

## KEVIN CAWLEY

PROFILE AND  
CASINO PROJECT

Kevin Cawley is an award-winning Lighting Designer and the Director of Total Lighting Ltd. He was commissioned by Christchurch Casino to bring vibrancy back to the casino surrounds and the central city. This aligned perfectly with Kevin's own belief that from out of the Christchurch earthquake, there is the possibility for the city to not only be the 'Garden City' but to also become the 'City of Light.'

The buildings surrounding Christchurch's Casino were badly damaged and subsequently cleared, leaving lots of empty spaces. CEO Brett Anderson and the Board of the Casino were all committed to revitalising the city centre.

Brett, who has managed casinos worldwide, had a vision that a lighting display could lift both the 22-year old casino building and the area, attracting people back into the city centre. He wanted something in keeping with the casino as an entertainment destination but respectful of the architectural integrity of the building.

For Kevin, it was a wonderful opportunity. His design aimed to create not only a vibrant image for the building but also "a visual symphony of programmable light". He wanted the Casino to be able to generate specific colours for individual events and functions and an original light show, "I decided to have a base colour that would be scheduled for twenty-eight minutes, then create a specific light show running for two minutes every half hour so the public would be attracted to

view this spectacle."

His aim was to create a perfect uninterrupted elegant line of light without seeing the light source, "I needed to ensure that the light fittings would not be seen in order to respect the architectural integrity of the building." He achieved this by designing a custom-built metal shield that when attached to the building would appear the same as the other negative detailed granite features, already part of the building. Kevin explains, "These light shields were specifically designed, not only to hide the fittings, but also act as light reflectors." Wind, rain, snow, heat expansion, weight and the security of the fixings all had to be taken into consideration. Kevin sought help, "Part of the success of any project is knowing what you can do and what you can't do! I engaged a Structural Engineer to assist with the complex, yet simple, design calculations, as the measurements were critical to the outcome." For Kevin, successfully disguising the fittings using the building's architecture itself was one of the pinnacles of the design and explains the 18-month





long planning phase, as extensive laboratory testing was conducted.

Kevin's design also acknowledged the Casino as an entertainment destination. He took into consideration the lighting in the entrance canopy, the roulette wheel on top of the building and fashioned a silhouette effect out of the embossed playing card concrete characters, on the top section of the building.

The 18-month planning phase over, installation presented its own challenges. Kevin recalls, "Eight weeks of traffic management, a deadline and weather restrictions for a start." However, the biggest test for Kevin was due to working in an earthquake ravaged city. Although structurally entirely sound, some of the building's angles and lines were not as true as prior to the earthquake, "The greatest challenge for me," explains Kevin, "was how to achieve a straight line of light. The installation and focussing of this project by the team was the best I have ever seen in order to achieve a straight line of light on the walls."

Kevin obviously relished the project but Brett seems to have too, "Working with Kevin was easy. We had worked with him before, knew his reputation and the awards that he had won. He is a perfectionist with an amazing imagination. I had an idea and I had to hand it over to someone to make it happen and Kevin and his team did – with lots of late nights out on the pavement staring at the building!"

Being able to tune lighting for specific and individual events is what coloured RGB is all about and with the use of a DMX control of the system, Casino staff are taking full advantage. Having decided to avoid the political statements that have seen other iconic buildings light up to sympathise with countries after national tragedies, Christchurch Casino focuses on their own functions and more joyous events. Recently, they have had a rainbow coloured display for Pride functions, drawing a very positive response from the LGBT community. Their red lighting display for Chinese New Year and green for St Patricks were equally as well-received.

As someone who has managed casinos as large as Macau (84,000 visitors a night compared to 2-3,000 in

Christchurch), Brett believes that the Casino and Kevin's joint vision and output is world class, "We often focus overseas on New York and places like that but actually much of what we do here in New Zealand is pretty innovative."

Simply put, Brett is blown away, "If I stand on the street corner now, the lighting has changed the building design. It has revitalised a twenty-two year old building that had got a bit lost in the dark space left after the earthquake. Now, it is an experience and photos don't do it justice. It has exceeded both mine and more importantly the Board's expectations."

## INSET

### Becoming an Architectural Lighting Designer

Kevin's career began on the stage, and although "rubbish at acting" he fell in love with the special glow that came with being quite literally in the spotlight. Never one to doubt his own abilities, he approached the director of a local am dram production and volunteered to do the lighting. The director accepted his offer and Kevin began a never-ending journey into the world of lighting design. He sourced a lighting designer who kindly taught him the ropes and his maiden production of 'Jesus Christ Superstar' received rave reviews. Never undertaking a formal qualification, he continued to hone his craft through kindly mentors and attending Master classes in both Broadway and the West End, ultimately working extensively in Australia on musicals.

'Theatre Retail' was a term that was being bandied around in the early 90's, when Kevin was approached by Christchurch International Clothing Company. They manufactured sports jerseys and wanted to distinguish the different sports disciplines on sale in their stores using lighting. Much to his surprise Kevin received an award for the store lighting and his career shifted emphasis into the commercial sector, working both nationally and internationally in Dubai, Saudi and Australia.

To upskill, he attended conferences to listen and network with other lighting designers. Whilst at the International



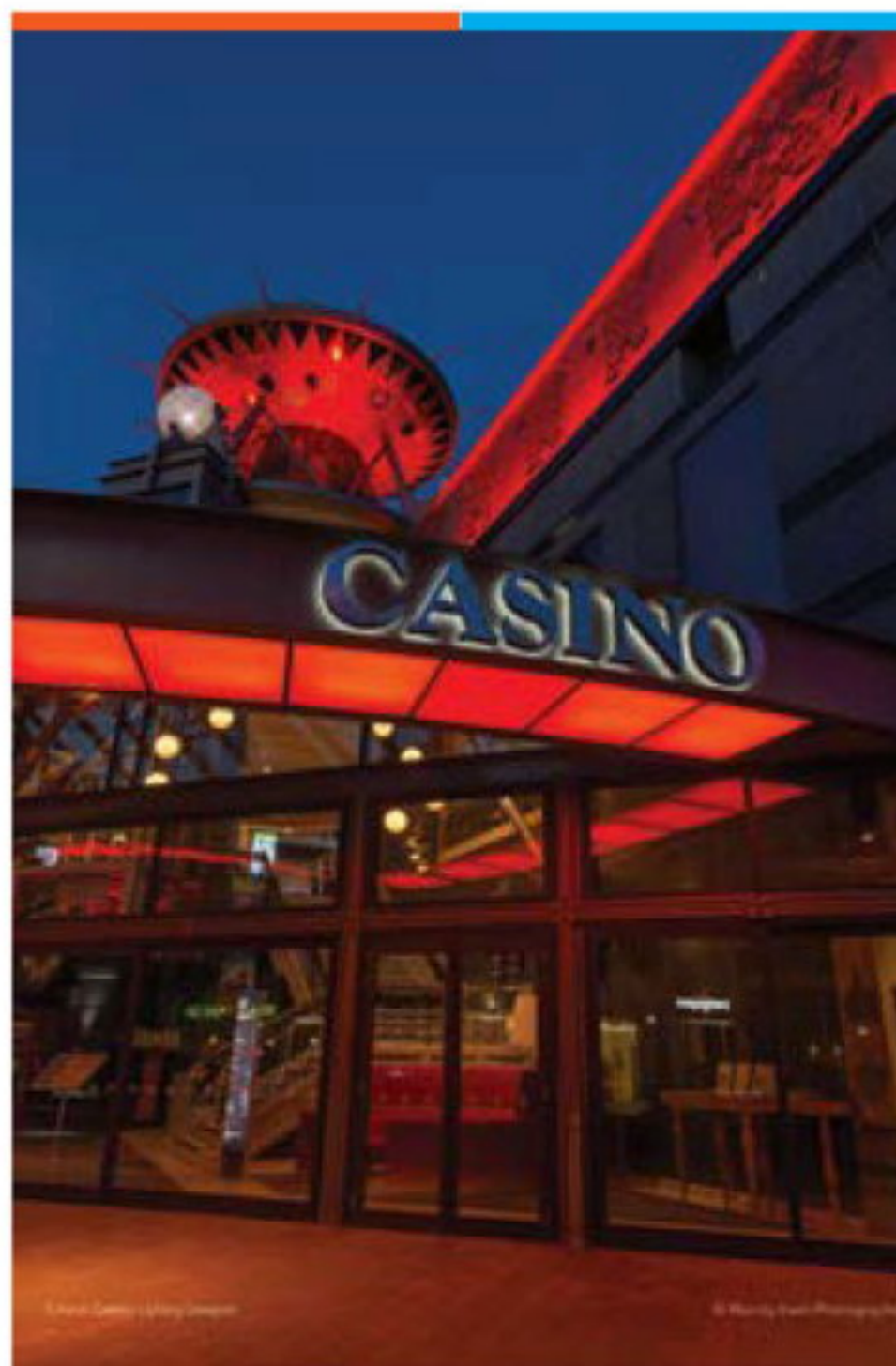
Light Fair in New York, where he gave a presentation on lighting (titled 'Lighting a Broken City - the story of rebuilding Christchurch') he even got thirty minutes' facetime with the lighting designer who lit the Statue of Liberty. With the life motto, "Nothing comes to you, you have to ask", Kevin invited himself along on a Monash University Retail Studies tour of Apple, Harrods and other leading retail stores and spent valuable time with top merchandisers.

The key for Kevin is having the passion, "You need to know how lighting works and why it works but with the added artistic understanding that for me comes from having worked in the theatre. I love the light and know how it feels, how it makes others feel. I am very privileged to be a theatrical lighting designer working in the commercial sector. Your designs are there forever."

Look out for more of Kevin's work coming to a place near you as he works on an Indian temple in Auckland, Trinity Church in Christchurch and AJ Hackett in Kawerau.

## WANT to know more?

Having been well-supported by mentors himself, Kevin now does workshops and teaches on architectural lighting courses across the country, adding the artistic understanding to the otherwise largely technical courses. He welcomes anyone keen on furthering their own career to contact him direct: [www.lightingdesign.co.nz](http://www.lightingdesign.co.nz)



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