



The International Association of Lighting Designers (IALD) regular column tackling the principles of lighting design... This issue, **Kenneth A. Douglas** IALD, LC, Principal of Illumination Arts LLC, explores the burning question that we all ask ourselves...

what's it all about, anyway?

In early 2004, I formed a new lighting design firm along with a good friend and long time collaborator. The last ten months have been an exciting adventure to say the least. In that time, we have had many conversations between ourselves and with other members of the lighting design community about the changes in our industry and what it means to be a lighting designer today. This article is an attempt to verbalise some of these issues and perhaps start a broader conversation. Lighting design has always been a profession that mixes creative abilities and vision with the nuts and bolts of lighting calculations and electrical knowledge. It is peopled by individuals from diverse backgrounds ranging from theatre to architecture to engineering to interior design and fine arts.

It is a field that allows each of its practitioners to define what a lighting designer is. We all work with light in some way; but I suspect there are as many ways of approaching a lighting design project as there are lighting designers. Some of us are more technical in our approach while some of us are more conceptual. I believe it is this very ability to define one's own professional identity that has drawn many of us to this field. Lighting design has allowed many independent minded people to flourish by building their own definition of who a lighting designer is.

However, as we all know, we live in a world of constant and rapid change. The profession of lighting design has not been exempted from these trends. Ours is a young field, and it is currently in transition. As the field of lighting design matures we find ourselves faced with pressures not seen before that will define what a lighting designer is and how we function as part of a glob-

al design community. I have outlined below some of the issues that seem to come to the forefront during conversations with peers. Given that I am writing this from the perspective of the North Eastern United States, I am sure your list of issues vary and I hope we can find ways to share our insights with one another on all the topics facing our industry.

Maturity: We are a profession in the middle of our fourth decade of existence; we are no longer a field populated by a handful of creative individuals in a few major cities. Today our profession has practitioners in every corner of the globe, practicing their craft in a manner which responds to their local marketplace. How will our definition of lighting design accommodate this change, and this multitude of perspectives, languages, and markets? How will our professional organisations adapt and reach out to these varied worlds to make everyone feel they have a stake in the development of the profession? Can one definition ever encompass the work of a consultant in New York or London with one in New Delhi? How can we incorporate these differences to build a stronger more dynamic profession?

Technology: The speed of the world we live in has never been faster and it affects our professional lives in many ways. In our offices, the world of cad, ftp sites, web sites, etc have increased our productivity while shortening the amount of time we all have to produce our work. How does this trend affect our work and our creativity? How do we manage the technology before it manages us?

In other ways technology has provided our profession with an ever increasing array of products and systems we can now bring to bear on our

projects. Our choices of lamps have expanded exponentially over the years, providing us with a wealth of lamp types, wattages, and colour temperatures to choose from. In the meantime our ability to control these sources has also greatly expanded. In these and many other ways, the technological world we live in has expanded the list of tools we have at our fingertips, while at the same time increasing our need for accurate information to keep us up to date.

Sustainability: Sustainability, Green Design, Responsible Design, LEED. These are just some of the terms associated with a trend that is rapidly gaining momentum in the world of architecture. Sustainable design is finding acceptance throughout the construction industry (particularly in government sponsored work in the US). Lighting designers have much to contribute to this movement; many in our field have worked on energy conservation and electrical codes for decades. This new movement will push many more of us into the arena of sustainable design, where previously only a few have gone. We will find ourselves needing to learn new skills and terminology, to learn not only what the products we use do, but also how, where and with what materials they are made of. Our lighting systems will need to seamlessly respond to the ever changing conditions of the occupants and the building systems. Sustainable design will expand both the challenges and the opportunities we each face in our practices. There will be many new issues to master, but also many new opportunities for the growth of our industry.

Competition: As I said earlier, we are no longer a field made of tens of practitioners, today there are hundreds of

us practicing throughout the world. Historically new firms are formed by ambitious individuals who break off from an existing firm to set out on their own. This has given us a world where the average lighting design firm consists of about ten individuals, while larger firms are not as common.

The multitude of small firms seems to lead to an environment where fees are under constant downward pressure as our clients demand ever lower costs from their consultants. Combine this with competition from designers who sell or distribute product (producing a secondary revenue stream outside of design and consulting) and from manufacturers representatives who provide "design" services "free" of charge, and it seems that the ethos of an "independent" lighting consultant will face greater financial pressures in the coming years. Is the small firm model the best one for the professions future, or should designers find a way to build larger more diverse practices that can leverage the productivity gains of a larger organisation? How can we keep the model of independent lighting designers relevant in a marketplace where cost controls and value engineering are the rule? What other models exist in other parts of the world that may provide alternative perspectives?

Lighting designers have always been a specialist's specialist, bringing a mix of artistry and science to their projects. As the world moves forward and becomes more intertwined and more complex our specialty will become more complex and intricate. Our challenge will be to incorporate these changes while continuing to expand and strengthen our global profession and the marketplaces we serve. 