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The Orchard, Holme Farm, Wincorpit Lane, Murrings Heath, Horsham, West Sussex, RH13 6LZ
T: +44 (0)1403 892720 F: +44 (0)1403 892721 msf@wildwoodpr.co.uk www.wildwoodpr.co.uk

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Staying independent



Mike Eddowes, managing director of Flairlight, discusses why lighting design is best done by an independent...

As an independent lighting consultant, designer and supplier, it is now the norm to be working as part of a project team. In particular, on new build projects, we'll expect to be operating alongside an electrical consultant, architect, an interior designer, an electrician - as well as builders, plasterers and all the other trades unconnected with the lighting or electrical installation. However, I think it is worth setting out the advantages that the independent lighting designer can offer to construction projects. The

reason for this is, it is not uncommon for an owner or developer to be unaware of the difference between the services offered by a lighting designer as opposed to an interior designer, or indeed an electrician. All can be involved in choosing lighting equipment, but the skill sets are entirely different.

An independent lighting designer brings solid technical knowledge to a creative discipline. Lighting technology and equipment developments happen rapidly. There are many,



many thousands of products in the marketplace and staying abreast of trends is a challenge. In this climate, it is worth remembering that independent lighting consultants should supply their own specified products, however they do not install equipment. Neither do they depend on recommendations from wholesalers, manufacturing lighting sales staff, or electricians on the type of product to be used on a project. They are independent. So by definition the client will benefit from a lighting design that is based on research and expertise, and uncontaminated by any conflict of interest.

As an independent you can work closely with a wide range of manufacturers. In this way, it is possible to accumulate a wide range of knowledge about the strengths and weaknesses of individual companies and their products and base your specification on your experience and judgement as appropriate.

From a personal point of view, I'm a big fan of European manufacturers, but sadly the UK's largest import growth area is in Far Eastern imports of lighting products. How the Far Eastern supply chain works is this: the Far Eastern importers sell boxes to distributors, who sell boxes to electricians and installers. The distributor says the products are great, but what he really means is, he is selling a lot of boxes. By the time the products are installed, they have often never been opened or gone through any checking process, let alone functional testing. The Far Eastern techniques of mass production are a trade off for product

quality. It's worth remembering that CE stamped on product stands for Electromagnetic Compatibility not Chinese Export! Also, the supply of product direct to clients avoids the known UK distribution channels and results in cost effective pricing avoiding mark up on mark up to maintain profitability, as a result the cost to clients and end users are often similar to known tested quality products.

The European distribution chain requires a contribution from all parties, to ensure that all take an appropriate margin and everyone stays in business. If the huge flood of imported goods is not stopped, eventually prices will be so low we'll have no decent products, no installers and no designers, and we'll be back to candles!

Alongside managing the specification process, an independent designer can also add value to a project by managing the product supply chain. This ensures that the product that is specified in the design is the product that is installed by the electrician. Ultimately it is this process that can make or break the success of a project as poor quality products are unreliable and offer inferior performance. Whatever the nature of the design scheme, it has to work for the client to be happy, and that is how we stay in business.

Contact
Flairlight Designs Ltd
Tel: 01372 807 661
www.flairlight.co.uk