

Designs of quiet simplicity

David Morgan describes to **Richard Brass** what designers can learn from butlers, and the surprising possibilities of the LED and the much-maligned CFL

For more than two decades, David Morgan has designed and developed luminaires and systems for clients around the world – as well as consumer and industrial products – through his company David Morgan Associates.

What are you working on at the moment?

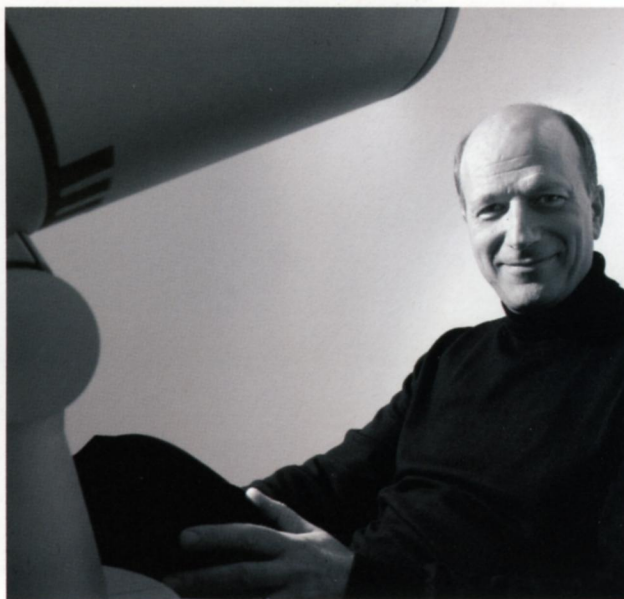
We have some clients we've been working with for years. We've come up with these bendable linear LED systems for Radiant Lighting, part of Belfer Group in US. We've just finished an office lighting range for Designplan, the UK company. Also Whitecroft – we first did work for them about 26 years ago and they came back quite recently.

We've started working in the entertainment lighting area, in the US with a theatre lighting company, and with an entertainment-based lighting company in Denmark. We've got projects in Germany, and we've just finished a range of floodlights for Lighting Technologies in Russia. Most of our work is with manufacturers, but in the past couple of years we've had more interest from architects and lighting consultants. We've been working with Maurice Brill on a project which should come out next year. Then we have our own projects, some LED stuff and some T2 stuff, and we're doing a range of low-energy residential lighting.

How did you become a lighting designer?

I couldn't decide whether to study physics or sculpture, but I thought physics sounded a bit more like a job. So I got a degree in physics, and then I went to Royal College of Art to do industrial design. One of my tutors was Robert Heritage, who did so much of the early Concord Lighting stuff, so that got me interested in lighting.

From my degree show at the Royal College I got recruited by Thorn Lighting, although my main thing was industrial pressing equipment, which couldn't have been more unrelated.



After quite a few years, I had a brief sojourn with a design company, and set up on my own in 1981.

When I started we didn't just do lighting, but now it's 95 per cent of what we do, particularly technical lighting. Appearance is important, but it's very much the technical aspect that

When I started we didn't just do lighting, but now it's 95 per cent of what we do"

seems to be the key to our growth in the past few years. I've started working much more closely with optical designers, which has given us a lot of insight into the applications.

Which areas of technology interest you particularly?

I always like to get involved as early as possible with whatever is new. Ten years ago it would have been fibre optics or something. Now it's LED. We started with LEDs four or five years ago, and it's been a pretty steep learning curve because all the thermal behaviour is different from incandescents or HID. I can see now how one can design LED-based luminaires that are going to perform reasonably well. I personally

don't think it's going to take over the whole lighting industry, but it's going to take a chunk of it.

The whole colour-changing thing is pretty amazing. But I think people are surprised, when they see LED fittings, by how big they are. By the time you add all the ways of taking heat away from the LED you end up with something which is probably larger than the equivalent luminaire if it was using a conventional technology. And it's obviously still extremely expensive, but it does open up a lot of possibilities.

We're also trying to make compact fluorescents acceptable in the mid-residential market. The quality of the light isn't very pleasant, and you can't control it particularly nicely, or if you do you end up with something that is enormous. It's proving to be a lot more difficult than I first expected. It's much more of a challenge than an LED project, but because it's quite energy-efficient and affordable, it should be an area where there's a lot of activity going on. I think we've come up with some interesting ideas.

Who are your influences?

When I started in the design business I was led by the Bauhaus and by Dieter Rams at Braun. I always liked his quip about how good design was like an English butler – something which is basically very quiet, in the background, but which would provide you with the services you were looking for. I think I've always followed that kind of approach, trying to make things as simple and quiet as possible. I was also influenced by Barbara Hepworth, Henry Moore and those organic sort of shapes. Some of my more successful products have been quite organic in their form, and I would like to have the opportunity to do more in that area. Because we've drifted towards the architectural end of things, where you don't want to do anything that competes with the architecture, it limits the scope for what one can do. But at an emotional level I'm drawn to those sort of more sculptural kind of shapes, that's where I tend to be going. ■