

Where there's Light, there's Shadow

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Where there's success, there are difficulties

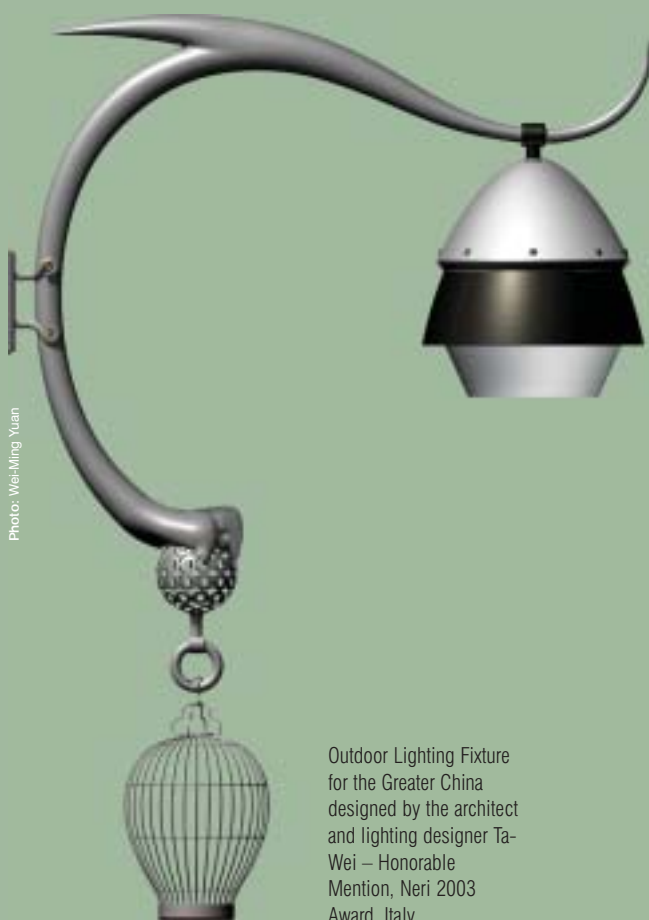


Photo: Wei-Ming Yuan

Outdoor Lighting Fixture for the Greater China designed by the architect and lighting designer Ta-Wei Lin – Honorable Mention, Neri 2003 Award, Italy.

THE CONCERNS ARE NOT EXCLUSIVE OF BRAZILIAN LIGHT designers: the lack of projects or the excess of them from one time to the other is part of the day-by-day in many light designer's offices around the world. This subject relieved one of the best seminars of the conference offered during the Lightfair International 2006, in Las Vegas, USA. With the theme "An Enlightened Way to position and Explore your Lighting Business", the architect and light designer Ta-Wei Lin enchanted all, in one and a half hour, with his Eastern philosophy and his simple and creative way to lead his office in Taipei, Taiwan.

After graduating in Architecture for Chung Yuan Christian University, in Taiwan, and having a master degree in Interior Design from the Pratt Institute in New York, Ta-Wei worked for a year in the American lighting office H.M. Brandston & Partners. In 1993, with the economic boom in Taiwan, he opened it's branch office there and after his own, the CWI Lighting Design Inc.

For a while, Ta-Wei dreamed in having a world recognized project, but he couldn't have the control of the quality of the project. He wanted to have an ample and sophisticated office, but he only had resources to keep a small room in a residential building. And worst of all, he neglected his family and his health to support the image of what he believed to be a successful lighting office.

Buddhist philosophy

As well as in Brazil, in Taiwan, lighting design is a new profession and, therefore, more vulnerable to any movement of the market. In 2001, the economy in Taiwan went through a period of contraction that shook the optimistical scene drawn by him. Ta-Wei got to a point of questioning himself if he continued in the lighting field and started to live deeply a personal crisis, what he himself called, ironically, of “crisis of the middle-age”. In 2002, the H.M. Brandston & Partners closed the branch office in Taipei, as he had foreseen.

In this hour, I looked around the room and I perceived that, besides me, the majority of the listeners had identified with that narrative and were with an expression in their eyes wanting to say “I’ve already been through this” or “I am going through this at this very moment”. From then on, we all became aware, wanting to know how that small and nice chinese had solved his problems.

For surprise of all, Ta-Wei started to speak on the Buddhist philosophy that says that the best form to resolve the problems is to stop and to look carefully to ourselves. Based on this, he created a “System of Internal Evaluation” where all the employees of the office, including him, could write what they think it was positive on themselves and on their colleagues. The results indicated the strong and weak points of each one and of the team as a whole, that helped to draw what he called “Specter of the Company”, inspired in the specter of light colors, composed in seven areas: Technology, Design, Abilities, Promotion and Marketing, Services, Management and Quality control and Finances.

According to him, by the Buddhist philosophy, the best way to transform the negative thoughts in the middle of a crisis is to change the point of view, is to move away from the fixed ideas and habits. “This concept can transform the imperfections into asset for the company”, he affirmed. To re-position the integrants of the team in accordance with their abilities was the first step. As result, he got more engaged and happy people with their new positions. The step after was to attack the weak points with a “Internal Program of Education”. For the diverse areas he implanted specific actions.

Technology

In the technology area, Ta-Wei narrowed the communication channels with suppliers and manufacturers of lighting systems and invited them to speak on the new products, from time to time, for all the team.

As the majority of his employees did not have much



Chun-Tai Chan Temple Interior Spaces, lighting designed by Ta-Wei that received in 2003 the Award of Excellence, from IALD and also the Award of Merit, from IIDA.

Photo: Wei-Ming Yuan

experience in lighting design, it was difficult to imagine and to foresee the illumination effects. Therefore, they had started to carry through tests and archetypes in real scale with equipment yielded for manufacturers and suppliers, what allowed to visualize the final result and to guarantee the quality of the project and, also, started to be a good form to convince customers and architects.

The use of softwares available in the market also was part of the program. Even understanding the illumination effects, the calculations carried through the computer check and validate what was projected. It started to be a basic requisite for all the team integrants to understand the meaning of the numbers printed in the calculations spread sheets, about uniformity, ratio and the relation of watts for square meter. When the project finishes a verification in the place is made to know if the results are the same ones foreseen and calculated.



Twice a month, the staff of the Ta-Wei's office sits down having tea, relaxing and sharing the information from international and national magazines subscribed. To keep the sense of humor, sessions of karaoke also has space on the schedule. Besides stimulating the good relationship, Ta-Wei has introduced an internal award, important incentive to the professionals of the time.

Design

Design started to be an important communication tool to convince the customers inside the In-ternal Program of Education. The design philosophy in Ta-Wei's office is based on using a phrase or a word to define the central concept of the project. "It is very easy for the team integrants, as architects and interior designers, to understand the intention of the project and to work together to reach the desired result", he affirms. With practical solutions and a touch of poetical sense, customer and designer become satisfied.

Abilities

To value the abilities was one of the strong points of Ta-Wei's new vision in search for a efficient process of production directed toward to the concern with the project presentation and the excellency of the services. With the perfecting of the technique and the project intention more objective, the drawings presentation started to reflect the finished project. A simplified check-list with each phase of the project was created, its sub-phases and spaces to fill, where everybody

could follow the project closely and give fast answers to the architects and customers. Moreover, the notations made in the working-field had changed into small memorial descriptions with pictures for all the team integrants to clearly visualize what had to be done.

Promotion and Marketing

Ta-Wei intended his projects to be divulged with more frequency. First appeared the idea to publish a book, what was soon discarded because of the difficulty to up-date it as the years went by. It was when the idea to make a table calendar appeared . Every year, 12 finished projects are selected and the pictures come followed by a small description. "The calendar does not only serve as a promocional material, but also as a reminder, to look at and to reflect on our improvement and perfecting each day", he prouds.

Another way to promote the office would be to have some projects awardees. "Difficult Goal to be reached quickly", confesses. Demonstrations and innovations in design were necessary to convince and cheer all the team and to make him feel comfortable to subscribe the projects. Even without having the experience of a awarding, he started to prepare briefings and projects presentations as the competitions ask for, it was a way to defy his team and to measure the design quality. After participating in many competitions, they had finally started to receive awards, as: Award of Merit in External Illumination for the Control Yan's project and for the Musician's Apartment in Internal Illumination, both in 2002 and granted by the IIDA (Interior International Design Association); Award of Excellency granted by the IALD (International Association of Lighting Designers) for the Chung Tai Chan Temple project in 2003, that also received the Award of Merit for the IIDA in the same year; Honorable mention of the Neri Award 2003 (Italy) Light-fixture for Greater China External Area; Award of Merit of the IIDA for the Chin-Sui Rest Stop project and the work in the Kaohsiung Tower of Light in 2004.

With the awardings, the so desired international publications came: cover of the magazines Mondo and Professional Lighting Design.

Services

"Our service was better than what we imagined". Patience and perseverance are secrets of excellent attendance and customer satisfaction. But Ta-Wei alert "Know how to dose these ingredients" and cited an example where they had not been applied in the certain dose: the Gi-Lou bridge project was initiated in 1995 and was paid only this year.

Management and Quality control

To place consistent and clear limits and rules so that all could follow and see the results. Difficult task, but with a little of good mood and communication at relaxing moments, it was easier.

Ta-Wei promoted two members of the team to be associates and share the responsibilities of management and quality control. "When they are too harsh on others, I have to ease the tension by making jokes". With this, the respect and the commitment spread itself and inspire the rest of the group.

Finances

Many of us architects, lighting designers and designers do not like numbers. After more than four years of quarrels with his accountant and financial consultant, Ta-Wei found an easy way to understand and to think about finances in the office's day-by-day. Familiar with the applied mathematics to the illumination, he used the method of ratio between the illuminancies, maximum and minimum, desired in a determined surrounding to execute a specific task (illuminance ratio). With this in mind, he found the ratio between overhead and salary expense, the man hours they spent and profit and other relations. "This ratio helps us to estimate how much the customer will have to pay for the honoraries and control the extreme expenses", he explains.

After establishing and testing the new financial system, he invited three old employees to be partners and to share the office obligations. This made them feel more involved and responsible and Ta-Wei more relieved.

Dividing information with good mood

Three years ago, they started to sit down to have afternoon tea twice a month, to relax and to change information brought from the nine magazines, international and national, that the office subscribes monthly. They started to like and to bring other information to be argued. "This aid to decide the daily problems", says him.

Dividing the success with the team

Most of the time, the awardings leave the office owners in evidence. And the team? Thinking about this he created a "internal awarding", that happens in the year-end dinner, where the wives and some architects friends are invited. There is an internal voting to choose the best design, the best execution and the most useful project of the new calendar and the

responsible person from the project takes the award. "This awards are a big incentive for them".

To finish, Ta-Wei cited: "The potential for success imbues every person and thing around us. We simply cannot see it", extracted quote from the book "Diamond Cutter", from the American Micheal Roach, who was a Tibetan Monk for 20 years and later went to New York to work in the diamond business to test what he had learned.

Looking at our own specter

Each source of light possesses proper characteristics, as: temperature of color, useful life, luminous efficiency, IRC. We need all of them to satisfy our necessities while human beings, because each one has its application. Trajectories as Ta-Wei's inspire and show me that regardless of the nationality, the economic situation in our country, the limitations of each professional, the difficulties, each one of us possess strong and weak points. The secret is to identify and to apply them correctly, searching the solutions inside of us and in those next to us. Ah! Without losing the good mood and the slightness of life. ◀



Photo: Simon Hsieh

Ta-Wei Lin is architect, specialized in Interior Designer in New York, lighting designer and the principal of CWI Lighting Design Inc, in Taipei, Taiwan. He also is professor of lighting design at the Shi-Jyan University and is member of the IESNA – Illuminating Engineering Society of North America.

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Photo: Arquivo Pessoal

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