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THE MAGAZINE OF THE ILLUMINATING ENGINEERING SOCIETY

MAY 2026 • VOLUME 56 • NO. 5 • COMMERCIAL AND INSTITUTIONAL LIGHTING

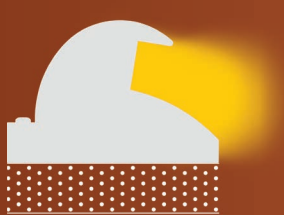
FIRST UP

PLUS

On the Cover
Foundation Medicine's headquarters features sweeping vertical movement inspired by patients' medical journeys. Photo: Connie Zhou

ALUZ

ZERA Pathway



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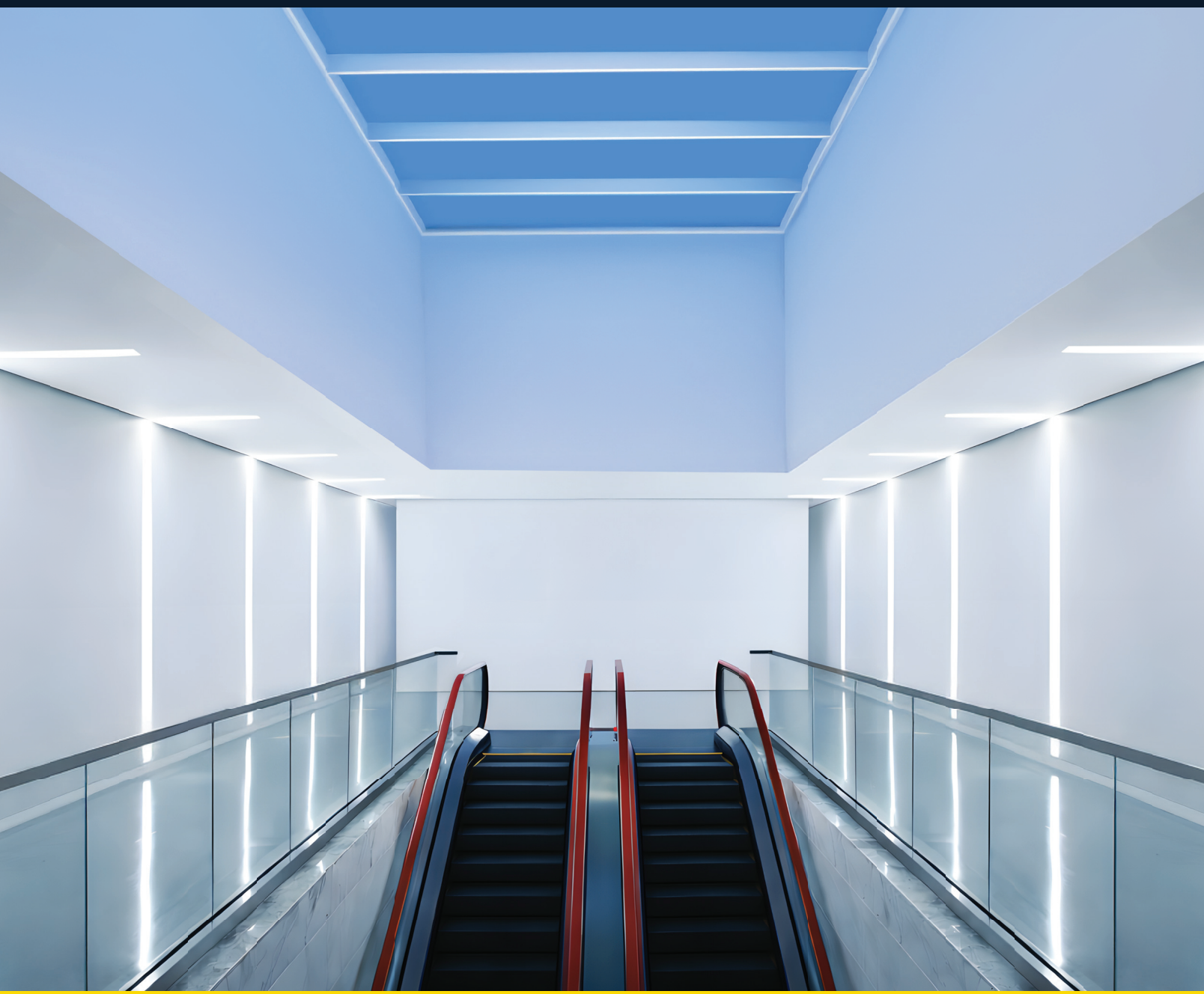

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Absolute Madness

At 17, I landed my first "real" job at Fortunoff, a high-end jewelry, outdoor furniture, and home retailer. Upon being interviewed, they took one look at my face and offered me a position in one of the lowest ends of the store—the Housewares Department. During my eight years with the company, two things remained constant: customers loudly insisting "The customer is always right!" and the reality that those shouting it were often spectacularly wrong.

Pick your favorite "ism," whether its Taoism, Buddhism, or even Jediism, each warns against "absolutes" and guides one to embrace a world that is fluid. Hence, the customer, client, or (insert group here) is never *always* right. If you disagree, you can take it up with Confucius.

So, Grasshopper, what does any of this have to do with illumination? In my nearly three years with *LD+A* it's been a bit surprising to witness the number of clients who have expressed "no interest" in allowing lighting designers to speak publicly about projects that were shaped—and even defined—by illumination. And designers are boxed in; no one wants to bite the hand that feeds them.

What's confounding is that a strategy to stay quiet often runs counter to a client's own interests. During my brief stretch as a public relations officer, one of the most valuable things I learned was mastering "the art of the pitch": understanding the outlet, knowing why the story matters, identifying what's unique, and clarifying the benefits for everyone involved. As an outlet, *LD+A* is not *Mystery Diners*—our purpose isn't to expose misconduct through deception but to "enhance and improve the practice of lighting." Promotion, done well, delivers tremendous value to clients: it draws attention and traffic to their projects, highlights technological advances and thought leadership, inspires others, and positions them in a way that attracts the next generation of bright minds.

In an ideal world, clients would recognize the value of promoting their projects and celebrating the designers behind them. It shouldn't require so much effort for designers to make that case. After all, the work being completed serves a purpose far greater than erecting a building, illuminating a space, beautifying a community, or serving the underserved. The bigger picture is advancing the industry technologically, creatively, and inspirationally so that each project not only solves a problem in the present but also helps shape the future of illumination.

For those of you who have successfully navigated these waters, I would love to hear about your experiences. I'm curious how you've handled it—the effective conversations, ones that fell flat, and those that may have required a deep breath and a second cup of coffee.

Craig Causer

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THE MAGAZINE OF THE ILLUMINATING ENGINEERING SOCIETY

LD+A
LIGHTING DESIGN and APPLICATION

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READERS WRITE

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Exercise Your Brain

Congratulations on an unexpectedly great article on an unexpected topic to find in *LD+A* ("Art, Science, Business...and Our Brains," *LD+A*, March 2026). Columnist Mark Lien posed a relevant question that I wrestle with when teaching my elective in lighting to architects and designers at the Hillier College of Architecture and Design: "How to see—and learn from—examples of good and bad lighting designs in the world around them?"

I have always felt that the best way to teach lighting as another design tool was by having students look at interior/exterior images—often taken from design magazines and/or manufacturers' websites, as well as from interiors that they see and use on a daily basis. Trying to make students understand how good lighting improves an ordinary space and/or how bad lighting diminishes an extraordinary space is easier when there are visuals to see and evaluate.

However, today's student can paste an image into Google's Gemini and ask it to describe good lighting and bad lighting and get an annoyingly good answer without any thought (and I fear without any true learning from the experience). I fear that instead of gaining knowledge and experience, they are facing cognitive decline.

Not wanting to be labeled a Luddite, I only ask for limits on children's use and access to AI as well as an understanding that minds must be exercised and not just spoon-fed endless streams of data.

Again, thank you for the article!

Manny Feris, adjunct instructor, Hillier College of Architecture and Design

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INSIGHTS

Swing from the Ceiling • As Seen on TV • Night Life

Photo: Michael Slack, courtesy JZA+D

The Ceiling Is the Limit

At the Myra and Van Williams Spark Lab, a STEAM lab for K–12 students at the Princeton Public Library in Princeton, NJ, designers from JZA+D put the ceiling to nontraditional use: a place to house power cords. Because the library leadership recognized the need for a flexible-use classroom to host various activities, the designers' task "was to design a studio that could accommodate as many uses as possible, with movable furniture and connections for power and data within easy reach," said JZA+D Partner Mark A. Sullivan. The flexible solution: recessed linear LEDs on the primarily ACT drop ceiling and more than a dozen ceiling-mounted retractable power cord and data reels attached to a rectangular coffered portion of the ceiling. The reels were not only a more cost-effective solution than traditional plug-and-play pods, but also allowed for easier movement of furniture and equipment types such as sewing machines, woodworking and laser-cutting tools, and a 3-D printer within the space.

MERGERS & MORE:

- Commercial lighting manufacturer **Luminii** has acquired architectural lighting manufacturer **Alva Lighting**.
- California-founded **Environmental Lights** has acquired Minnesota-based **Nova Flex**.
- **Ventilux**, a designer and manufacturer of multiple safety systems products, celebrates 40 years of business in 2026.

> **"Approaching the specification of lighting and acoustics as an integrated system—rather than as separate scopes—creates opportunities for closer collaboration between the two disciplines."**
>
> **"The Twain Shall Meet," p. 38**

Ready for Their Close-Up

Top-level managers of Inter-lux, a lighting-products manufacturer and distributor recognized across Canada and the U.S., were interviewed for Bloomberg Network's TV program *World's Greatest!...*; the episode featuring the brand appeared on air twice, once on March 28 and again on April 4, 2026. The long-running show depicts a wide variety of companies, products, technologies, and travel destinations, from hidden gems to household names, and provides viewers with behind-the-scenes information.

To connect more deeply with Inter-lux customers and end users, the manufacturer invited the show's camera crews into its office, factory, and sales center to film daily operations. Inter-lux CEO Mark DeVries said, "We're thrilled to share who we are with the world. Those who have not yet visited us [got] to meet some of our team members and see how we collaborate to deliver innovative lighting solutions to our customers."

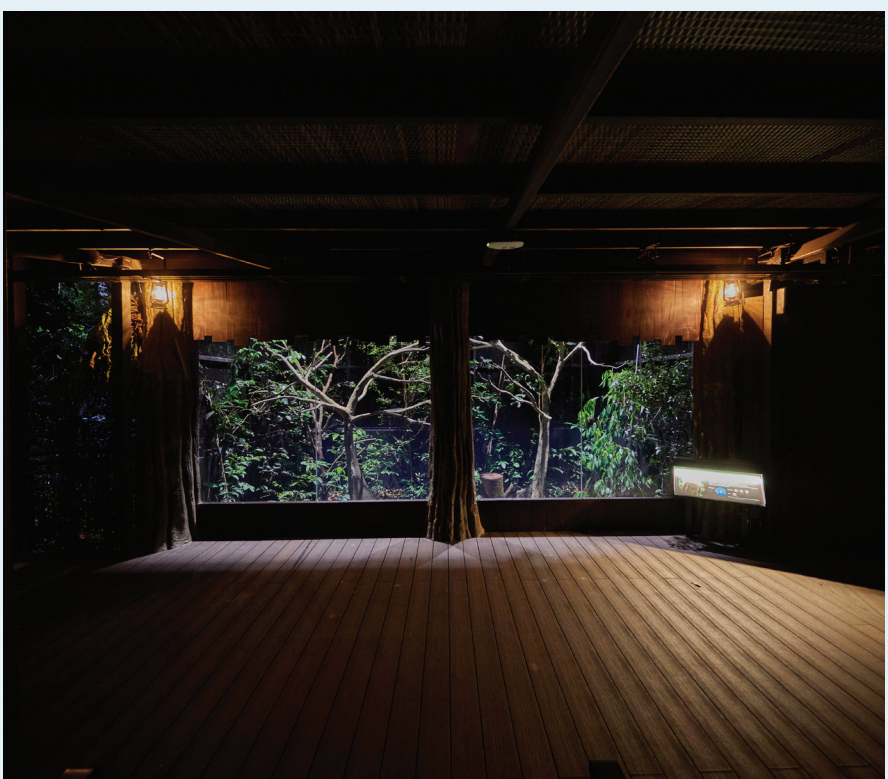


Photo: Harman Professional APEC

A controls system by Pharos and a light strategy by Light Collab allows visitors to catch a glimpse of nocturnal life at the new Pangolin Trail at Singapore's Mandai Wildlife Reserve. The control solution comprising two Designer LPCs each with two universes of DMX, six Designer BPSs, and 27 Martin Exterior Wash fixtures strategically placed along the trail, balances light and shadow while blending with habitat surroundings, allowing the pangolins to feel safe to emerge from hiding spots.

EVENTS

JUN 25

The IES San Francisco Section's Light! Design Expo returns to Pier 27 on San Francisco's Embarcadero. This annual event showcases the latest in architectural lighting products and attracts a wide range of exhibitors and design professionals.
https://lightdesignexpo.com

AUG 13–15

IES26: The Lighting Conference, the pre-eminent conference for all things lighting, will be held at the Denver Grand Hyatt in Colorado. The event will include peer-reviewed, poster, and technical presentations; workshops; and speaker sessions.
www.ies.org

SEPT 15–16

ArchLIGHT Summit, an event dedicated to delivering interactive experiences for lighting designers, specifiers, interior designers, and architects, will be held at the Dallas Market Center and showcase new products in addition to hosting educational sessions.
www.archlightsummit.com

Seen by Staff

Photo: Michele Zimmerman

Preset light scenes illuminate the Prudential Center in Newark, NJ, during the American and Canadian national anthems at a PWHL New York Sirens hockey game.

Ask An EMERGING PROFESSIONAL

This assistant lighting designer at **NV5** explains how her childhood hobby of figure skating inspired a career in the lighting industry.

What is your current role and what are your day-to-day tasks?

I am an assistant lighting designer on a small team that works in architectural lighting for higher education, laboratories, and specialty lighting/controls for theater auditoriums. I act as our team's photometric specialist and have the opportunity to design projects as well.

What is the best part of your job?

I like that our projects are not all the same; we get a wide variety of things to collaborate on. I like that my background in theatrical lighting is helpful, and that I am a small piece of the puzzle that helps build spaces for future artists.

How did you find the lighting industry?

Through the performing arts. I was a figure skater and performed in ice shows as a kid. I quickly switched from being an athlete to working behind-the-scenes in theater when I saw how technology truly transforms spaces. Lighting became my passion, and I have been studying and working in theatrical lighting since 2005 and switched to a career in architectural lighting in 2020.

What is the most surprising part of your job?

Location is everything in a project: where the building is geographically, where daylight is coming from, the code regulations, the outside temperature, surfaces in a room, how luminaires can be concealed in specific spaces, etc. These aspects of design became more important when I decided to focus on architectural lighting, and it was a true eye-opener. Telling a story took a backseat and making sure that luminaires can work with all adjacent elements became the focus.

What is something people in other industries don't understand about light?

Lighting has such a profound effect on how we live our day-to-day lives. The moment you change a scene can immediately change the viewer's perspective and mood. Lighting has a huge impact on everything it touches and it's important to use it as a tool in the most effective way—that's when it becomes a work of art.

Do you have a dream project?

I am drawn to lighting projects that let me work from darkness, like façade work and landscaping and lighting environments that balance lighting for humans and wildlife. I think this is because I see it similarly to a dark stage where minimal lighting can make a huge impact. I would love to work on projects that give me more of an opportunity to explore that. Additionally, I'm originally from Chicago, and would love to leave my thumbprint in the Windy City.

Is there a project that you have not worked on but find inspiring? Why?

Howard Brandston's story and career are inspiring. His project of lighting the Statue of Liberty to be seen as the Sun is rising from the east is something of nature, storytelling, and engineering. I like that he took a simple approach that made the biggest impact: It paid homage to Lady Liberty and all she represents. Flashy lights and attention-drawing items are not always the answer.

Is there a current lighting designer and/or design firm you particularly admire? If so, who and why?

I have had the chance to meet many wonderful lighting designers, and I have taken some of their essence and teachings with me on my journey thus far. The people that first come to mind are my mentors: Brandon Wardell, Bob Davis, and Sandra Vasconez; they are true masters and artists of lighting as well as wonderful people to have had the chance to learn from. I have had the opportunity, via lecture or in a theater, to observe Margaret Nelson, Norman Russell, Leslie North, and Teal Brogden in their elements. They are all inspiring professionals, and to witness creative people who are passionate about lighting, and open to supporting others in the industry, has been something I have been fortunate to be around.

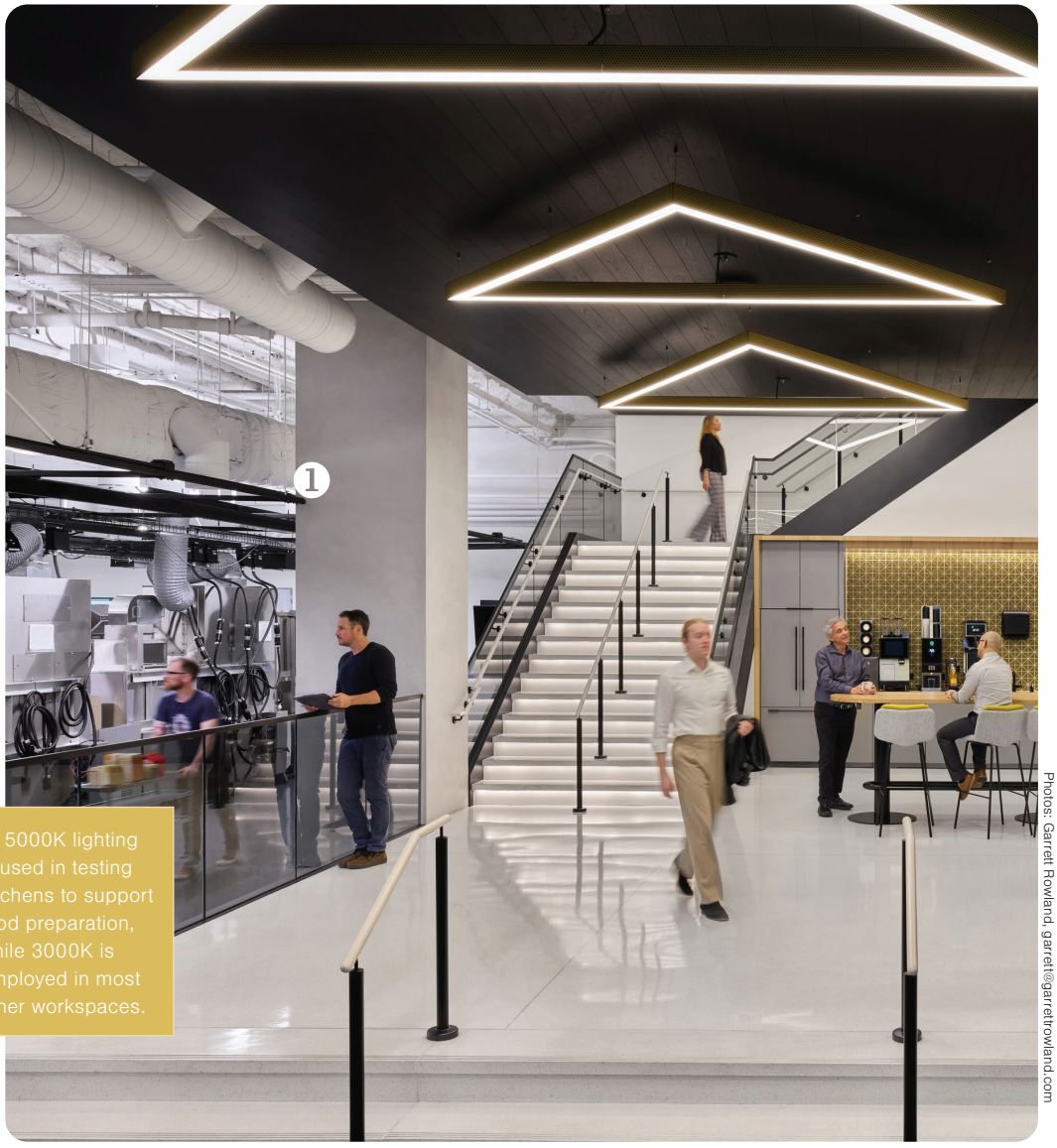
What is one piece of advice you would give to someone considering a career in the lighting industry?

Read everything, be curious, and be kind. No one pushes you into a career in lighting, it kind of chooses you, and when you accept that as your path, you must do everything you can to be a sponge: learn everything. Lighting is a versatile science and art, and you must be versatile to work in this field. It is also a small world, so, be kind to those around you and ask questions with honesty.

How THEY DID IT

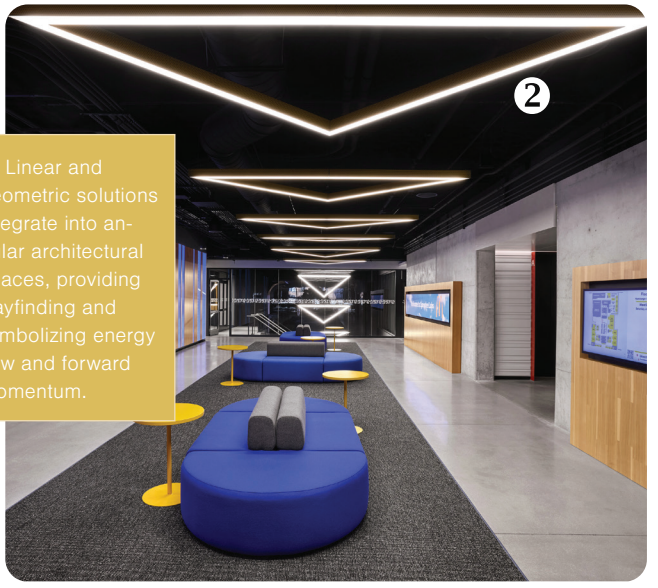
"McDONALD'S – SPEEDEE LABS"

Geometric-inspired lighting design by **IA Interior Architects** at a future-focused Mickey D's corporate facility in Chicago emphasizes innovation and creativity.

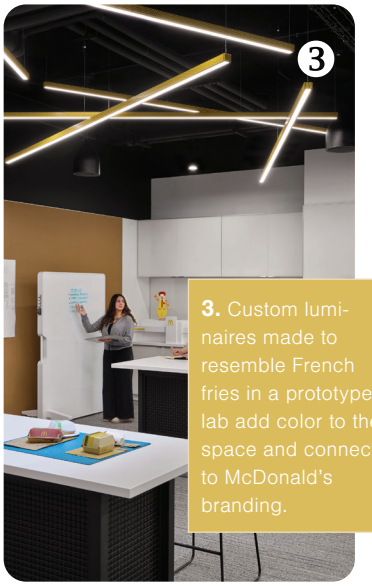


1. 5000K lighting is used in testing kitchens to support food preparation, while 3000K is employed in most other workspaces.

Photos: Garrett Rowland, garrett@garrettrowland.com



2. Linear and geometric solutions integrate into angular architectural spaces, providing wayfinding and symbolizing energy flow and forward momentum.



3. Custom luminaires made to resemble French fries in a prototype lab add color to the space and connect to McDonald's branding.

Mark Lien

"One trend that was explicitly identified by *Lighting News Now* in its residential list was 'going analog as an antidote (screen free, tech free spaces).'"

THERE IS SO MUCH WE DO NOT KNOW. We don't know what happens when we die or what happens when we sleep. We are still learning about human vision and how light affects our metabolism. Nutrition is still debated. Consciousness remains a mystery.

Homo sapiens date back to Africa about 300,000 years ago, and we still do not understand basics of the human body. Thought leaders recognize that the more they know, the more they realize what they do not know. It is hubris to think we can see the future when we cannot even understand important aspects of what exists in and around us.

No one sees the future clearly, even the near future, but that does not prevent guesswork and informed speculation. Knowledgeable people can forecast the trajectory of change, just not the speed of change, especially in the far-off future.

Lighting trends can help inform designers, manufacturers and their sales force, lighting educators, and any lighting professional who wants to stay current. This column is limited to what is being predicted for 2026 and the near future of architectural lighting. These trends exist already so their trajectory can be plotted.

My focus is on the common threads for commercial and residential illumination as well as both combined. Descriptions have been paraphrased or shortened in some cases. If you would like further clarity, see the sidebar "Recommended Reads," which includes links to articles that expand on their highlighted trends.

The prompts used for the Claude AI response were "What are the top 10 trends in commercial architectural lighting?" and "What are the top 10 trends in residential lighting?"

For this column, I reviewed six articles on lighting trends for commercial and six different articles for residential lighting, which were all focused on 2026 and written early in the year. In addition, I prompted Claude AI with the aforementioned trend questions. **Table 1** shows the top 10 trends in order based on how often each appeared in the 14 sources.

Based on this list, smart lighting, tunable lighting, circadian/light and health lighting, and sustainability are valued more in commercial projects than residential. Uniquely commercial were artificial intelligence and "invisible" lighting, which I take to mean lighting that provides illumination without calling attention to itself and/or blending into the space so that only the function is noticed. Vintage luminaires were more important in residential lighting. The residential trends are, understandably, focused more on aesthetic aspects and materials.

Missing the Cut

What does not make the list reveals

Photo: iStockphoto/Techa Tungateja

an interesting change: There were only two commercial lists that included energy savings, and none of the residential lists included energy savings at all. LEDs can be more efficacious (at a higher cost) than current versions, but the marketplace seems content with the price and performance levels currently available.

Only Claude listed UV-C for pathogen-reduction. Lighting for horticulture/agriculture appeared only on the list from the *LightNOW* blog. UV and horticultural lighting were common on past lists; both are growth markets, although more modest in growth than some had predicted.

Tariffs, Li-Fi, controls, energy savings, and new materials were each listed twice in the commercial lists. Arguably, tunable lighting infers controls, but I limited assumptions and tried to stick to what was stated in the lists.

One trend that was explicitly identified by *Lighting News Now* in its residential list was "going analog as an antidote (screen free, tech free spaces)." I had dinner with an interior designer recently who told me she had been asked for this as well. It was my intent to not judge any of the lists or offer my own perspectives in this article but this seems healthy, and it is good to know it is trending. All the distractions we have, especially with our electronic gadgets, are not conducive to thinking deeply about anything.

If you don't have time to read all these links, I suggest you start with the *LightNOW* Blog; Editor David Shiller is an astute observer of our industry, and his white paper on trends provides clear and succinct reasoning for his choices. The AI responses from Claude were also excellent, mirroring what many of the article authors selected.

I began with a disclaimer and will end with another: Nothing changes faster than the future. These trends represent what is valued in the marketplace now and presumably for the near future. Five years from now, based on past precedent, our values will shift again, and the lists will be very different. As rock star Jon Bon Jovi advised, "Map out your future, but do it in pencil."

COMMERCIAL	RESIDENTIAL	TOTAL	TOP 10 LIGHTING TRENDS
5	2	7	Smart Home/Smart Lighting
3	4	7	Sculptural and Statement Lighting
6	1	7	Tunable Lighting
4	2	6	Light and Health/Circadian Lighting
3	2	5	Outdoor incl. Landscape, DarkSky
1	3	4	Vintage, Retro, Nostalgic Lighting
4	0	4	Artificial Intelligence
3	1	4	Sustainability
2	2	4	Layered Lighting Design
3	0	3	"Invisible" Lighting

Table 1. The top 10 trends in commercial and residential lighting.

Recommended Reads

While not an exhaustive list, the following links provide more-detailed discussion on current residential and commercial lighting trends.

Residential Trends

- *https://www.marthastewart.com/lighting-trends-2026-11915098*
- *https://www.elledecor.com/design-decorate/a70205228/best-lighting-trends-2026/*
- *https://www.homesandgardens.com/interior-design/lighting-trends-for-2026*
- *https://www.houzz.com/magazine/8-lighting-trends-to-look-out-for-in-2026-stsetivw-vs~183696378*
- *https://www.veranda.com/decorating-ideas/advice-from-designers/a69514939/lighting-trends-2026/*
- *https://lightingnewsnow.com/?p=2527*

Commercial Trends

- *https://centralpros.com/outdoor-lighting-trends-2026/*
- *https://lightingspecialtieslv.com/commercial-lighting-trends-2026/*
- *https://www.draperdna.com/lighting-trends-2026/*
- *https://www.uslightingtrends.com/featured/2026-commercial-and-industrial-trends/*
- *https://www.lightnowblog.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Lighting-Industry-Trends-for-2026.pdf*
- *https://architecturaltrends.com/trending-lighting-future-interior-design/*

Mark Lien is industry relations consultant for the IES.

Gary Meshberg

"Education empowers professionals to not just understand lighting trends, but to lead them."

LED LIGHTING SYSTEMS ARE VERY PRECISE, highly flexible, and inherently controllable, providing features and benefits practically unachievable 20 years ago. A good lighting design includes a good control design. Today, the key to realizing the full scope of a design is through the thoughtful application of a lighting control system. This has placed lighting controls at the leading edge of the industry, dramatically expanding the basic utility of lighting systems to achieve a broad range of benefits, from integration to circadian- and skyglow-friendly lighting to dynamic interiors to building analytics. Current advancements are now translating into a range of practical benefits for today's lighting projects.

Superior Savings

Lighting controls remain a deep well of energy savings. Average commercial electric rates in the U.S. increased about 7% in 2025, with some regions reporting increases as high as 29%. The extensive buildout of AI data centers now underway is likely to push energy costs even higher, at least in the short term. As a result, demand for energy savings among building owners and utilities has only increased.

Converting traditional lighting to LEDs in the existing buildings market has matured to the late-majority technology adoption phase, while in new construction, energy codes have realized most of the potential of LED lighting. This has created new value in emerging trends like LED-to-LED upgrades and in lighting controls in general—from standalone controls to networked and luminaire-level lighting controls potentially integrated with other building systems such as HVAC. The lighting controls industry is meeting this expanding opportunity with a continuous drive toward standardization, open system architectures, and innovation.

As an example, Zhaga-D4i combines Zhaga's standardized plug-in hardware interface (Book 18 for outdoor, Book 20 for indoor) with the DALI Alliance's D4i digital protocol. Together, they create a certified framework combining a standardized plug-in interface for sensors and communication modules with a common digital language for data exchange. This can simplify installation, improve upgradeability, and create new opportunities for offering connected lighting solutions, particularly in outdoor projects.

Another recent example of standardization and innovation is Bluetooth SIG's 2025 release of the HVAC Integration NLC Profile. This facilitates the development of Bluetooth NLC smart thermostats that can receive occupancy signals

Photo: iStockphoto/ATHVisions

directly from Bluetooth NLC sensors. The result is new opportunities for integrating lighting and HVAC systems, including existing buildings where Bluetooth NLC sensors are installed in addition to small- and medium-sized buildings unlikely to have a building automation system.

Smart Start

Lighting controls can facilitate smart buildings. Networked lighting control (NLC) systems are transforming commercial lighting from a basic utility into a powerful source of building intelligence. Because lighting is building-wide and closely aligned with occupancy, it provides an ideal platform for capturing detailed data on how spaces are used.

Sensors can capture occupancy, motion, device status, and other information. When networked, this information can be aggregated and analyzed across rooms, floors, or entire buildings. The result is actionable insight into peak usage, occupancy times, space utilization, and optimization—supporting better space planning, hybrid work strategies, and informed real-estate decisions.

Energy management is another key benefit. NLC systems can track power use, dimming levels, schedules, and runtime, helping verify energy code compliance, verify savings, support ESG reporting, and potentially expose unrealized optimization opportunities. When integrated with HVAC and other systems, occupancy data can drive ventilation adjustments and demand response strategies.

Networked controls can also enhance maintenance through fault detection and diagnostics, reducing downtime and costs. Over time, the data creates a continuous feedback loop, enabling buildings to adapt, perform efficiently, and operate more intelligently.

Reshaping Spaces

Lighting controls are instrumental in creating dynamic, adaptive environments. The inherent controllability of LED lighting has brought dimming close to a standard product offering, and introduced another powerful capability: color tuning. Designers can now adjust color temperature to enhance occupant comfort, support flexibility, implement circadian-friendly strategies, and reshape how spaces feel and function.

Schools are a strong example, with some using tunable-white lighting to signal activity transitions and promote behaviors such as calming, focusing, or directing attention. In January 2025, the U.S. Department of Energy published *Why Tunable? A Look at Schools*, reviewing installations in eight districts. The study found schools primarily adopted tunable-white systems to support teaching and learning, especially in special-needs classrooms. Teachers reported positive experiences and improved learning environments, demonstrating how adjustable color can expand lighting's role beyond its basic utility to actively support occupant well-being and performance.

Restoring the Great Outdoors

Lighting controls are foundational to responsible outdoor lighting. A quality outdoor lighting design focuses on reducing skyglow, light trespass, and glare while saving energy. Lighting controls have become an essential component to achieving a responsible design.

The IES/DarkSky International "Five Principles of Responsible Outdoor Lighting" include usefulness, targeting, appropriate brightness, control, and visually warmer light. Building on these principles, the DesignLights Consortium published seven strategies touting dimming, controls, optics, and reduced blue-violet emission.

With its precise optical control, consistent efficacy across a wide range of color temperatures, wireless technology, and easy dimming, LED technology is well-suited to serving these goals. Lighting controls are especially useful, offering scheduled dimming, occupancy sensing, and high-end trims that reduce light pollution and energy consumption.

The Way Forward

Education empowers professionals to not just understand lighting trends, but to lead them. Maximizing lighting's value to building owners and users today requires expertise with lighting controls. Education, experience, and staying abreast of new products, codes, and trends provide this expertise. This is why organizations like the IES—and the organization that I chair, the Lighting Controls Academy (formerly the Lighting Controls Association), a NEMA coalition—are so essential to the industry. Armed with this expertise, designers can bring every project under control and realize lighting's full potential.

Gary Meshberg, LC, CLCP, LEED-AP, Member IES, is the regional sales manager, Central USA for Casambi and chair of the Lighting Controls Academy, a coalition of NEMA.

Brienne Willcock

"If you had to start civilization again somewhere new, what knowledge would you carry with you?"

"SOMETIMES I THINK THAT THE EARTH was destroyed none too soon; the human race was being crushed by the information it was generating."
—Arthur C. Clarke in *The Songs of Distant Earth*

I've been rereading Clarke's *The Songs of Distant Earth* (published in 1984), a novel about a human colony built far from a dying Earth. What struck me this time wasn't the technology, astrophysics, or even the limits of human resilience; it was the realization that when information becomes overwhelming, survival depends on deciding what knowledge is worth carrying forward.

In the book, fragments of human knowledge—literature, music, engineering—were carried into a new civilization. What was prioritized was information that would help survival and social stability.

If you had to start civilization again somewhere new, what knowledge would you carry with you? It may not be as far-fetched a question as it sounds. Today, we are surrounded by conversations about AI and data management. AI can access and recombine enormous amounts of information, but it does not originate knowledge. It learns from what humans choose to collect, document, and preserve.

People often describe AI as if it were a skilled craftsperson. It is closer to a hammer: useful and entirely dependent on the hands that guide it. The real decisions happen before and after the tool is used.

Which brings me back to Clarke's book. If the knowledge we preserve today at the IES—standards, education, research—becomes the foundation for how technology interprets our profession tomorrow, what are the universal truths of lighting we would want to carry forward? What principles would remain relevant no matter how the tools evolve?

It wasn't that many decades ago that lighting as a design profession was born, so to speak. The themes of lighting practice: technology, art, energy? Manageable. The tools of the trade: lenses, lamps, filters? Tangible. But as the field has grown, so has the body of knowledge that surrounds it. The responsibility of stewarding that knowledge—of deciding what must be preserved, taught, and carried forward—has grown as well.

Image: iStockphoto/grandfailure

If we had to begin again, what would we keep? Some things would undoubtedly change. Technologies always do. But certain truths about light would remain. If we were forced to begin again, these principles would still guide how humans experience illumination.

• *Light reveals space.* Architecture exists in three dimensions, but it is light that allows us to perceive form, texture, and scale. A building may stand without illumination, but it is not truly experienced until light defines it. From the first firelit caves to the most advanced electric systems, light has always been the medium through which space becomes comprehensible.

• *Light guides movement.* Humans navigate environments through brightness, contrast, and adaptation. Long before electric lighting, people instinctively understood how illumination could signal safety, hierarchy, or danger. A well-lit path invites movement; a shadowed threshold slows it. We understand prospect and refuge because of it. Designers shape these cues every day.

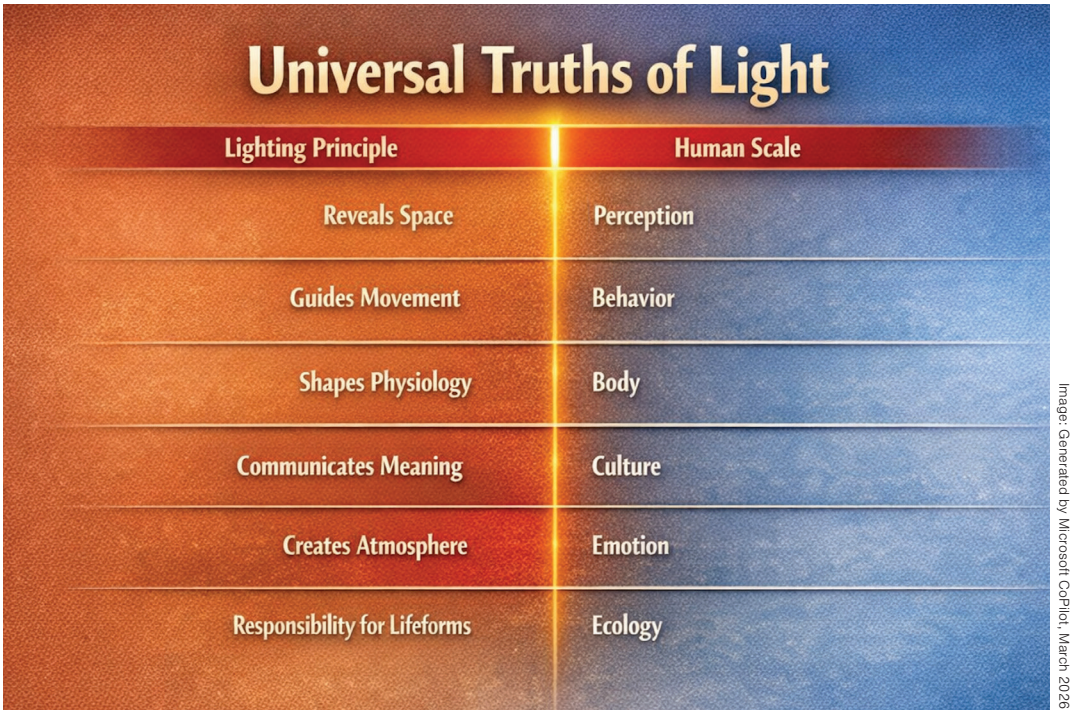
• *Light shapes physiology.* Our bodies respond to patterns of brightness and darkness that regulate circadian rhythms. Long before the science was formalized, humans aligned their lives with the rhythms of day and night.

• *Light communicates meaning.* Lighting has always carried symbolic and cultural weight. It marks sacred places, signals celebration, and creates focus. The difference between a stage and a room is often nothing more than where the light falls. Designers use illumination not just to make things visible, but to tell people what matters.

• *Light creates atmosphere.* Beyond visibility and function, light shapes emotion. A room washed in soft warmth feels different from one illuminated with sharp brightness. Lighting designers work in this territory every day, balancing science with intuition to create environments that people remember long after they leave.

• *Light carries responsibility for other lifeforms.* Humans may be the only species that rely on electric lighting, but we are not the only ones affected by it. In lighting our world, we extended the day for ourselves, sometimes further than we intended. Today, we understand more clearly how anthropogenic light alters night skies, migratory patterns, and ecosystems. If we were starting over with that knowledge, we might be more careful about what darkness we choose to remove.

These principles existed long before the lighting profession. They would remain



Universal truths of lighting that we should consider carrying forward.

Image: Generated by Microsoft CoPilot, March 2026

true even if every technology we rely on today disappeared tomorrow. They would remain even if every record of certification, licensure, and professional accolade were lost. Personal legacy rarely travels as far as shared understanding.

What We Might Leave Behind

If we were to begin again with those principles in mind, there are also things we might choose not to carry forward. The lighting industry has evolved through decades of technological change, market pressures, and rapid growth. In that process, we accumulated structures and habits that may not be essential to the future of the profession.

One example is the complexity in how lighting reaches the built environment. In many places, lighting moves through multiple layers of sales representation, distribution, specification, and procurement before it is installed. Each layer has developed a role in access, logistics management, and even expertise; the result can sometimes obscure the design intent and slow the path between knowledge and application.

Another is waste. The transition to solid-state lighting brought enormous efficiency gains, but the lack of consideration for end-of-life hasn't served us well. If we were starting over with what we know today, durability and adaptability might carry more weight alongside efficiency.

Additionally, we might choose to leave behind knowledge that never pierced through its own silo. The lighting profession has produced decades of research, standards, and technical understanding, yet much of it lives in disconnected systems, proprietary tools, or specialized language that can make it difficult for others to engage. If we were to begin again, we might place greater emphasis on clarity, shared vocabulary, and open pathways to knowledge, ensuring that the understanding we develop can be discovered and applied by the people who need it most.

We might also discard some of the fragmentation that has emerged across the lighting ecosystem. Designers, engineers, manufacturers, researchers, and advocates often work toward similar goals, yet speak in different languages or operate within separate professional spheres. As an industry, we spend an enormous amount of time and energy on duplicate efforts, assumptions, and territorial tendencies to fight for relevancy. A profession built around the shared medium of light would benefit from maintaining a connection between knowledge and effort.

Accumulation or Intention?

None of these realities diminish the extraordinary progress the field has made. But a thought experiment about starting over invites us to ask which structures are fundamental—and which simply accumulated along the way.

Clarke imagined a future in which human civilization survived by carefully curating the knowledge worth carrying across the stars. The lighting profession carries its own fragments of knowledge forward: an understanding of how light reveals space, guides movement, shapes physiology, communicates meaning, and creates atmosphere.

As technologies evolve and tools grow more powerful, the responsibility to curate that knowledge becomes even more important. If we ever had to begin again somewhere new, it is not the fixtures we would take with us. It is the understanding of light itself.

Brienne Willcock is associate executive director, Strategy, Standards, and Industry Engagement at the IES.

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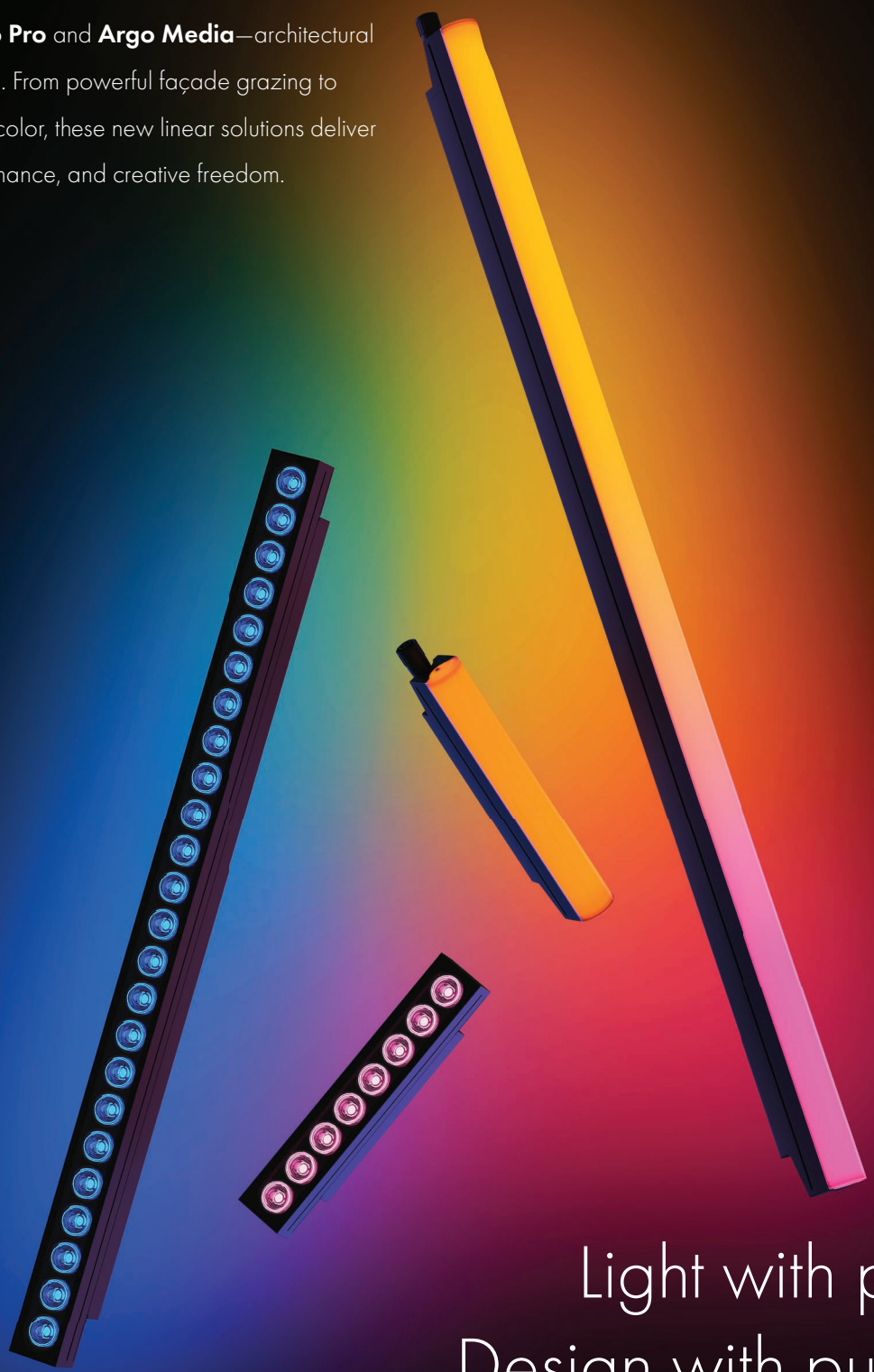

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MARATHON

Glow Tell

By Michele Zimmerman

Top: Artist Kate Schroeder wearing a pair of her Illuminated Earrings.

Inset: Earrings inspired by the late 20th century Tiffany-style Pizza Hut lamps.

ONCE A WEIRD-ARTSY-KID, ALWAYS A WEIRD-ARTSY-KID

Hello readers! This is my first time speaking directly to the lighting community in the pages of *LD+A*, and it's nice to have this outlet to do so. Some of you may already know that my background isn't in lighting, but in writing. When I was hired as *LD+A* assistant editor in 2021, I had recently graduated with my M.F.A. degree in Creative Writing, with internship experience in book publishing. When I was writing my thesis, a collection of spooky short stories, I never envisioned my future to include editing and writing for a magazine about illumination.

However, in my approximately five years on the masthead, I have learned more than I ever expected about the magic of light—and I'm thoroughly enchanted. For a long time now, I've been looking up at the light fixtures in museums as much as I have the art on the walls, noticing if/how daylight is harvested at airports, understanding the difference between the decorative details and task lighting in restaurants, and generally thinking more about the design intent behind the visuals. Occasionally, I'll see something so cool, I feel the need to share it with my *LD+A* colleagues. This column is a way for me to pass along my lighting-design-adjacent findings with the people who most enjoy illumination.

Let's start with the work of Kate Schroeder, a ceramist I started following on social media for her intricately designed mugs with 3-D elements and miniature home scenes, but whose art really caught my eye when, in June 2025, she began posting about her latest creations: lamp-shaped earrings that use mini LEDs to glow. The prototypes were large, bright orange, and quirky; my first reaction was that I was in love with the earrings. What can I say? Once a weird-artsy-kid, always a weird-artsy-kid. Then

I thought: If the lighting community knew about these, we would likely see them swinging from the earlobes of visitors all over IES26: The Lighting Conference and LEDucation. For almost a year, I have been following along as Schroeder has experimented with "Chandeliearrings" of various types—from Louis Poulsen-inspired pendants to stained-glass shades to shades with fringe and tassels—all the way to the iconic Tiffany-style lamps of Pizza Hut's 1990s aesthetic. To get further insight into these pieces, I spoke with the creator herself.

Schroeder explained that her artwork often highlights functional domestic items: "There is something really beautiful about objects that we use and interact with every day," she said. "As a ceramic artist, I learned the importance of functionality...and the more interested I became in functional ceramics, the more I started to notice other household items. From furniture to lamps to houseplants, they all serve a purpose beyond just being a place to sit, light our homes, or purify our air. These objects hold history. They speak to who we are and who we want to be. They give us comfort, safety, and belonging."

Having already worked in miniatures and life-size lamps as well as illuminated sculptures, the motivation for her radiant accessories was a combination of natural curiosity and what she calls the "artist-hoarder mentality," citing that she simply has a large collection of "unique lightbulbs, wiring, and different types of LEDs" even if she isn't always sure what she wants to do with them. During a season of experimentation with new materials and a bout of spring cleaning, Schroeder came up with the idea to make her wearable art. However, she knew ceramic earrings would be too heavy to wear, so instead, she returned to sculpting with her favorite material from childhood: lightweight polymer clay. In addition to the clay and other materials on the diverse styles of lampshades, each earring comprises hypoallergenic, surgical-grade stainless steel findings as well as a single LED with three puck batteries. While each LED lasts for approximately 96 hours, "both the LED and batteries are easily changeable and inexpensive to replace," explained Schroeder.

Top: A "Shelfie" mug with a detachable lighted element.

Bottom: Schroeder's work comes in various shapes and styles..

> "'There is something really beautiful about objects that we use and interact with every day.'"

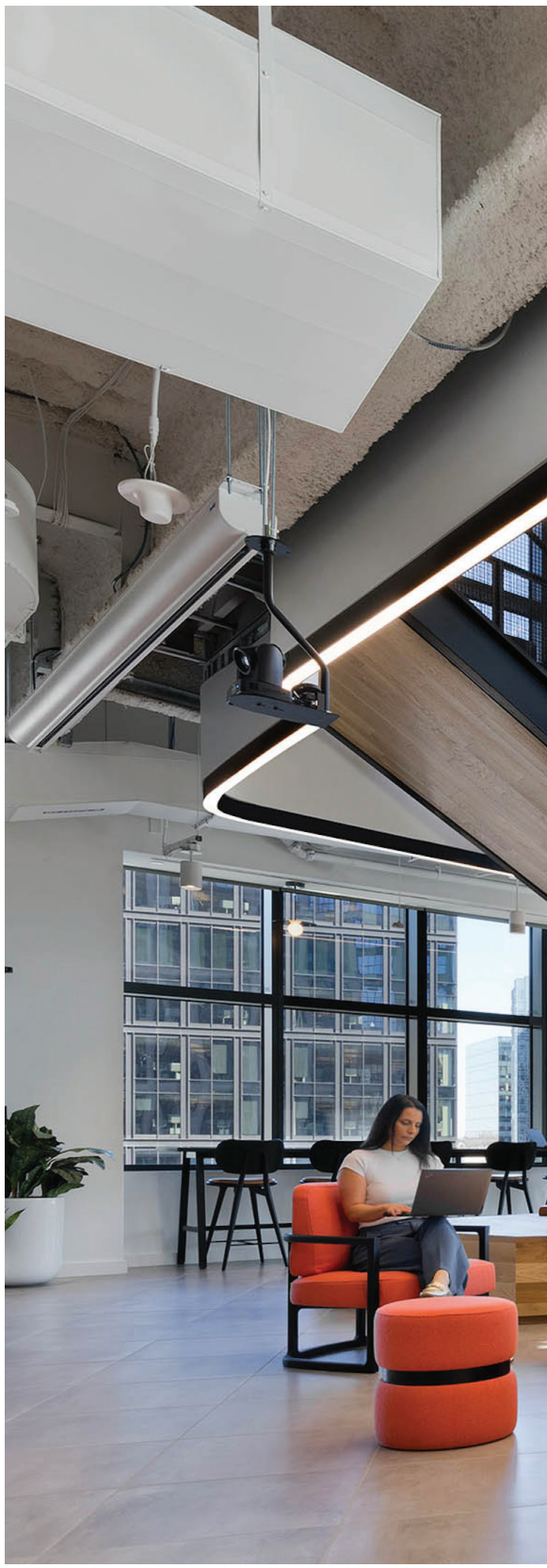
After making dozens of styles and selling out of many of them through pre-orders on her own website, Schroeder has recently pulled inspiration from her earrings to form illuminated "Shelfies." The cozy mugs that originally made me hit the "Follow" button on Instagram have become even more intricate and now include detachable lighted charms. "My Shelfies feature interior scenes. Instead of a traditional handle, a mug might have a 3-D couch or an entire bookshelf covered in tiny objects," said Schroeder. "It felt only natural to add a working mini lamp...I've incorporated lighting into many works over the years—it's one of my favorite elements."

When asked where she hopes to take her art in the future, Schroeder admitted she would enjoy more museum shows to house her art purely for the sake of art instead of needing to sell her work all the time, but she also noted that the world is a shifting place. The only thing she is sure of is that she hopes to "continue to make a living as a human being who creates tangible, joyful things with [her] hands."

As for me, I'll continue to explore "roads less traveled" in wildly unexpected ways via this new column. If kindergarten taught us anything, it's that the best stories are the ones we are excited to bring in and share—and this is a chapter of mine, glowing just a little brighter.

Foundational Changes

A journey of progression, transformation, and connection



When Foundation Medicine relocated to a new 580,000-sq-ft space in Boston's Seaport District, its goal was to expand its laboratory capacity while reinforcing the company's growing brand within the precision medicine industry. To achieve this, it assembled a comprehensive architecture and design team that included Sladen Feinstein Integrated Lighting (SFIL).

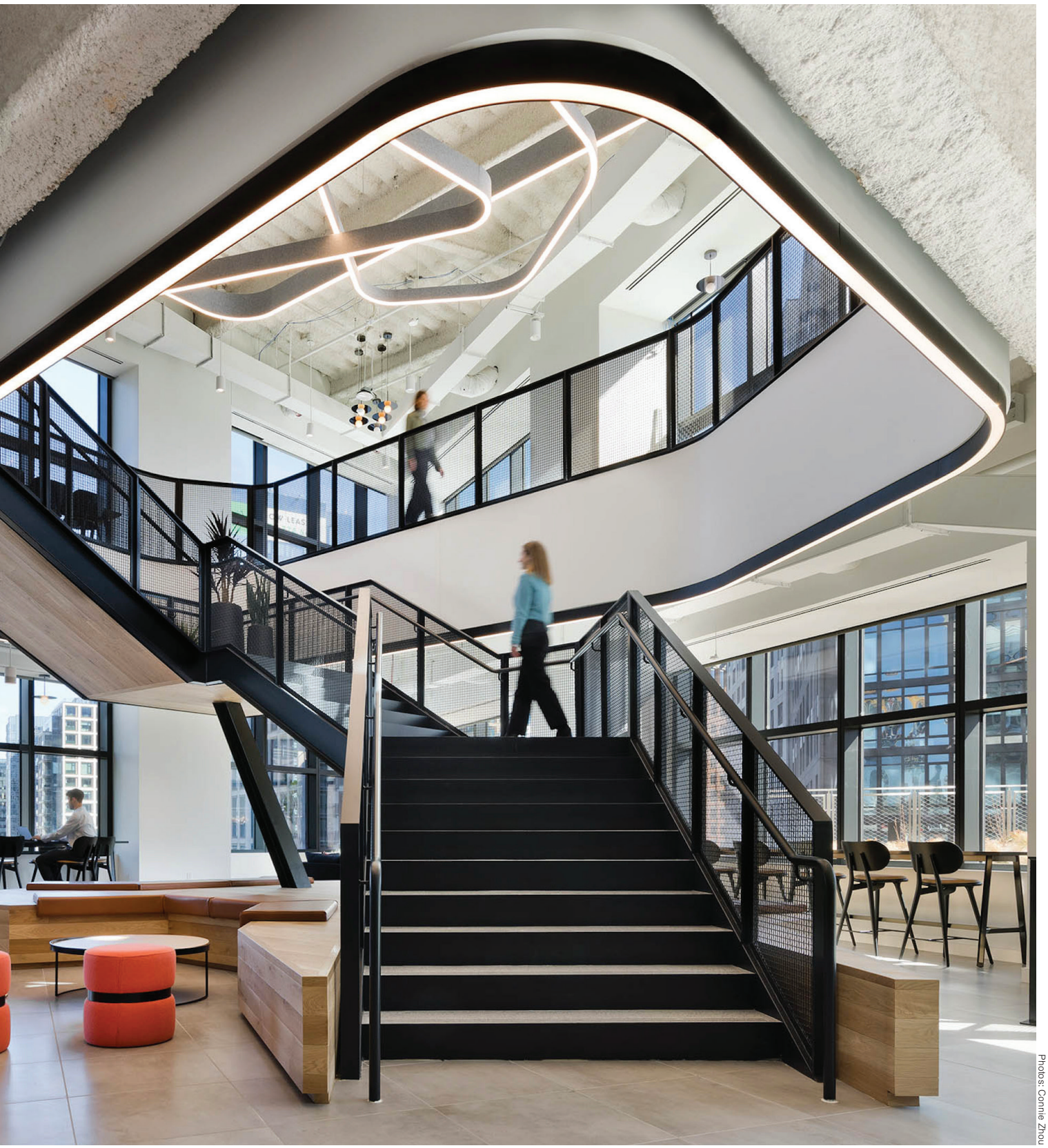
"One of the biggest design drivers of this project was the idea of the journey, specifically the patient journey," said SFIL Principal Reiko Kagawa. While no patients pass through the headquarters, this idea of "progression, transformation, and connection" informed both architectural and lighting decisions from the beginning of design conception through completion.

Designed by architecture firm Gensler, the new 16-story headquarters features open circulation paths and sweeping vertical movement. On the lower levels, large windows connect laboratory spaces to circulation areas, bridging science and people. Throughout all floors, shared spaces encourage not just collaboration but chance meetings. Open stairs act as the spine of the building, progressing upwards through floors that are designed around unique themes such as "innovation," "resilience," and "optimism."

In this facility where science and humanity intersect, illumination is a tool for clarity, care, and progress. The lighting decisions prioritize occupational wellness, sustainability, and ease of maintenance, while subtly enhancing the integrated patient-centered motif.

Throughout the building, custom curvilinear fixtures, the majority provided by Lumos, hang from the ceilings in organic designs. These large overlapping fixtures are constructed with acoustic felt backing that adds "visual softness and comfort," a feature that was rare for curved-form lighting at the time of the project's design. These curvilinear fixtures provide continuity throughout the space: They are suspended at the top of the

Repeated lines of light
begin at the central stairs.



Photos: Connie Zhou

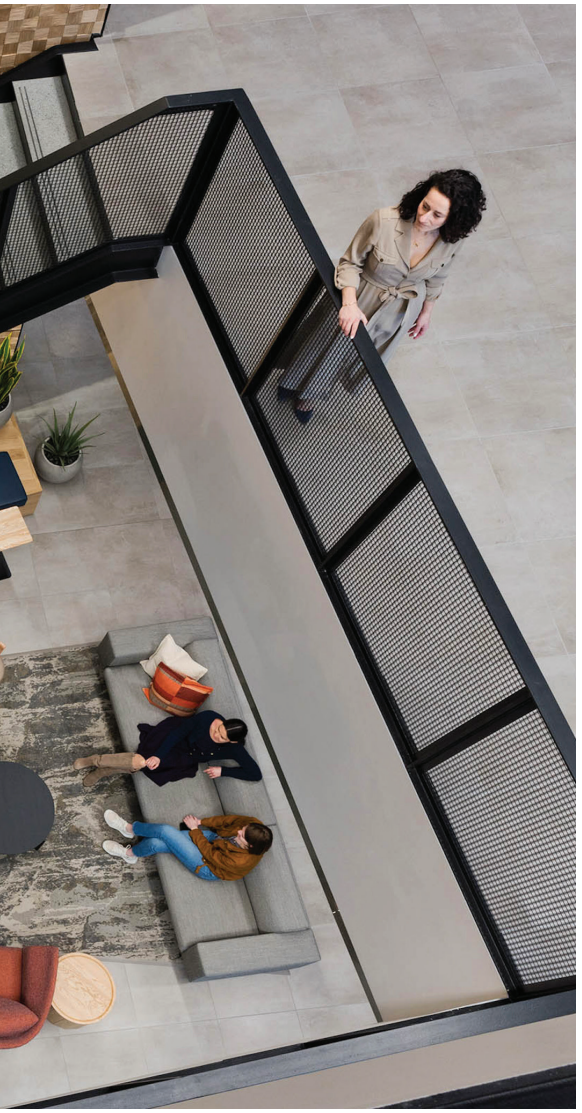
Individually dimmable track heads allow intensity control for throw lengths, graze textural wood walls, and integrate into an architectural pocket beneath interconnecting stairs.

communicating stairs and “ground quiet corners,” encouraging rest and reflection.

Inside laboratories, the work demands lighting that is wet-location rated and ISO appropriate. Rather than defaulting to traditional 1-by-4-ft lab troffers, the design team selected black surface-mounted linear fixtures from Selux Lighting. The slim profile provides a sleek appearance that makes a statement and aligns with the architecture. Each fixture integrates the LED driver and e-board, creating a sealed, streamlined assembly while supporting precise multi-channel control. The system, fitted with BIOS Lighting circadian controls, delivers higher levels of equivalent melanopic lux to support productivity and circadian rhythm for shift-workers. The result is a rigorously technical lighting solution that supports wellness while being “clean and modern at the same time.”

The Stencil, a modular linear LED fixture by Axis Lighting with integrated downlights and wall-wash optics, was used throughout all open circulation areas on workplace floors to illuminate core walls. The building’s irregular geometry meant that fixture lengths and wall-wash directions were constantly changing, resulting in luminaires customized for each space. Downlights were integrated in the centers of each customized fixture. “That approach really helped highlight the architecture and reinforce movement through the building,” said SFIL Principal Ben Strauss.

Selux Piix fixtures installed in seating areas are the “unsung heroes” of the project, noted Kagawa. These micro-baffle downlights, integrated between baffles in the open ceiling, are designed to visually recede. “You almost don’t notice them,” she said. “They create a calm background



that lets the architectural and decorative elements stand out."

The project isn't without decorative lighting, but it's selectively used, explained Strauss: "There aren't a lot of decorative fixtures, and that's intentional. They're used where they have the most impact." An example is in the collaborative hubs on each floor. Here, selecting the "twisty" Palindrome fixture by Rich Brilliant Willing was an effort between the lighting design team and the architectural design team, with the resulting fixture symbolizing connection and progression. "This fixture visually reinforces the idea of the journey, each point connecting to the next," said Kagawa.

Creating an Experience

"For us, lighting design isn't just about selecting features. It's also about how those fixtures are controlled. The experience of the space is created through both," Strauss said. The lighting control strategy was therefore designed to provide adaptable, responsive lighting that supports a variety of work modes across labs, offices, and collaboration spaces.

Jennifer Bean, associate and controls specialist at SFIL, selected a hybrid system manufactured by Lutron Electronics that combines both the Lutron Quantum and Lutron Vive platforms. "Quantum provides centralized, networked control for coordinated facility-wide lighting, scene recall, scheduling, and A/V integration,

Top: Black surface-mounted linear fixtures provide a sleek appearance and higher levels of equivalent melanopic lux.

Bottom: Organic pendants with connected dots represent the continuing pathway through the patient's treatment journey.

Visually discreet micro-baffle downlights define the seating zone and can be viewed from the exterior.

while Vive supports wireless, room-based control for standalone spaces. Digital dimming, preset scenes, and flexible programming—including the open office areas—allow future rezoning," said Bean. Together, these layered systems deliver "precise, adaptable, and user-friendly control" across all spaces.

This approach "ensures the lighting is not just feature-driven, but responsive, adaptable, and supportive of evolving work modes," continued Bean. The BIOS Technology in lab and lab support areas promotes occupant comfort, focus, and well-being. Custom engraved wall stations with clearly defined preset scenes allow occupants to select scenes or make localized adjustments while "maintaining overall design consistency and ensuring uniform operation throughout the building," said Bean. Lighting also integrates directly with the A/V system, enabling seamless scene transitions that automatically respond to presentations, video playback, and collaborative activities.

As Strauss noted, the result is a system where performance and aesthetics are intertwined: "The way lighting responds, adapts, and supports different modes of work is just as important as how it looks. That's how you actually create an experience."

Supporting Wellness and Sustainability

Design for the project began in February 2020, coinciding with the onset of the COVID-19 shutdowns. Despite the challenges of remote coordination, the project progressed without major modifications and ultimately remained on schedule. The experience prompted deeper reflection on the role of lighting design in supporting health, sustainability, and transparency.

From the outset, the team prioritized healthier materials and greater product disclosure. In 2020, this commitment took shape through an internal initiative focused on improving material transparency across specifications. Approximately 30% of the selected lighting fixtures carried material transparency labels, a level of disclosure well ahead of industry norms. Achieving this required active negotiation with manufacturers, and the three-name specifications for many fixture types requested by the client helped. As Strauss noted, "If one manufacturer agreed to certain conditions, like material transparency, we used that as leverage to encourage others to meet the same standard."

Sustainability considerations extended beyond material content to encompass energy efficiency and system integration. The building's chilled-beam HVAC system, while environmentally friendly, limited where fixtures could be placed. "In the open space areas, the ceiling constraints were very restrictive," said Strauss. "We studied a lot of different fixtures to balance visual brightness, uniformity, and spacing while working around the chilled beams." The resulting lighting solution contributed to the building's overall LEED Platinum certification while supporting demanding workspace environments.

The lighting design for Foundation Medicine transcends simple utility, balancing the technical demands of precision medicine with subtle touches that ground the space in the human element. In this Seaport headquarters, the lighting supports the important work of scientists today while reflecting the "progression and optimism" essential to the patient journeys of tomorrow.

THE DESIGNERS

Reiko Kagawa, Member IES, is a principal at Sladen Feinstein Integrated Lighting.

Ben Strauss, Member IES, is a principal at Sladen Feinstein Integrated Lighting.

Josh Feinstein is founding partner and a principal at Sladen Feinstein Integrated Lighting.

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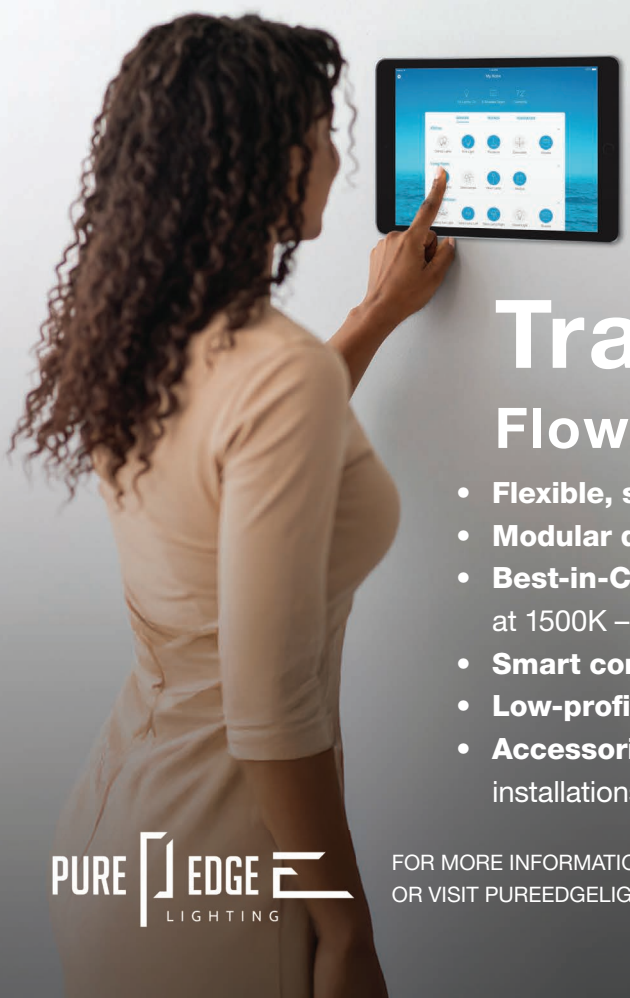
THE AUTHOR

Katianne Williams, co-author of the STEM guide *Count Girls In*, enjoys writing about innovative projects and inspirational people.



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Where the Griz Gather

A nature-inspired dining hall brings the University of Montana back together

Nestled in the heart of the Northern Rocky Mountains is Missoula, Montana, a city with a bustling downtown scene and brimming with skiing, swimming, and hiking opportunities; it's known as the "Last Best Place." There, one can find the University of Montana (UM), a den for over 11,000 Grizzlies earning undergraduate and graduate degrees and technical certifications across more than 175 disciplines. Strong connections to the surrounding community are central to the university's identity, reinforced by student volunteer groups dedicated to helping people, animals, and the environment.

Photos: Heidi A Long, Longviews Studios

Suspended linear illumination above the salad bar mirrors the countertop below, adding decorative flair.

When UM needed a new habitat to welcome its Grizzlies in 2020, stakeholders turned to design firm NAC; together with the firm's local architectural partner, A&E+SMA Design, the team created a dining hall that celebrates Montana's natural beauty, welcomes the institution's diverse student body and broader Missoula community, and adheres to UM's sustainability goals. With the ability to seat more than 900 people and offering over 100 charging stations in addition to a private dining room for campus events and two roof decks, the $20 million dining hall at UM debuted in August 2024 after students experienced a period of intense isolation due to COVID-19. As student dorms do not have kitchens, The Lodge serves as a communal kitchen, living room, and general place for relaxed gathering.

A memorable experience for NAC Associate Principal Julie Allen was when the NCAA Division 1 Grizzlies football team first entered the hall and one bear exclaimed, "We're all eating together!" It was a "spontaneous declaration that captured the spirit and success of the project: reconnection, inclusion, and a shared sense of place," said Allen. "Beyond serving students, the building also strengthens ties between the campus and the local community. With public access and an all-you-care-to-eat model that accepts credit and debit cards, the dining hall welcomes everyone, further reflecting the project's commitment to connection and belonging in a post-pandemic world."

Going With the Flow

Designed to reflect the flowing movement of water around canyon rock forms, the dining hall pays homage to its setting and the surrounding landscape. Inspired by the nearby Clark Fork River, the concept of "flow" became a driving design

Top: Randomly sized and placed downlights within the black ceiling appear as stars in a clear night sky.

Bottom Left: Glass cases with integrated horticulture lights support student-grown microgreens.

Bottom Right: Recessed linear illumination frame mini venues and provide visual continuity across the space.

factor; seven small food venues throughout the open-space hall "sit like boulders within the current—diverting movement, creating eddies of activity, and generating a variety of inner scales," explained Allen.

Venues like Beargrass, a salad bar offering locally sourced ingredients, and Sa Fire, inspired by the Sapphire Mountains in southwestern Montana and serving custom pizza creations, are defined by curved, linear recessed lighting frames. While the frames provide bright 3500K illumination and consistent visuals throughout the space, the team implemented differing decorative light details at the mini restaurants to give each a unique identity. For example, Allen cited, "One of my favorite elements is the custom line of light connecting to the glowing signage over the salad bar. The line exactly mirrors the outline of the countertop. This was carefully coordinated and is such a fun, unique element." Another distinctive element of the salad bar is the inclusion of glass-enclosed cases with integral horticulture lights to support students growing their own microgreens.

The mini-restaurants' back-of-house prep kitchens are employed with high light levels and precise color rendering, while Prescolite downlights with 2-, 4-, and 6-in. apertures are peppered throughout the project to provide

Boulder-inspired wall sconces on interior and exterior walls further connect the project to "The Great Outdoors."

supplemental lighting where it is most needed, creating a uniform backdrop.

Irregularly sized and placed downlights in The Lodge's dark central ceiling emulate scattered stars across the Montana night sky. Recessed lights with various apertures in between baffled ceiling spaces carry the celestial motif into other areas of the project, splashing light onto dark materials.

Additionally, boulder-like sconces by Bover on brick walls travel from within the dining hall to an exterior wall visible through glass, further connecting the space with its surrounding nature. Large-scale Luce Plan pendants, similar in shape to the boulder-inspired sconces, anchor wall-seating at the entryway. "Glass mountain lights" by AxoLight over another seating area are a client-favorite visual element.

A Healthy Habitat

The Lodge's LEED Gold-certified design strategy prioritizes community well-being in various forms. "Sustainability and wellness are woven into the DNA of the project," said Allen. "A strong commitment to local sourcing supports regional farmers and reduces environmental impact. The in-house microgreens display is both an educational tool and a source for onsite fresh produce." Ample sunlight and daylight-responsive lighting controls not only support circadian health but reduce energy use.

Seating arrangements play a role in how The Lodge allows for every level of end-user comfortability. From long dining tables in the middle of rooms to soft booths lining walls to two-seater nooks, "the vision was to create a space that supported individual comfort while also reintroducing the joy of gathering. Whether a student wanted to eat quietly alone, study in a tucked-away corner, or be part of a lively communal setting, the design ensures there is a place for everyone...the space is designed support both physical and mental health," Allen explained. Inclusivity is most represented in a clearly demarcated, purple Allergen-friendly Zone, free of the five most common food allergens; for those with other dietary restrictions, icons signaling food preferences are located throughout the building. The project earned its LEED Gold certification by achieving points such as Sustainable Sites Credit 6, Light Pollution Reduction, and Indoor Environmental Quality Credit 6, Lighting Controls, according to the accreditation program.

Ultimately, The Lodge succeeds as more than a dining hall, functioning as a central gathering place that supports daily campus life while strengthening ties to the broader populace. Informed by The Treasure State's landscape and shaped by a holistic design strategy, the project stands as a contemporary love letter to the American West—one that balances sustainability, inclusivity, and a shared sense of place. S

THE DESIGNER

Julie Allen is associate principal at NAC.

Proactive Life Safety

Practical methods to achieve reliable emergency lighting

Emergency lighting, the infrastructure designed to guide building occupants to safety during a power outage or emergency, is a critical life-safety system that largely goes unnoticed by end users (that is, until the moment it is needed). A 2023 study from Cyalume found that the emergency lighting failure rate is approximately 87%. That means the success rate is only 13%, a rather alarming number for a safety measure in the commercial building industry. For lighting specifiers, contractors, engineers, and property managers, this data point serves as an urgent call to action.

The good news is that modern technology and updated industry standards provide clearer pathways to mitigate common risks such as compatibility and integration issues, installation errors, lack of maintenance, and code-compliance confusion. By understanding the core challenges and adopting future-forward solutions, lighting professionals can drastically enhance the reliability of emergency lighting systems.

Why Do Systems Fail?

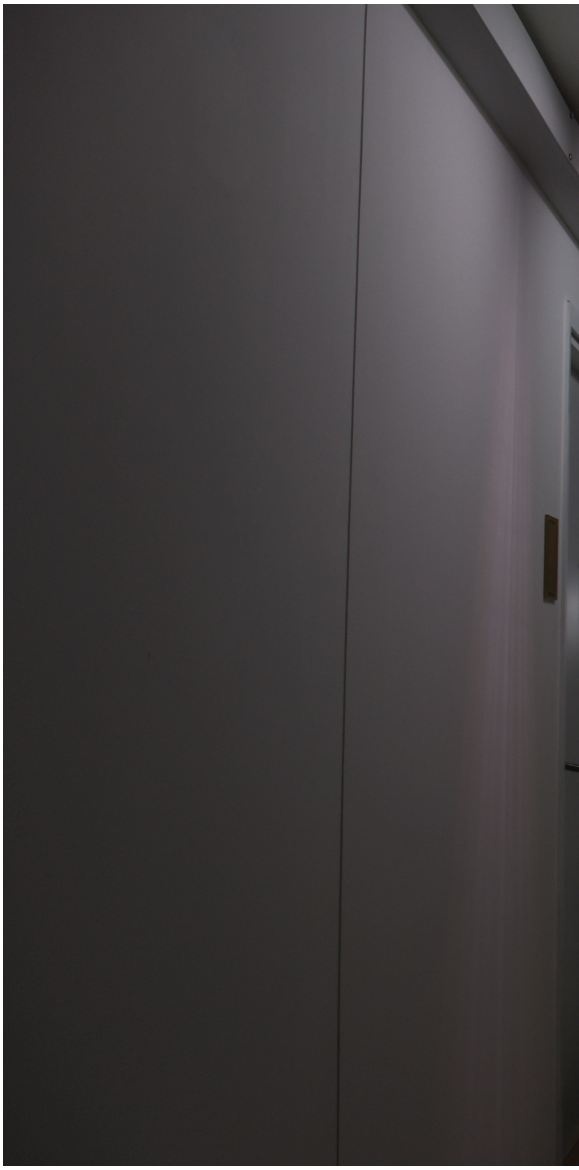
The first step to overcoming emergency lighting failures is understanding why they often fail. These are the four primary challenges that consistently lead to system failure:

1. Compatibility and integration issues. Modern LED lighting systems continually clash with emergency power needs. Ensuring emergency drivers or battery packs are compatible with increasingly complex, digitally controlled LEDs is a frequent hurdle. A poorly matched driver may supply the incorrect voltage or power level to the LED array, leading to insufficiency in lighting output or premature component failure under emergency conditions.

2. Complex installation processes. Emergency lighting requires intricate wiring schemes that differ from standard power circuits. This often involves dual circuits, dedicated test switches, and remote indicators. The level of complexity that these installations require increases the margin of error. Miswiring can bypass the emergency circuit entirely, or improperly connected test switches can render the required monthly testing ineffective (or inaccessible). Increased installation complexity directly causes higher initial labor costs and a greater risk of defects.

3. Poor routine maintenance. One of the most common operational challenges comes from a lack of maintenance, given the burden it poses on facility management. Building teams often struggle to keep up with the required testing and documentation. NFPA 101: Life Safety Code calls for a quick, monthly functional test and a more rigorous annual 90-minute full-duration test. Across large campuses, performing these manual tests is labor-intensive, time-consuming, and frequently falls prey to documentation lapses, which can result in non-compliance during inspections.

4. Code-compliance confusion. The landscape of emergency lighting standards is governed by a patchwork of documents, including NFPA 101, NFPA 70: National Electrical Code, International Building Code (IBC), International Fire Code (IFC), and component-level UL standards, notably UL 924. Varying local interpretations and overlapping requirements often create uncertainty about not just what is required but where it is required. This confusion leads to under-specification or systems that meet the bare minimum, leaving more room for performance errors.



Emerging Solutions in Emergency Lighting

Lighting manufacturers are actively making strides to overcome emergency lighting failures through thorough research and solution development that directly address these daily challenges for operations teams; the last decade has

Photo: iStockphoto/Prompiilove

seen significant advancements that are fundamentally changing how emergency systems are successfully specified, installed and maintained. For example,

- **Integrated emergency drivers:** The shift toward factory-integrated emergency lighting drivers is one of the most impactful advancements for contractors. Most lights now ship with these components pre-installed by the manufacturer, which significantly reduces field labor and eliminates most of the on-site compatibility guesswork. Overall, this shift ensures a cleaner, more reliable installation from day one.
- **Smaller form factors:** As LED technology has become smaller, so have the required emergency components. The miniaturization of battery packs and electronic circuits has made emergency integration far more feasible in decorative and architectural products. This allows specifiers to meet life-safety requirements without compromising aesthetics and facilitates emergency light integration within high-design environments.
- **Lithium battery chemistry:** The replacement of older NiCd/NiMH packs with advanced lithium battery chemistries (e.g., lithium iron phosphate) signals a major technological leap in the industry. Lithium cells offer several key advantages such as longer life spans, significantly reduced weight (a benefit in architectural fixtures), and a better environmental profile. The improved performance results in a more reliable charge, ensuring units consistently meet the mandatory 90-minute duration test throughout operational life.
- **Self-testing and reporting:** For maintenance teams, the introduction of self-testing-and-reporting units has been revolutionary. Modern emergency lighting drivers now include built-in self-diagnostics that automate the monthly functional test and, in many cases, the annual 90-minute duration test. Many systems also offer wireless reporting capabilities allowing for centralized monitoring and automatic compliance documentation. This collectively reduces the ongoing labor (and common risk) associated with manual testing.

The Path to Compliance

Beyond the specific component improvements, reliable emergency lighting requires optical performance and adherence to evolving code standards. Beyond simple component failure, a common pitfall is non-compliant light output and duration. This often stems from insufficient illumination levels caused by poor optical design or battery degradation that reduces emergency wattage over time. The fixture's mounting height is also crucial, as installing a luminaire above its tested height can result in code violations due to inadequate light reaching the path of egress. Additionally, batteries failing to sustain the 90-minute duration must be routinely monitored.

To safeguard against these risks, original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) must implement rigorous product testing protocols that adhere to standards like UL 924 or CSA C22.2 No. 141, providing documented evidence that the fixture delivers the proper light output and emergency duration at its intended mounting height.

Industry professionals must also make a proactive effort to stay informed on the latest emergency lighting standards and codes as they're constantly evolving. Here's a quick snapshot of some of the most recent code developments:

- NFPA 101 and NFPA 70: There is an increasing emphasis on documenta-

Photo: Courtesy of LightArt

Photo: Courtesy of LightArt

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Top Left: Linear acoustic beams deliver visual rhythm and reliable emergency illumination in a finished project; each fixture integrates an emergency battery option to ensure light continues during power interruptions.

Top Right: Performance Light Core is an example of a high-functioning LED luminaire system that can integrate into emergency backup battery software.

Bottom: An emergency LED driver containing an emergency battery that is designed to provide backup power to an LED light fixture during a power outage.

tion and the use of automated testing features to ensure compliance logs are maintained accurately.

- UL 924 updates: Testing has become more rigorous, particularly around the integrity of the emergency function when digital control systems (0—10-V, DALI) are involved, ensuring control override functions correctly during power loss.
- IBC and IFC: Clarified language often addresses emergency lighting requirements in egress paths, including accounting for the transfer and startup time of auxiliary power sources, such as generators.

Building Dependable Emergency Infrastructure

The failure rate necessitates a key industry shift: recognizing emergency lighting systems, not as an auxiliary component but as a critical life-safety system. To improve the current success rate, the industry must commit to three crucial strategies:

1. Design early for emergency: Ensure that emergency components are integrated into the initial design phase rather than being retrofitted later, which compromises both performance and aesthetics.
2. Test regularly and automate: Utilize self-testing and centralized, networked systems to replace labor-intensive manual checks, thereby guaranteeing required monthly and annual compliance checks.
3. Partner for reliability: Collaborate closely with experienced OEMs to verify driver sizing, optical performance, and adherence to all necessary UL, NFPA, and IBC certification requirements.

To move decisively beyond reactive maintenance, success hinges on leveraging integrated technologies, adopting advanced battery chemistries, and embracing automated compliance solutions. By committing to these measures, the lighting industry can build a truly dependable emergency infrastructure, dramatically reducing the failure rate and ensuring that occupants have reliable egress regardless of the event or unfolding situation. S

THE AUTHOR

Edwin Vice leads innovation at LightArt as director of Research and Development, overseeing product development and driving the evolution of the company's portfolio.

INDUSTRY
PROGRESS REPORT

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The Twain Shall Meet

The ceiling convergence of illumination and acoustics

Over the past two decades, we've had a front-row seat to major shifts in the arena of commercial interiors. On the part of aesthetics, we've moved steadily toward openness and material restraint. Carpeted floors, partitions, and dropped ceilings have disappeared, replaced by exposed structure, polished floors, and unbroken volumes. At the same time, the way we evaluate performance has matured. Energy use, comfort, and well-being are no longer abstract goals; they're modeled, documented, and verified.

Lighting designers are accustomed to working within this performance-driven framework, having long ago been subject to standards and codes. Now, acoustics is entering a similar phase thanks to Indoor Environmental Quality (IEQ) standards embedded in programs like LEED and WELL. As the two disciplines converge around shared performance goals, we have an opportunity to reconsider how they are currently specified and what becomes possible when they're designed together.

A Procedural Divide

Within the CSI MasterFormat, lighting falls squarely under Division 26. It is electrified, code-driven, and evaluated against quantitative criteria such as illuminance levels, glare control, and lighting power density. These requirements place lighting decisions early in the design process, closely coordinated with structure, mechanical systems, and life-safety considerations.

Acoustics, by contrast, is often classified under Division 9 alongside finishes and furnishings. Even as IEQ standards have brought greater clarity and rigor to acoustic performance, acoustics' placement within the specification process positions it as secondary to early planning. As a result, acoustic strategies are still frequently addressed later in the process and are often among the first design elements revisited during value engineering.

When Systems Collide at the Ceiling

Historically, this separation was manageable. Older building typologies relied on enclosed plans, partitions, and soft finishes that—regardless of intent—provided a baseline level of noise mitigation. In today's open, reflective interiors, that buffer no longer exists. As a result, decisions made for one system directly impact the other. A visually restrained ceiling that performs well from a lighting standpoint can unintentionally amplify reverberation. Acoustic interventions introduced late in the design process can similarly disrupt lighting layout, spacing, and visual hierarchy.

Although lighting and acoustic systems are ultimately expected to coexist seamlessly within a single architectural field, the traditional specification process still develops them on independent timelines and within separate scopes. In practice, opportunities for cohesion are shaped more by sequence than by design intent.

Image: Sabin

Integration as an Advantage

Approaching the specification of lighting and acoustics as an integrated system—rather than as separate scopes—creates opportunities for closer collaboration between the two disciplines. Instead of treating acoustics and lighting as sequential considerations, teams can evaluate how both contribute to the intended use of a space from the outset.

When lighting and acoustics are considered early and in tandem, performance goals are easier to align. Coordination with structure, mechanical systems, and life-safety elements tends to be more straightforward. Documentation benefits from greater clarity, and design intent is more likely to carry consistently through procurement and construction.

A rendering showing that within open environments, acoustic lighting systems can reinforce spatial definition.

This clarity is especially valuable during value engineering. When acoustic elements are understood as integral to spatial performance rather than optional finishes, they are less likely to be reduced or removed. Early coordination also helps protect lighting intent by reducing the likelihood of late-stage acoustic interventions that force compromises in fixture placement or visual hierarchy. In this context, absorptive surface area can be scaled independently from light output and lit and unlit elements can be composed intentionally to balance performance and clarity.

Integration also changes how budgets can be deployed. When lighting and acoustics are designed as separate scopes, each is constrained by its own line item, often forcing trade-offs that limit overall performance. When they are developed together, designers can distribute resources more strategically—scaling acoustic surface area where it matters most, adjusting lighting output accordingly, and achieving better sensory performance without simply adding cost. In effect, integration allows design teams to work across budgets rather than within them, unlocking solutions that would be difficult to justify in isolation.

For architects and owners, it can result in spaces that perform as intended over time, reducing the need for post-occupancy fixes and retroactive adjustments.

A Case Study in Coordination

A renovation of Affiliated Engineers Inc.'s (AEI's) Chicago office illustrates how this integrated approach can work in practice. Designed as a highly collaborative workplace, the project includes open work areas directly adjacent to shared lounge and meeting spaces—conditions that made acoustic performance a functional requirement, not a secondary consideration.

AEI's existing space already had known acoustic challenges. "In this case, we knew from the beginning that we were looking at an installation that would combine acoustic performance with illumination. It really was designed as a combined solution," explained Grant Kightlinger, senior lighting designer at AEI's in-house lighting studio Pivotal Lighting Design.

That early alignment shaped how the ceiling was approached. Rather than resolving lighting first and layering acoustics later, the ceiling was developed as a shared system. Lit and unlit elements were intentionally composed together, allowing acoustic performance to scale where needed without over-lighting the space or disrupting visual order.

"That the lit and unlit elements were able to exactly match in sizes, materiality, and mounting methods allowed us to have a denser installation," Kightlinger noted. "That was helpful from an acoustic perspective and was a big part of the design concept."

The Role of Manufacturers

For integration to become more common, manufacturers must also play a role. Products designed in isolation—whether lighting fixtures or acoustic treatments—reinforce the silos designers are navigating.

Systems that align lighting and acoustic performance within a single platform can reduce coordination friction and support earlier, more informed decision-making. By integrating photometric data, acoustic performance metrics, and installation logic, manufacturers can help teams evaluate trade-offs holistically rather than reactively. The goal is no longer to add acoustic capability to lighting as an afterthought but to rethink how ceilings are designed, specified, and delivered—treating light and sound as inseparable contributors to spatial performance.

Toward a More Integrated Model

The separation between lighting and acoustics was never ideological. It was procedural, shaped by codes,

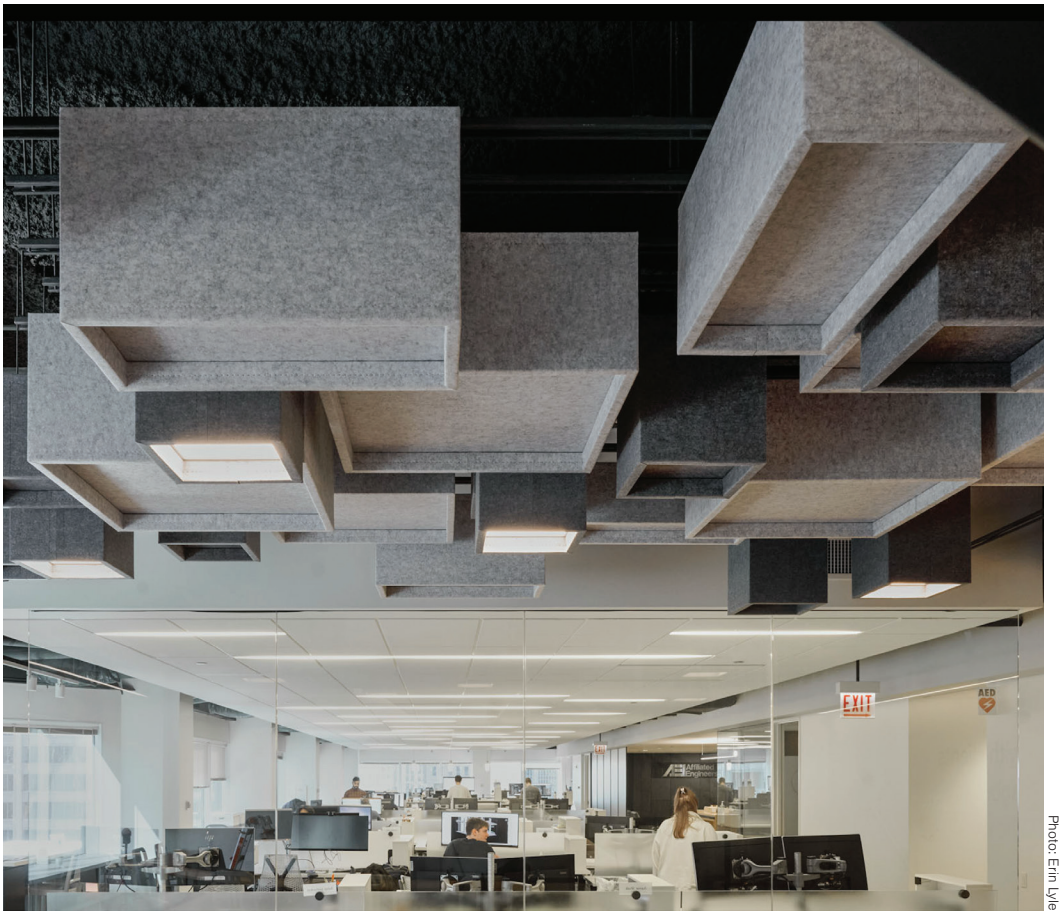

Photo: Erin Lyle

Top: The ceiling plane at AEI's Chicago office demonstrates illumination and absorptive surface area that are composed together, allowing performance goals to be resolved within a coordinated system.

Photo: Erin Lyle

Bottom Left: The lit and unlit elements of the ceiling system at AEI's Chicago office matched in size and mounting.

Photo: Charles Davis Smith Photography

Bottom Right: At Metrocare's Mental Health and Disability Innovation Center in Dallas, an integrated lighting and acoustic ceiling system supports both design intent and sound control in a high-traffic healthcare environment.

specifications, and construction conventions that aligned with the architectural conditions of their time. As those conditions have evolved, the opportunity emerged to rethink how these systems are brought together.

In today's open interiors, light and sound are shaped by the same volumes and surfaces, experienced together, and evaluated collectively. Designing them as a coordinated system reflects that reality and mirrors the way designers already think about performance, clarity, and experience.

The integration of lighting and acoustics isn't about blurring scopes or disciplines. It's about empowering designers and bringing processes into closer alignment with how spaces are built and experienced. S

THE AUTHOR

Wes Cox is co-founder of Sabin and an industrial designer with deep experience in architectural lighting and product development.

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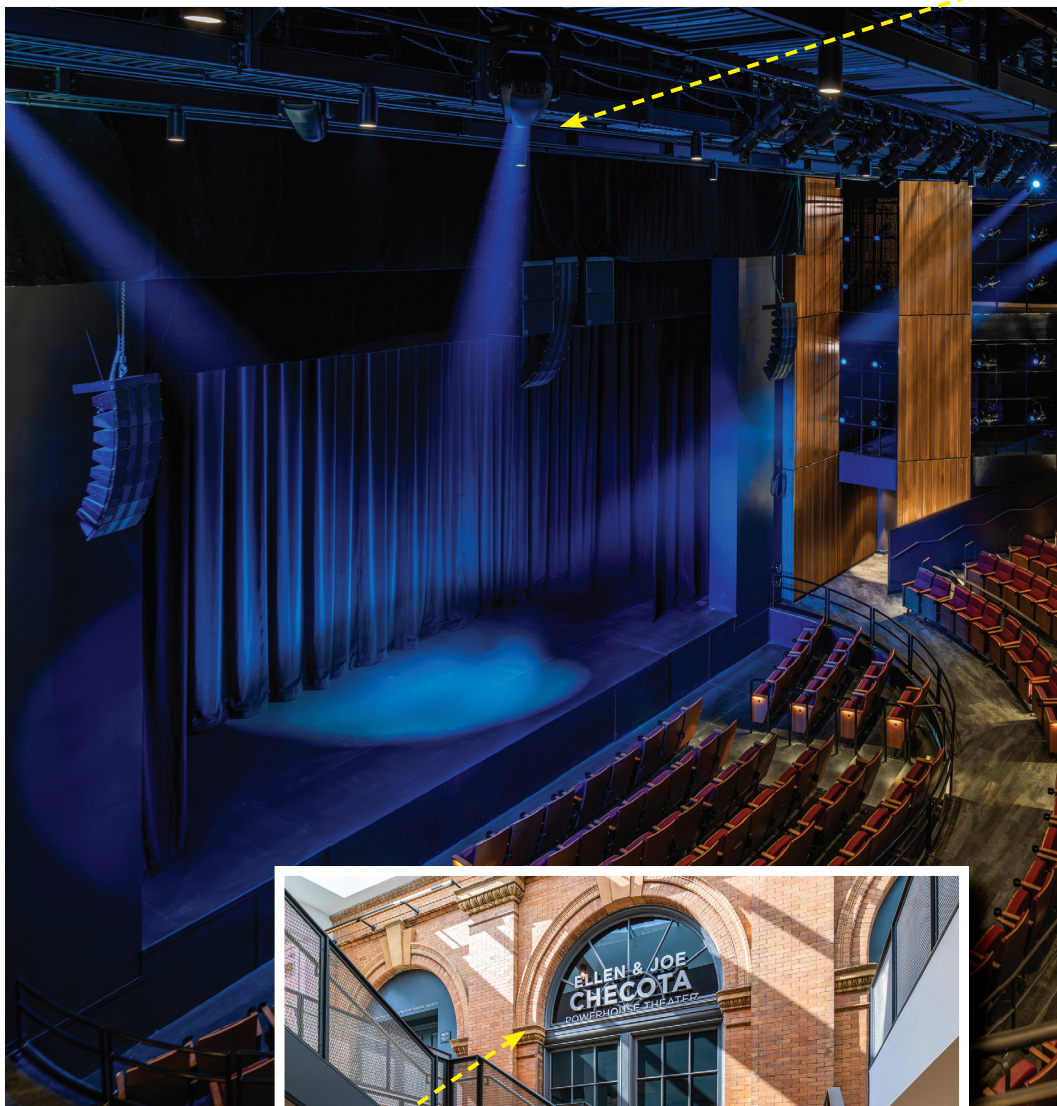
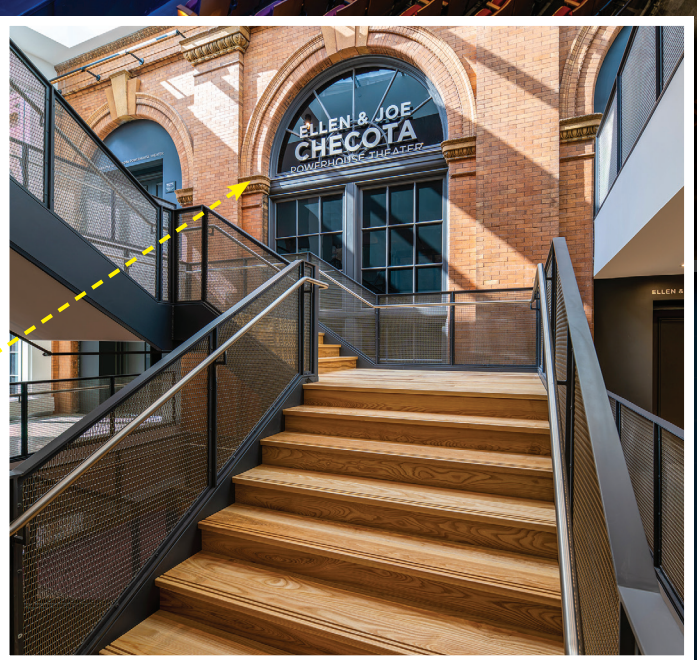
PROJECT IN PICTURES The Show Goes On

EUA, Fisher Dachs Associates, and Ring & DuChateau | Photos: Peter McCullough

In 2026, "Milwaukee Rep," one of the nation's first and largest regional theaters, will feature fan-favorite productions such as *Footloose* and *Twelve Angry Men* in addition to newer titles such as *John Proctor is the Villian*; thanks to design by **EUA** with theater consultants **Fisher Dachs Associates** and lighting consultants **Ring & DuChateau**, thespians and guests alike are able to enjoy the spoils of an updated **Associated Bank Theater Center**. The changes to the historic Wisconsin site include a new 30,000-sq-ft glass structure that connects to the theater company's 1898 landmark building as well as expanded, upgraded, and/or restored performance areas and pre-event spaces. The project complies with the National Park Service Historic Preservation Standards.





Century-old brick walls and arches are highlighted in the evenings with new interior architectural lighting.

A newly installed, flexible mainstage configuration complements programmable smart lighting and a laser projection system.

Color-changing façade lighting not only accentuates the volume of the new glass entryway, it also adds an element of dynamism to the theater's nighttime appearance.

The Circle of Light

The IESNYC continues to grow and challenge its Members during the second iteration of its Guiding Lights Circle mentorship program. Expanding from 6 months to 9 months, based on participant feedback, the cycle runs through June and includes a broader mix of participants: some more-senior lighting designers as mentees plus some lighting professionals on the manufacturing and agency sides. IESNYC President Zachary Pearson and the Section's leadership plan to nurture this program for years to come, adding fresh, unexpected layers of professional development and community.

The Guiding Lights Circle program aims to support and guide the next generation of lighting professionals by fostering professional growth, learning, and development. However, in this traditional mentor-mentee model, benefits run both ways. Experienced mentors share their expertise while staying current on emerging trends and in-demand skills. Emerging professionals expand their networks and gain candid, industry-insider guidance as they navigate immediate challenges and map their path forward. Some mentees reported that the program has become a journey of self-discovery, helping to clarify their passions and set meaningful goals.

SDA Lighting Executive Vice President and Guiding Lights Circle Committee Chair Jean Jacques emphasized connection: "The Guiding Lights Circle framework helps mentor-mentee pairs move with intention while still allowing the relationship to develop organically. By fostering trust and openness, we create space for honest dialogue, so the conversations become more impactful. That's when mentees can begin to identify their strengths and move forward with greater clarity."

The program is open to all current IESNYC Members and mentors with at least 5 years of industry experience. Mentee applicants must demonstrate a commitment to their professional growth and a willingness to learn. This is an in-person initiative, and mentor-mentee pairs are expected to meet monthly. Since feedback is crucial to the development of future cycles, mid-program and end-of-program evaluations are required.

Applications for the 2026–2027 cycle will open in August. Follow IESNYC's social media to find announcements and help spread the word. For more information, visit *iesnyc.org/mentorship* or send questions to *mentorship@iesnyc.org*.

Mentors and mentees from the 2024–2025 Guiding Lights Circle program.

Photo: IESNYC

IES ILLUMINATION AWARDS

2026 CALENDAR

DEC 1-21 | EARLY SUBMISSION
Deadline 11:59pm EST (Early bird submission fee: Members $265 / Non-Members $365)

DEC 21-JAN 30 | REGULAR SUBMISSION
Deadline 11:59pm EST (Regular submission fee: Members $320 / Non-Members $420)

FEB 4-18 | SECTION IA CHAIR PROCESSING
- Section IA Chairs will review submissions forcompliance of rules and guidelines
- Projects that comply with the rules of theprogram will move onto Merit Judging

MAR 4-APR 5 | ONLINE MERIT JUDGING
- Eligible projects receiving sufficient scores during online judging receive an Award of Merit
- Projects receiving exceptionally high scores will move to final, society level judging

MID-APRIL | LIVE FINAL ROUND JUDGING
- Eligible projects passing the online phase are judged during live, society level final judging
- Final judging determines the highest level of Society awards including Special Citation,
- Award of Excellence, or Award of Distinction
- If projects do not score high enough at this level, they retain their Award of Merit

MAY/JUNE | AWARD RECIPIENT NOTIFICATION

Local Section Judging will be conducted at the discretion of Section IA Chair timeline.

ILLUMINATION AWARDS

2025 Award of Distinction | Illuminating the Spirit of the Luce Chapel | Taichung, Taiwan | Lighting Design by CosmoC Lighting | Photo © Yu-chen Zao, Sen-Yung Liu

SUSTAINING MEMBERS

The following companies have elected to support the Society as Sustaining Members, which allows the IES to fund programs that benefit all segments of membership and pursue new endeavors, including education projects, lighting research, and recommended practices.*

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COOPER Lighting Solutions
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HLB Lighting Design
LUMA Lighting Design/ PAE Engineers
Lutron Electronics
Musco Lighting
P2S, Inc.
Rosendin Electric, Inc.
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SILVER

Acclaim Lighting
Affiniti Studios
Albert Chong Associates
A.L.P.
BK Lighting
BR&A Consulting Engineers
Cannon Design
ConTech Lighting
Cree Lighting
Duke Energy
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GE Lighting, a Savant Company
Hapco
H.E. Williams, Inc.
iGuzzini Lighting USA
IMEG Corp
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Kenall Mfg. Co.
Kurtzon Lighting
L Design Studio, LLC
Landscape Forms
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Lighting Services, Inc.
LMPG
LSI Industries, Inc.
Ministère des Transports du Québec
naturalLED
RAB Lighting, Inc.
Radiant Vision Systems
Reveal Design Group
Seminole Pole
SOSEN USA, Inc.
Spitzer Lighting
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The Engineering Enterprise
Visa Lighting
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WSP Canada
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*Bronze Sustaining Members are listed at *www.ies.org*.

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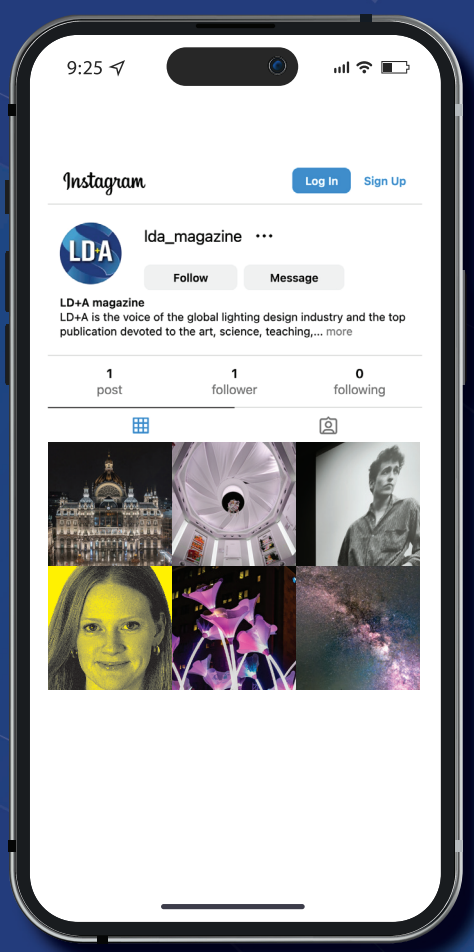

What to Expect:

- Stunning project showcases
- Expert tips and tutorials
- Industry news and trends
- Exclusive sneak peeks

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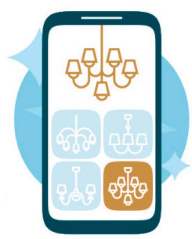
PRODUCTS

LUMINII
introduces its Gen 2 LED platform with 25% improved efficacy, tighter cut increments (as small as 0.66 in.) on strip lights, a 5-year wet-location warranty, and expanded BAA/BABA compliance for public-sector and federally funded projects. The platform includes five new LED strip families, 21 output options, CCTs ranging from 1900K to 3000K, and a standardized 10-millimeter form factor.
www.luminii.com

LEGRAND
unveils the adorne 65-W USB Type-C Outlet with direct-to-wall power delivery for commercial and hospitality applications or luxury residential spaces. The UL-listed outlets deliver 65 watts per port, providing fast charging for smartphones, laptops, and tablets, and include a charging-status indicator light that remains yellow during charging and changes to green when charging is complete. Fixtures install in standard electrical boxes and pair with over 40 of the adorne series' colorways and finishes.
https://www.legrand.us

LUMINIS
has updated the Clermont family of interior and exterior luminaires to include a 12-in. fixture and a 39-in.-high bollard mount. The new size option, like the original 18-in. luminaire, is compatible with multiple mounting options such as bollard, catenary, ceiling, pole, post top, and suspended. New bollard mounts can be used in public spaces like park trails and walkways.
www.luminis.com



LIGHTING NEW YORK
introduces Beacon, software powered by Light Visions—the brand's internal AI platform. Beacon allows users to take photos on their smartphones of lighting products they admire, upload the images to the platform, and receive information about the same, or similar, products available on Lighting New York's website.
https://lightingnewyork.com

FLOS
unveils Maap by Erwan Bouroullec. A wall-mounted lamp resembling a cloud, Maap diffuses ambient light across a broad surface. The 155-centimeter (~5-ft)-high luminaire comprising crumpled Tyvek, a tear-resistant material that appears paper-thin, and a metal frame with magnetic "dots" to secure the Tyvek in place are available in three sizes. At it's largest, luminaires can cover up to 3.2 meters (~10 ft) of width. Maap utilizes four 80 CRI, dimmable LEDs.
https://flos.com

SPOTLIGHT

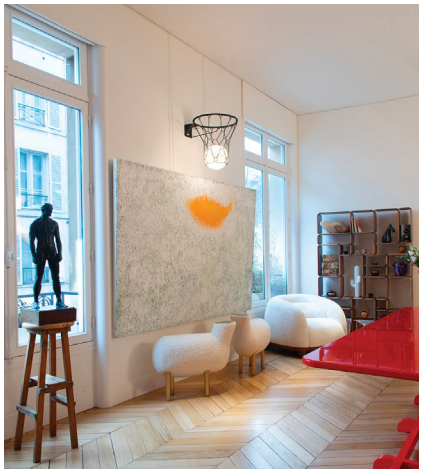
DMF Lighting
has launched the second generation of the A Series of illuminated room signage. Designed with a customizable faceplate allowing vertical and horizontal orientations and flexible text positions, the ADA-compliant signs now have integrated dual-voltage drivers and a concealed magnetic retention system within the faceplate, allowing for access to the driver and LED board, thus, reducing maintenance time. Sign text is illuminated through a clear, diffused lens in either 2700K or 3000K color temperatures. Additionally, fixtures install into the company's fire-rated F4NC junction box as well as standard 4-in. octagon and round junction boxes.
www.dmflighting.com

LUTRON
announces enhancements to Vive, a wireless system with a wide range of products (pictured) for commercial projects as small as a single space or as large as an entire campus. The newest addition includes the Vive Battery-Free Solutions Daylight Transmitter, which harvests ambient light to power itself. The code-compliant product eliminates the need for battery replacements and reduces maintenance for project end users.
https://commercial.lutron.com

PRODUCTS

EUREKA
debuts Torno, a luminaire with a circular, flat shade. With a 14-in. diameter, Torno is available in three ceramic finishes (pictured): Ivory White, Coal Black, and Terracotta Brown, as well as two locally sourced maple and oak wood finishes. Luminaires deliver up to 750 lumens and can be surface mounted, stem mounted, or suspended.
www.eurekalighting.com

CHROMA-Q
announces Vista 3 Release 5 (R5), the latest update to its lighting and media control software. R5 introduces new features and enhancements such as “Action Grids,” which allow for a customizable programing workspace and real-time modification of stage visuals; “Time Masters,” for customizable controls for hardware and on-screen elements; as well as streamlined production workflows and advanced show control integration.
https://chroma-q.com



FRANCK GENSER
debuts Basketball, a playful wall lamp for interior residential and hospitality applications. The illuminated “ball” serves as a sculptural focal point suspended inside a delicate chain mesh anchored by a black metal ring. The mesh across the sphere highlights the interplay of light and shadow.
https://franckgenser.com

ALLOY LED
introduces the PrimaPanel RGBW Flexible LED Sheet and the PrimaPanel Tunable Flexible LED Sheet to the PrimaPanel family. The modular, waterproof, and field-cuttable sheets are designed to deliver hotspot-free illumination in indoor and outdoor applications with flat or curved surfaces. The RGBW option (pictured) provides a spectrum of pastel and saturated colors with a 95+ CRI, while the Tunable option offers a range of CCTs from 2700K to 6500K with a 92+ CRI. Both offerings can be cut horizontally and vertically and mounted with adhesive backing or nails and screws at designated points.
https://alloyled.com

AD INDEX

The companies listed below would like to tell you more about their products and services. To learn more, access the websites listed here.

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Landscape Forms, Inc.	www.landscapeforms.com	7
Lucetta Lighting	www.lucettalighting.com	1
Meteor Lighting	www.meteor-lighting.com/nova-link	Cover 4
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Last Look

Shadowland

Inspired by the Komorebi effect, *Flight into Shadow* is an indoor installation at the Deggendorf Institute of Technology in Germany exploring how light and shadow shape human perception of comfort and heat in urban environments. Living mycelium structures scatter shifting artificial sunlight created with individually controlled luminaires, allowing visitors to experience multiple controlled spatial and solar-like elements independent of external weather conditions.

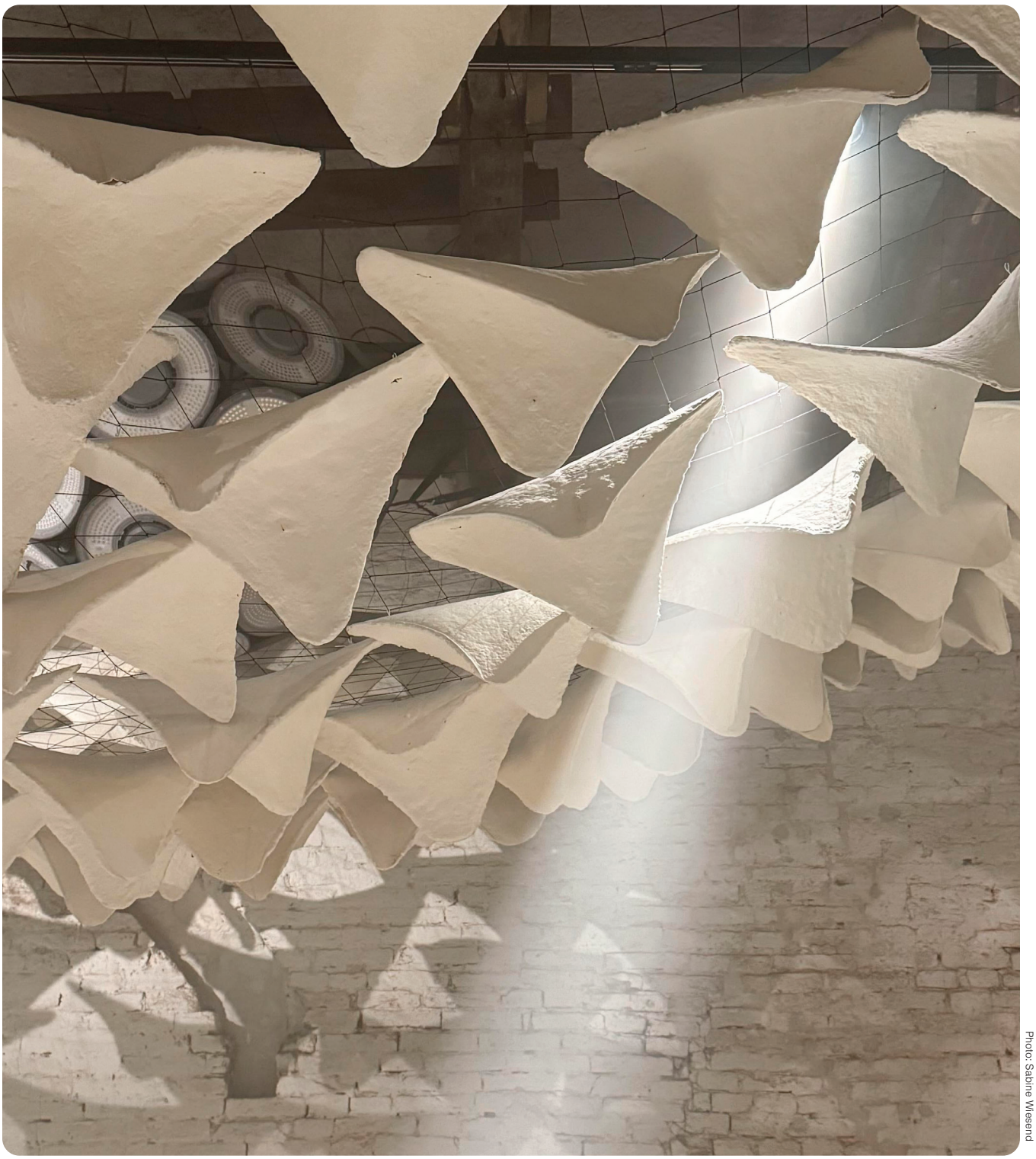

Photo: Sabine Wiesend

Join us August 13-15, 2026 in the Mile High City of Denver, CO for IES' annual conference, **IES26: The Lighting Conference**, the preeminent conference for all things lighting, from research to design to technology and more—a true state of the industry event.

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