

My particular path is just one example of an evolution toward becoming an architectural lighting designer; the paths of other people can take many forms and depend upon personal talents, career objectives and interests. I truly believe

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that those, like myself, who aspire to be architectural lighting designers should take time to evaluate their strengths and weaknesses and determine where supplemental training or education will be of use. This will be beneficial for a more prosperous and fulfilling career.

Take advantage of opportunities to enroll in a class (lighting related or not), attend a lecture or seminar, engage with other lighting professionals or, at the very least, read lighting articles and books. Doing so may help you uncover hidden interests, reinvigorate your passion for lighting and approach it in ways never considered before. A designer with a deep understanding of the ways in which technology and research can inform and blend with the art of lighting

design will be all the more valuable to his or her firm. The less one-dimensional you can be as a lighting professional, the more you will have to offer that is unique and valuable to those who hire you.

There are few professions as exciting and dynamic as architectural lighting design, especially in this moment of advanced lighting controls, ever improving solid-state technology, and a deep well of research in the realms of light

and health and human factors. With new technologies come new challenges as well as design opportunities. In order to maximize the benefits of new lighting technologies, designers must be versed in their nuances and features while ensuring that they are put to use in ways that uphold the aesthetic standards that make the built environment an uplifting place to inhabit. Architectural lighting design truly is an art and a science, and it may take just a small step out of your comfort zone to become capable at both.

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*The EP Column addresses issues affecting younger lighting professionals and those new to the industry.*