

Working internationally – urban regeneration in New Zealand

FROM THE RUINS

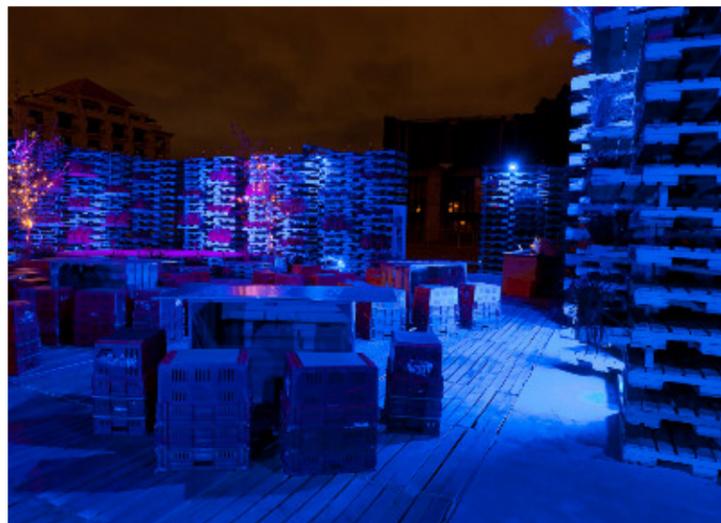
The city of Christchurch was devastated by an earthquake in 2011. Lighting and lighting design has been at the heart of its recovery and regeneration

By Kevin Cawley

Working in New Zealand as a lighting designer is a wonderful experience. We have a small population of 4.5 million, so there is no room for error. As a great singer once said: 'If you can make it here you can make it anywhere.'

You need to have a wide range of skills. Myself being trained in the theatre, I get involved in all types of projects from designing lighting for bathrooms in department stores, to world famous musicals, to large commercial and domestic buildings and even masterplans for towns.

One example of this diversity is that I was engaged to advise on the use of coloured light for a city council for city beautification because of my creative design skills. It became apparent that, up until now, councils had only been putting lights



on poles to light streets. But when it comes to the use of coloured light, it's a different game altogether and, to be fair, if you are not skilled in this area, then this should never be considered.

MAKING EDUCATION THE KEY

Some of the things to consider are: why are we thinking of colour? What is the purpose? Because when we put lights on to poles for street illumination, that's great for only illuminating the street. When it comes to colour for city beautification, all the above needs to be considered, as well as budgeting.

In New Zealand we have to educate the users of lighting that it's not 'just light', it's

a tool to be used with skill and expertise. I just don't think this is limited to NZ but worldwide. Education is the key.

A few years ago, for example, I was invited to speak at the International Light Fair in New York on 'Lighting a broken city' after the earthquakes that devastated the city of Christchurch, my home town.

My presentation consisted of all the challenges we in lighting design would face in Christchurch. I needed to point out the value of lighting design. Is it a cost, or could it be an investment for the future? Point out what solar plus LED could deliver? It could be energy savings on steroids.

I needed to show that budgets should be long term; that 'value' is not just about ini-

tial price, it comes from creating a warm environment that supports mental health and wellbeing and puts the heart and soul into projects.

As lighting professionals if we offer Rolls-Royce costing, then that – the costing – became the focus, not the wider benefit. To me, then, it's always the value not the cost that matters most.

As lighting designers, whether we're in New Zealand or wherever, we have to create better communication. We have to acknowledge investors and get them to understand why and, most importantly, why we *don't* need vast quantities of light, just the right amount of light.

In that presentation, I also pointed out

why lighting has to be about the environment: warm light, creating shadows, respecting the architecture and its surrounds. We should not allow regulation gate-keepers and 'status' to stifle lighting excellence.

We must educate and communicate with civic authorities' owners and developers. We must not create 'sameness' but challenge and deliver difference, because value comes from people wanting to work, play and feel special in the spaces we create.

LIGHTING DESIGN RATHER THAN SIMPLY LIGHTING

Most importantly, it is vital to have excellent relationships with independent lighting designers, who understand the challenges of lighting *design* rather than simply lighting to illuminate. It is about delivering cost-effective lighting that gives value to the owner who, at the end is the party and the one who funds and lives with the solution.

We have a dark sky reserve at our back door, in Tekapo on the South Island. In fact, it is the second most popular place on the planet to see the stars; international tourists flock to see our night sky.

It is vitally important therefore, as lighting designers (again both in New Zealand but also generally), that we bring discipline to our lighting. We need to recognise the value and importance of being able to see the stars from our cities.

Lighting excellence, I strongly believe as well, has to respect the environment. It is just as important as the project, regardless of the objective of the brief. In other words, street, building, statue, square, monuments, gardens and amenities – all require a collective approach, not just a singular 'let's light the tree' approach.

Christchurch is still recovering from the 2011 earthquake. But new buildings are now being erected all over the city, and we do work with architects, designers and other companies to ensure the lighting environment is sustainable and cost effective.

Rest assured, it is never all plain-sailing; on occasion budgets, personalities and feedback create a need for change! However, as time evolves, so too will our city. We have had our success and we are still working on the future. It's all about education, about lighting for people, about humanising pedestrian areas and public lighting.

Lighting is both a science and an art, but if we take humanity for granted, we do so at our peril. Pedestrian areas and public lighting is often designed only to meet standards and compliance criteria; this too frequently fails to take into account

the needs and preferences of the user.

Good urban lighting design, for me (from the other side of the world) is probably no different to you in the UK: it is about the highlighting of focal points and balancing the rhythm of light; it is how a space feels.

I take a lot of inspiration from my theatrical lighting principles; I take people through the meaning and mechanics of 'humanised' public lighting, the possibilities attainable and their effects on the moods and feelings of people. I show how to create comfort and ambience through the use of variations in light levels, of warm light, cold light, even no light.

A 'THINK LIGHTING' MENTALITY

I speak about tuneable white along with other solutions. I have created over time a 'think lighting' mentality among many different parties. I thank those international suppliers who have understood and supplied advice, materials and solutions, and those lighting companies have understood the challenges of lighting *design* rather than lighting to illuminate; we can work together to provide the best possible outcome for my city.

Finally, what can we learn, what can we apply, from the lessons of Christchurch? First (and most obviously) never go light on insurance! Plan for disaster.

But, more widely, it is about having a city vision that includes key parties from across all sectors. It is about actively working not to create sameness but to challenge and deliver difference.

It is about understanding that 'difference' – whatever that means in practical terms of where you are in the world – is what makes your city a must-see on any bucket list of travel, a 'must work there' for professional development, a 'must live there' just for the experience and for life.

So while, obviously, it is important as lighting professionals that we act as gatekeepers of lighting standards, of the professionalism of lighting and lighting design, it is also up to us to allow and celebrate difference and creative thinking. We should never allow lighting and lighting design to stifle the vibrancy of the city.

Certainly in Christchurch, where things changed overnight as the walls shook in 2011, we're now working to deliver precisely that difference, to deliver *design*, to deliver lighting and living for the whole community as well as the new community to come. ■

Kevin Cawley is a lighting designer based in Christchurch, New Zealand