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Tuning the colour of light can make our public spaces more human



(/article/2015/08/tuning-the-colour-of-light-will-make-our-public-spaces-more-human)

The fountain at Christchurch's botanic gardens - spaces like this will benefit from lights that can be tuned in colour and intensity

At a recent international lighting conference in New York, where I presented on lighting's role in the rebuilding of Christchurch, New Zealand following the earthquakes of 2011, it was inspiring to find that tuneable white light was a hot topic. There was much talk of the use of tuneable white across many lighting disciplines.

Tuneable white is exciting as it gives me a tool to create night light magic, with the ability to not only control the colour temperature but also the intensity of light. Just think of what that can do for our public spaces. We now live

in a world that suffers from light pollution, which is causing us many problems. As lighting designers we have a responsibility to our planet and now we have the opportunity to get it right. We need to become proactive, educate as many people as we can and show all the possibilities.

For example, security. Imagine you're the owner of an evening entertainment venue on a boulevard. On a street pole outside is a tuneable white light source that you have the option of controlling for a short period of time in the event of a disturbance, taking the area light from warm to bright white light. Pausing the disturbance. When we go from low warm light to cold white light suddenly, we tend to pause the activity.



Independent lighting designer Kevin Cawley

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Tuneable white light has a large role to play in humanising pedestrian areas and public lighting"

The possibilities are endless – and are already being explored. People love warm light. It makes us feel great. It makes us feel special. I have been presenting of late on the theme of lighting for people: humanising pedestrian areas and public lighting. Tuneable white has a large role to play in this.

One of the frequently asked questions is about the cost. To me lighting design excellence has

always been about the value, not the cost. Sadly, on occasions, if we offer a Rolls-Royce costing then the focus falls on that, rather than on the benefit.

You see, cost-effective lighting is not necessarily the cheapest. The lighting that has the greatest economic benefit for us is the lighting that makes people want to stay around, sit at our outdoor restaurants, browse our shops and promenade along our walkways. Effective lighting design and use of lighting gives heart to our public spaces. We need to light for people, not just to meet standards and compliance criteria.

Coming from a background of theatrical lighting design where we were always adjusting and tuning the fittings to create perfect scenes, this to me now has to be an answer to our public spaces. As a great man once said, 'All the world's a stage...' If that's true, let's light the stage better. Now with tuneable white and excellent design it is finally sustainable and cost-effective to provide light for people to enjoy.