

The USS Monitor Center at the Mariners' Museum, Newport News, VA. Available Light

20-30-40: ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

JASON COPES

Age Of Architainment

Eco-Friendly And Entertaining Lights That Please The Masses

By Lisa Murphy

As long as people have been living and working in buildings, they have been lighting them. Imagine cavemen burning sticks outside the walls of their caves 2,000 years ago to scare off beasts and conjure spirits. Now fast forward to the year 1969, when the concept of illumination as applied to architecture was solidified by the International Association of Lighting Designers (IALD), who set raising the profile of architectural lighting design as one of their first objectives. It's been almost 40 years since then, and as the lights have begun encompassing not only buildings but all sorts of entertainment-related endeavors, lighting designers are adjusting to concerns over energy consumption, new technologies, a growing government interest in regulating the lighting of public spaces, and a blurring of the lines between design disciplines.

Saving The World, One Light At A Time

Although the creative process will never change, the tools and intentions will become more progressive, thinks Anne Militello, founder of Hollywood-based Vortex Lighting. "Rather than have technology driving design ideas, I prefer to see the design community have influence on engineers to help steer them to create more ecologically-minded technologies that will also give us greater choices for expanded creativity," she says. "The use of harvesting daylight, the push to develop high lumen LEDs, and the redesign of incandescent lights are reshaping the way we design. As designers, we are at the cusp of an exciting shift

to keep creativity alive and to try to design responsibly."

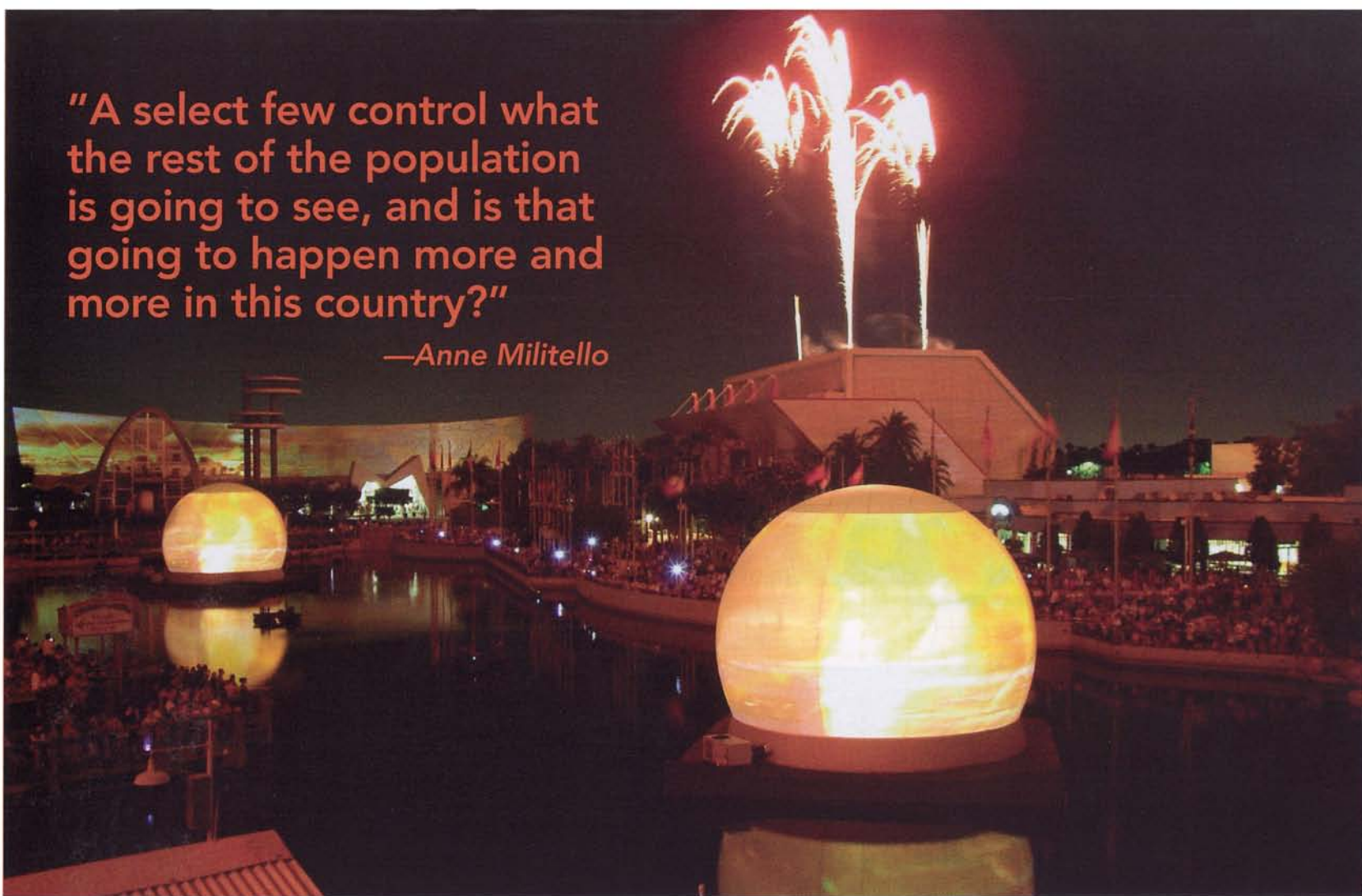
It seems the days of power-guzzling traditional fixtures and sources may be numbered, and designers are feeling a social responsibility to mitigate the old school consumption. "I've spent a lot of my career dealing with projects that have a large architectural component, and that's made me very sensitive to energy efficient lighting solutions. In a lot of places, it isn't just a good idea—it's the law," notes Thinkwell Design & Production's Michael Finney, based in Burbank, CA. "I think—and hope—we're going to be seeing a lot more out of sheer necessity. This is starting slowly, but I hope to see it in full roar by the five-year mark."

Energy conservation is the biggest trend now, says Stephen Bernstein, principal at New York City-based Cline Bettridge Bernstein Lighting Design. "Because of technological advances and changes, energy concerns, complexities of switching, etc, the lighting designer is more and more important. Low wattage color HID lamps good for interiors are also now available but they are not dimmable (yet). I think an important issue not acknowledged is that these new demands require a rethinking and a re-imagining of the environment—meaning architects and interior designers have to start thinking about designing differently—they must be more aware of finishes, cost of equipment, and schedules. We need to educate them so they can educate their client."

Steven Rosen of Available Light in Salem, MA, became fascinated with color, light, and electricity back in 1972 and says that as he looks to the future

"A select few control what the rest of the population is going to see, and is that going to happen more and more in this country?"

—Anne Militello



Universal 360—A Cinesphere Spectacular at Universal Studios in Orlando. Thinkwell Design & Production.

of the business he sees nothing but green. "How can I continue to deliver the visual wallop my clients expect on an ever-decreasing use of precious natural resources? I think it about it every day and continue to question our trusted manufacturers and cajole my clients to think beyond the initial capital investment. I hope to be part of the solution."

Entertaining The Future

When lighting designers aren't worrying themselves with saving the environment, they are embracing new technologies and design tools and applying them to archtainment-based lighting. "I think we're going to see the dividing line between projection device as projection device and projection device as lighting fixture break down more and more," Finney observes. "It's already there in a lot of applications. All of the architectural lighting we did on façades for the Universal 360 project at Universal Studios Florida last year (*Live Design*, November 2006) was actually Jeff Klein using his video projectors as lighting fixtures, but the price point is going to keep coming down to a point where it's common."

Militello's been in the business for over 20 years, since she lit her first show at the Magic Theatre in San Francisco. Her money, too, is on video as the future of design. "Video has definitely taken the place of the latest 'lighting trend,'" she says. "This just means we have more choices—conventional classical style of lighting or future oriented looks."

Bernstein notes, "Technology is a tool that allows us to achieve our design

concepts. It doesn't so much drive the solution as it allows us to do things that couldn't physically be done before given the constraints of the fixtures available and the architectural design." Bernstein acknowledges that lighting evolves slowly, and as incandescent lights are being phased out they seem to be being replaced by tungsten halogen equivalents. "As things evolve, you gain but lose as well. We will be that much more necessary because of the technological and environmental designs issues. A lighting designer can help keep the appropriate balance for a successful design, but our primary function is always to help architects and interior designers think about their work in relation to light. The vision and design contribution that we bring to a project is unique."

One other thing Finney would also like to see the future bring is a better generation of user interfaces for control devices. "I'm not thinking that will happen in the short term, as manufacturers have such an investment in their existing products, and I understand the economic realities there. But I think it's time that manufacturers start looking at how we as users interface with our control devices, and I think we need to look at it with more of a blank slate than I've seen anybody do to date." As Finney's role as a designer continues to change and evolve, he finds himself spending more time working on what the "next thing" will be, and sometimes he thinks it's technologies, and sometimes it means revisiting older approaches and adapting them to new situations. "I'd like to say that I try to let the concepts drive the design and not the technology, and I know that one of my strengths is being able to adapt



Hotel Angeleno in Brentwood, CA. Anne Militello, Vortex Lighting.

different technologies (not always from our industry) to achieve whatever the design intent is, but the reality is that I think we have to be aware of the limits and opportunities of the technologies available to us. And sometimes there's just going to be some new technology that we can't resist trying out!"

Government Lighting Control?

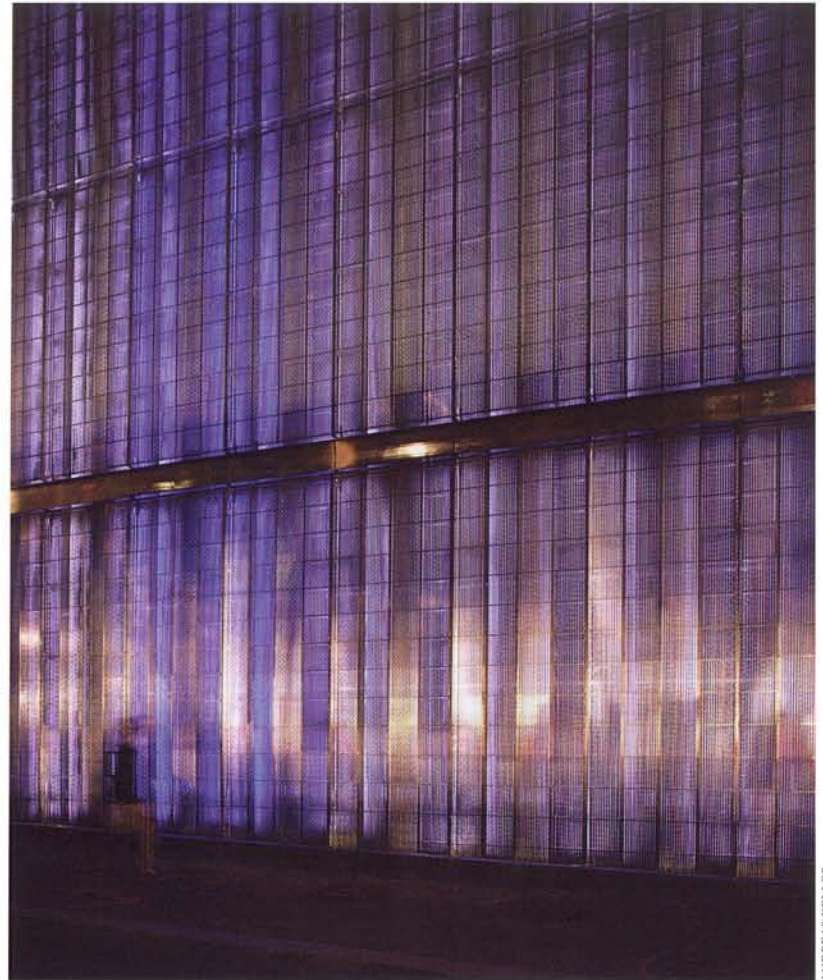
One of Militello's recent projects involved cutting the wattage (and energy bill) in half from 16,000W high-pressure sodium vapor lights on a former 1970s Holiday Inn turned boutique hotel in Brentwood, CA. The Hotel Angeleno was programmed with 16 Martin Architectural Exterior 600 575W intelligent color-changing luminaires and 28 Color Kinetics Color Bursts with frosted lenses to create a crown-jewel effect at the top of the building's rounded 17 stories. Despite a definite lack of light pollution, and an astronomical clock that stops the color changing at midnight with only a warm white remaining until 2am, Militello's design was met with fierce opposition by the local homeowners' association, who got the city involved by holding a series of hearings aimed at turning the lights off on the building—for good.

"As a designer, you get hired, and you do your job. You put your heart and soul into it. Your client likes it, and you make public art, and then you've got people that like it or people that don't like it. And it doesn't matter if the majority of the people appreciate what's being done in the public's interest. A select few control what the rest of the population is going to see, and is that going to happen more and more in this country?" Militello wonders. Currently, there are no laws on the books about colored lights anywhere, but this could set a precedent on future city zoning laws and issues of lights that "negatively impact the environment," Militello adds.

At press time, the owners of the hotel invited local residents to vote on which color palette they preferred, and from more than 600 looks Militello originally programmed, only the blues and whites will remain, and the Color Bursts are being totally removed. We'll just have to wait and see if future projects like this meet the same fate.

Between The Lines

What else the future holds remains to be seen, but one thing Finney is noticing is a distinct blurring of the lines between the different areas of design, requiring designers to adapt and evolve right along with the latest technologies and industry trends. "I don't think you can really be a lighting designer anymore and not recognize projection technologies as part of the palette, even if you're not the one doing that part of the design," he notes. "You can't really design media if you don't understand how it works with the scenic elements, and you can barely cue a show if you don't understand how the audio design works. Working in any kind of narrow focus just doesn't work anymore." **LD**



Lower Manhattan's 7 World Trade Center. Cline Bettridge Bernstein Lighting Design.



I got my first taste of live theatre in 1974 when my mother took me to see *Godspell* at the National Theatre in Washington, DC when I was just nine years old. I was captivated by the live theatrical experience and continued to be heavily involved in live theatre both in school and the Montgomery County, MD community. I went on to study lighting design for the theatre at Purchase College – State University of New York, graduating with a BFA in spring of 1988, alongside such terrific talent as David Gallo and Ken Posner. I then began my career with the Walt Disney Company, all in the production of live entertainment for the theme parks and beyond. Currently, as the vice president of entertainment for the Disneyland Resort in California, I can definitely see trends for the future where we blur the lines between traditional "seated in a theatre" entertainment and the immersive experiences we sometimes experience in traditional places like museums, traveling shows, and even video games. At the heart, it is still about storytelling and immersing people in a world, or an environment, or a story, even just for a brief few minutes. How we do it may evolve, but hopefully we just continue to do it!

—*Matt Conover, vice president of entertainment, Disneyland Entertainment, California*