

Lighting Design
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Staying power

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With more than a thousand luminaire design programmes completed over the past 20 years, David Morgan is one of the most respected designers in the business. So why isn't his name more widely known?

Louis Poulsen, Panasonic, Kreon, Thorn, Designplan, Holophane. All are world class companies. And a key factor they have in common is that they all have best-selling products designed by David Morgan.

Yet in many cases, his name is not linked to them – particularly in the case of UK companies – which is a state of affairs he has started to question: 'I do observe that in Italy and other European countries, companies boost the names of the designers they use to push the product up front, whether it's lighting, fabrics, or furniture. The designer is part of the uniqueness of a product.

'UK companies tend not to do this, it's not part of the way they do their marketing. Here you still have a lot of designers working away quietly in the background. So I suppose I do think it's time that British firms started to promote their designers and celebrate design talent.'

So a change of culture is called for? 'I just notice that in other countries you see that the

designer's name adds value to the whole marketing proposition.'

In the arena of contract and architectural lighting products, Morgan's prodigious talent is evident from his body of work. This year he has completed the striking Pantheon wall light for Designplan and the SPR 10 20W CDM Floodlight for Louis Poulsen. Both were launched at this year's Frankfurt Light + Building. And he's relieved to have come to the end of what turned into a four-year project for US manufacturer Belfer, to develop an innovative low voltage linear system, which uses xenon lamps. 'The complicated aspect was to achieve a cove lighting with no dark spots in the light distribution,' says Morgan, 52, a physics graduate who trained as an industrial designer at the Royal College of Art.

The Radiant system for Belfer is a notable achievement because it's the first two-circuit linear system for cove and showcase lighting. Specially developed connectors allow twice the length of linear lighting to be achieved from a single feed





point without any dark spots than with any existing system. David Morgan Associates was responsible for creating the design, thermal testing and development, component and system design, prototyping, testing and sourcing suppliers.

Morgan is based in Highgate, north London, and has deliberately kept his product design company small – it never numbers more than five. 'Beyond that and I would cease to be a designer,' he says. And doing design work, testing, prototyping and sourcing suppliers for a variety of clients is what he loves – so far he hasn't wanted his own brand.

'What I'm interested in are, principally, the interaction of light on architecture and the technical aspects of light. For those reasons I've never been drawn to designing decorative luminaires. Most home lighting products are objects that light up, they are not about the quality or performance of the light they emit.'

That said, one of his designs can be bought in John Lewis – the Sunrise Clock. It is marketed in the UK by Lumie and in the US by its partner Biobrite, both leaders in the market for consumer light therapy products that can reduce jet lag and help sufferers of SAD. DMA designed the world's first sunrise alarm clock, which gently wakes the user with a gradually increasing light output. A new digital version has been launched recently, which incorporates soothing sound effects as well as sunrise and sunset lighting effects. 'The Sunrise clock is one of my favourite designs,' says Morgan.

As to why he's not gone down the road of

manufacturing his own range of luminaires, Morgan says he likes the diversity of working for different companies and relishes the challenge of meeting their needs. 'Companies either come to us and ask us to develop a series of designs to a specific brief and then choose the one they like, or we approach companies with our designs. We often work in both ways with the same clients over a period of time.'

'The challenge is to differentiate a product from the competition. In the past, we were concerned to design products with a corporate look, but that approach has died away. Now companies are more concerned to have luminaires with a dynamic appearance. I feel I have to be something of a psychoanalyst in that I need to work out what lies at the heart and soul of a company and express that in a product.'

Morgan says computer aided design has made an enormous difference to the type of lighting products that can be manufactured. 'With a 3D CAD system, one person can achieve what once required input from five people. With computers you can see something from different angles, you can see how parts fit together. And you are creating a precise model from which tooling can be made.'

'I think one great advantage is that you can create less obviously geometric shapes. The Sunrise clock is an example of what I mean, because it

Profile



Previous page: David Morgan with one of his favourite designs, the Sunrise Clock for Biobrite. **Facing page, and above left:** Morgan likes the variety of working for different clients. **Above right, top to bottom:** some of Morgan's designs – SPR spotlight for Louis Poulsen, Pantheon for Designplan, Wave fibre optic task light

Profile



would have been very hard to define it in 2D. But with computers, now you imagine a design, you model it, you find someone to make it. It's fantastic!

Morgan says he likes working with companies such as Designplan, which are moving from a heritage of functional products to ones with a more architectural look. 'It isn't Flos or Artemide so it has to move cautiously, change has to be subtle. Pantheon is a good example because while it is based on classic geometry, it does have a contemporary edge.'

Progress in light sources is of huge interest to Morgan, but he's not as wild about LEDs as some. 'Generally, a new light source arrives on the scene, everyone wants to use it... but then the technical problems show up. Then there's another gap of three to five years while they're sorted out and the technology improves. With LEDs there's been tremendous hype, but they are expensive and the thermal properties need to be carefully controlled.'

Between 30-50 per cent of Morgan's work is for US clients. 'The US business style is very different to ours. People are fun, they are much more adventurous, they want to try new things immediately. But they are sometimes less confident about creating their own styles and prefer to make products with the widest possible appeal,' he says. The Japanese, on the other hand, are incredibly reliable, and they always pay on time, says Morgan.

'They're not as spontaneous as the Americans, but they are great to work for.'

So his is an international enterprise. 'I've had to make it a global business. Price is important – lighting is a very competitive market – and you have to find the best-value suppliers wherever they are. And I love to be involved in all these cultures, with their different ways of working,' says Morgan. Variety is, indeed, the spice of life. ■

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Above: Morgan with a row of the SPR spotlights he designed for Louis Poulsen UK, part of the Danish group which has bucked the trend by always crediting DMA for its work