



City Light Artists: Working in the Dark



By Paula Wallace

How can something as immaterial as electric light contribute to the formation of civic identities? This is a question that city custodians, designers and architects around the world are starting to ask themselves in the planning of our cities. While artificial light has pervaded the architectural and public space with such depth as to almost become invisible, its effects on the inhabitants are not so subtle. While many authors and academics have explored this subject, there has been a tension evolving between the aesthetic or artistic uses of light and its commercial uses, which involves public authorities, designers and engineers. Rather than reinforce architecture, light has also become more of a spectacle itself, which raises issues as to whether the routine application of bright, artificial light is our chosen natural habitat. Here we feature the work of several international designers in lighting public areas and describe how they came to realise their designs and why.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF NOCTURNAL “LIFE”

This relatively modern movement has its roots as far back as 1893 with the construction of Edison’s Tower of Light built for the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago – arguably the first structure built and illuminated specifically for night-time viewing.

The 1980’s saw the genesis of a consideration of public spaces from the perspective of stakeholders in the city, inhabitants and the work of architects.

Subject of a new book by Vincent Laganier, the history of French illumination in the past 15 years has seen the emergence of the lighting specialist as artist. He writes, “Contributing their knowledge and skill, they established a sensitive, practical and up to date dimension to lighting, of which the new illumination of the Eiffel Tower in late 1985 was the starting point.”

Since then, many major cities in France have realised the potential of light not just to increase profits for illuminated advertisers, but to bring people into the city at night. The most notable addition to this era was the development of Lyon, in France, as Europe’s first real “city of light” in the late 1980’s. Now, more than 20 cities have joined with Lyon in an organisation devoted to the invention and promotion of illuminations that benefit cities.

Their message has started to filter through to agencies worldwide of the benefits of enhanced visual amenity, enlivened retail activity, increased safety and convenience for pedestrians.

LIGHTING AND THE SOCIAL FABRIC

But there is another element to consider, also the subject of Dietrich Neumann’s “Architecture of the Night: The Illuminated Building”, that is, the nature of night lighting and its role in building a modern society.

Neumann asks what kind of effect it had on the city of Berlin when it began to compete in illumination and electric advertising with cities like New York. He asserts that even during the Depression years of the 1930’s the widespread night lighting produced a positive image of cities – an image that was geometric, crisp and hopeful.

A place where the role of architecture and lighting in the formation of social fabric can be seen in process is China, a country undergoing an “aesthetic revolution”, according to Time Magazine.

Opposite Page –

TOP: “Berge 2000” opus 3, Grenoble, France. Chinese artist: Lu Shengzhong, Project designer: Philippe Mouillon, Laboratoire sculpture-urbaine, Photographer: Vincent Laganier.

BOTTOM: Finsbury Avenue Square at night, UK, by Maurice Brill Lighting Design

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The Smartpole is set to transform Redfern’s main shopping street with a design customised to express the cultural values of the area by Sydney’s Streetscape Projects. Photographer: Rowan Turner.



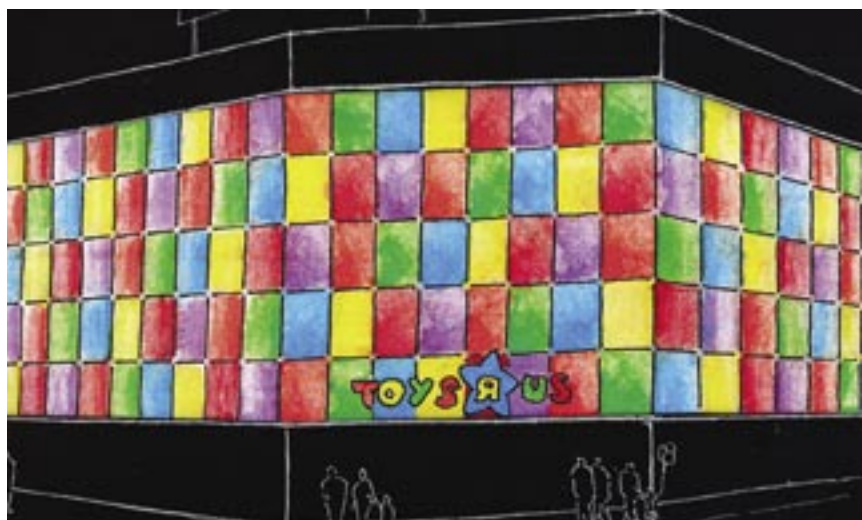


Its cities are expanding fast: 6.09 billion square metres of new buildings were constructed between 1999 and 2002 alone, nearly doubling the country's total built floor space. When you add to this a lack of "modern urban-design conventions and a vast pool of cheap construction labour", it is easy to see why many architects consider China as a blank canvas, said the Time article in April 2004.

The city of Beijing has undertaken huge new projects in preparation for the 2008 Olympics: a stadium and water-sports complex set in a vast Olympic Green, a new airport terminal, five new subway lines and more. Quoted in a Metropolis Magazine report earlier this year, Beijing-based architect Yung Ho Chang said, "The demolition (of old neighbourhoods) has accelerated with the Olympics in sight."

The city planning commission has protected 42 historic areas around the Forbidden City. But some sources estimate that by 2008, 90 per cent of the city's original 6,000 hutongs will have been razed.

The ongoing removal of Beijing's dilapidated old alleyways, or hutongs, may be ridding the city of outmoded housing, but the bulldozers are also eradicating the complex social networks and bustling street life of these close quarters.



TOP & MIDDLE: Toys R Us flagship store, located in Times Square, New York City. Focus Lighting collaborated with architects at Gensler Inc. to create a design that can be transformed from a three-storey-tall advertisement into a collage of children's faces in one second. Individual scrolling screens in six foot square sections cover each glass window on all three floors of the building. Each scroll contains one white, one clear, and one colour panel and areas for interchangeable ads or graphics. Each panel can be changed individually, allowing for endless design opportunities, or allow views of the interior through clear glass. Photographer: Paul Warchol.



BOTTOM: Paul Gregory, Principal Designer, Focus Lighting USA.



The congenial adjacencies of schools and sidewalks and storefronts that form the foundation of urban community life are an increasingly rare sight. The design of lighting networks for these areas will form a crucial part in maintaining community life and creating neighbourhoods instead of compounds.

LIGHTING THE CITY-SCAPE: MONTREAL, BIRMINGHAM, SYDNEY, NEW YORK MONTREAL

“Urban lighting design is not only a matter of ornamentation, but also a way to appeal to a community in the progressive search for better safety, comfort and ambience”, says lighting designer, Gilles Arpin of Canadian firm Éclairage Public. Arpin has found himself in a leading role in the changing the face of Montreal’s night-time look. The city of Montreal administration and the Ministry of Culture and Communications of the Province of Quebec have enlisted Arpin and his architectural and landscape

design colleagues to sustain and upgrade the urban design, pedestrian profile and lifestyle/entertainment options of the historical district known as Old Montreal.

As reported in Architectural Record Magazine in 2004, Arpin produced an innovative lighting-plan study for the Canal de Lachine. Along a route that begins with the Old Harbour of Montreal and goes up to the Cote-Saint-Paul Bridge, Arpin selected seven key objects, from footbridges to towering old trees, that he washed with colour. “The resulting presentation collage is like a walk through an extraordinary sculpture garden,” reported William Weathersby, Jr.

Montreal’s administrative centre is made up of various buildings like City Hall, the Bonsecours Market, and several courthouses. Old Montreal’s lighting plan identifies these buildings as the main elements in a nocturnal skyline visible from the modern city, the old port and the islands.

The lighting takes into account each building’s symbolism and appeal to tourists, enhancing each one distinctively according to different scales of perception.

“Our lighting design work and recent research drives us to conceive light scenographies that contribute to the development of human relationships in urban spaces,” the designer says. Arpin’s motto is: “Lighting should enhance convivial relationships by revealing the beauty of cities.”

Birmingham: Designer, Nigel Edmondson, has been closely involved in this city’s renaissance and seen dramatic changes in its identity in the public’s perception.

As Assistant Design Manager for the Birmingham City Design Team, in Britain, Edmondson can report a significant increase in visitor numbers and new businesses and a positive public response over the past 20 years.



Opposite Page –

The iconic Selfridges building by Future Systems, utilises simple blue floods powered from the existing street lighting columns. Image courtesy of Birmingham City.

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TOP & SECOND FROM TOP: This canal-side space is to the rear of Birmingham’s Mailbox, an innovative mixed use redevelopment and extension of a former sorting office, to house an exclusive shopping street, offices and restaurants. The lighting design is by DPA of Oxford and Edinburgh. Image courtesy of Birmingham City.

MIDDLE: A most dignified building in Tampere, Finland. Lighting design: Roope Siirainen. Photographer: Sami Helenius.

BOTTOM: This bus terminal is a landmark for city dwellers and an example of modern city planning. Lighting design by Roope Siirainen.

The changes have followed a principle of creating a linked network of “streets and squares” that are virtually all pedestrianised, or at least given pedestrian priority. This program has succeeded in breaking the concrete collar of the inner ring road, has lowered roads, removed the large number of unpleasant pedestrian subways, and created new public spaces.

“Lighting has been recognised as playing a significant role in animating the public realm, creating a safe night-time environment, bringing legibility to the city centre, and attracted new businesses. It has also extended active and trading hours, and highlighted the city’s architectural assets and public spaces,” said Edmondson.

New developments in Birmingham recognise the importance of good lighting, both in terms of corporate identity, and positive visitor/occupier response. Increasingly developers are engaging specialist lighting designers as part of their design teams, and including lighting artists as part of their response to our public art requirements.

Sydney: Closer to home, the City of Sydney is implementing plans this year to encourage residents of the inner-city suburb of Redfern to utilise their main shopping street.

“If the council are serious about rejuvenating Redfern they must start with Redfern Street. With a low shop tenancy there, the increased security that will come with improved lighting is a huge bonus”, said Moses Obeid, CEO of the City of Sydney’s light pole supplier, Streetscape Projects.

The company saw a similar result after the installation of better lighting in First Fleet Park, on Sydney’s CBD Harbour foreshore; from a reported three assaults taking place in the park per week, to none in less than six months.

Obeid said, “We have been in discussions with the City of Sydney to see how else we can custom-design the poles to give Redfern Street its own sense of community.”



In another inner-city suburb, Darlington's, a cast-studded lower cladding was created to cover the lower section of street poles. The cladding acts in two ways, as a deterrent for street posters/advertising, and to reflect the trendy atmosphere of the area.

A unique feature of Smartpole is its design flexibility. It can be made in a range of colours, it can include LED signage panels, and design additions can be made even once the pole is installed.

"Most commonly we would merge all the traffic signalling into the pole and this stops the problem you have with a plethora of poles and signs cluttering up the street", said Obeid.

New York: New, modern streetlights may soon also grace the streets of New York, designed by the winners of its international design competition.

The design by Phifer and Partners, incorporates the latest technology and

is designed to replace the circa 1963 "cobra head" luminaire. The luminaire's design integrates light-emitting diodes and photovoltaics in a slender arm that is connected to an aluminium base pole by two thin stainless steel rods.

T-shaped slots in the post's fluted base will allow signage and other elements, such as street and traffic signs, additional lighting, traffic signals, traffic control boxes, and pedestrian push buttons, to be integrated in the design.

New York City will add the Phifer design to its street lighting catalogue that includes about 15 lamps that Business Improvement Districts can choose from. In this case, the design competition process itself was used as a tool for positive change in the urban landscape.

*This Page –
4th Street Live – Focus Lighting, USA.
Image courtesy of Cordish Company.*

ABOUT LUCI

(Lighting Urban Communities International)

This organisation is a network of cities across the world who promote exchange of skills and knowledge, research and best practice, and the benefit of innovative lighting schemes and festivals for their citizens and visitors.

For more information visit www.luciassociation.org

ABOUT THE IALD

(International Association of Lighting Designers)

Founded in 1969 and based in Chicago, Illinois, USA, the IALD is an internationally recognised organisation dedicated solely to the concerns of independent, professional lighting designers.

For more information visit www.iald.org

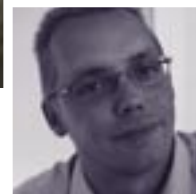
ABOUT ELDA

(European Lighting Designers' Association)

ELDA is a voluntary federation of lighting designers and consultants who are active on an international scale, their purpose being to increase the reputation of the profession and to establish the profession as such in its own right.

For more information visit www.eldaplus.org

>> Turn the page to see case studies from international lighting designers.



TOP LEFT: The heart of the city with flowing water being projected on to the facades, Tammerkoski, Finland. Lighting design by Roope Siironen.

TOP RIGHT: A centrepiece dominating the view of Jyväskylä City, Finland. Lighting design: Roope Siironen.

BOTTOM LEFT: The "living room" of the city with the facades and bus terminal given a dignified and elegant treatment. Lighting design: Roope Siironen. Photographer: Sami Helenius.

BOTTOM RIGHT: A place of tranquillity in the most central location of the city, Tampere, Finland. Lighting design: Roope Siironen. Photographer: Sami Helenius.

Roope Siironen FINLAND

Roope Siironen, M.A, ELDA, Design Director, VALOA

DESIGNER COMMENTS:

The challenge in lighting public spaces is to create the visual look and mood with respect to technical reliability and functionality. The keywords are mood, image and safety.

The differently styled lighting schemes for hierarchically different objects should create a dramaturgical and logic visual entity that speaks to people by leaving a lasting imprint.

Dark time is an opportunity for bringing forth the most beautiful subjects and to underline the best sides of a city through good lighting. The dark time expression is a central and personal image factor for cities.

A successful and complete lighting scheme enables spatial perception. It

becomes easier to recognise spaces and places, this in turn creates psychological security. Almost all projects we have completed have received exceptional recognition in the media. City inhabitants regard beautifully lit subjects as the best ventures their city has done, and tourists remember them as landmarks.

My current interest lies within the commercial lighting sector, such as shopping districts, department stores and car retailers.

We have also completed many historically valuable subjects. They are demanding and require a great sense of respect for the original architecture. The visual possibilities for commercial subjects are broader and participating in visual marketing through the means of lighting is very fascinating.

The urban landscape is in a way a panoramic theatre where man, that is,

anybody can play the main role. Today, urban spaces are mostly lit with street lighting posts. This direction of light flattens the space, usually causes glare and at worst provokes a depressed atmosphere.

This "one-way-system" type of lighting culture should be gradually abandoned. An urban space can be lit safely by emphasising its best features such as facades, landscapes, landmarks, bridges and water motifs.

This can give a city a vital and characteristic appearance that heightens comfort and business opportunities.

A magical city for me is Las Vegas, but I would not like to stay there more than three days because the lighting is so effective.

Another interesting city is Lyon, which has inspired many of our customers to improve the lighting of their own cities.



Maurice Brill UNITED KINGDOM

Maurice Brill, Director, Maurice Brill Lighting Design, London

DESIGNER COMMENTS:

It is the affect lighting has on people that requires such study and sensitivity. Being able to approach a scheme from the perspective of the user, which differs from someone who lives in the area, whether it is pedestrian or car vs. people who are visiting the area is critical to the success of a design.

What we believe a space should look like, in response to what the brief calls for, combined with requirements of local governments and communities requires a sensitivity to achieve balance.

One of the unique characteristics of public lighting is people's perception of what is safe which is different depending on whom you ask. We have found this often translates to the level of contrast that is perceived to be "safe".

Again, a balance has to be found where the majority feels comfortable while still retaining an environment that people want to be in.

Depending on the area, it has tremendous impact on the night-time environment. We have seen examples

where a successful lighting scheme has not only supported evening events for local communities but create a city's identity.

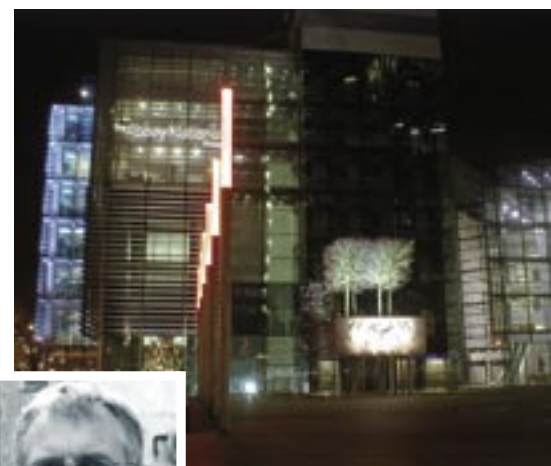
In regards to Finsbury Avenue Square, people go out of their way to experience the light installation. It is now considered a meeting point where people stop, sit and talk.

On their way home, people who walk through the square consider the lighting installation soothing and contemplative, which makes their journey all that much better.

I have found an eclectic approach with the use of various types of lighting make up the most interesting compositions, and rigid master plans often lack that imagination.

No matter the size of a project, I break it down into smaller projects by creating a footprint of varying elements that can be discovered and linked together. When viewed as a series of smaller projects, inspiration can be found everywhere.

Traditionally I find Paris magical, but each city has its own formula that works and creates a different feel that is magical to them.



TOP: The award-winning Finsbury Avenue Square illumination, by Maurice Brill Lighting Design

MIDDLE: Lighting design in Regents Place, UK, by Maurice Brill Lighting Design

BOTTOM: Finsbury Avenue Square at night, UK, by Maurice Brill Lighting Design



TOP: San Jose Church, Mexico, illumination by Pedro Garza

MIDDLE: Guadalajara Cathedral, Mexico, illumination by Pedro Garza



Pedro Garza de Yta MEXICO

Pedro Garza de Yta, Architect, Lighting Designer, Mexico

DESIGNER COMMENTS:

Normally public places that are illuminated become icons in the city and the society, therefore the responsibility inherent in changing their appearance is enormous. This is a modern way to participate in the history of a city or a building.

Lighting city areas is a detonator of socio-economic development. More and more around the world people are restoring downtown areas, so plazas,

churches and historical buildings that are illuminated are part of this recovery and are important players in this process.

After renovation of Morelia in Mexico, for example, the increase in tourism in the downtown area was more than 15 per cent, restaurants increased their sales by more than 20 per cent, and at least four restaurants and bars were re-modelled at the same time.

An important issue for designers is keeping up to date with technology and working within a multidisciplinary group. It is important now to be able to communicate with architects, specialists

in restoration, electrical installations, lighting controls etc.

The most rewarding part of lighting public spaces is probably the reaction of older people when they witness the completed project. I will never forget a couple of old ladies crying when we inaugurated our first Cathedral.

I hope cities of the future are lit according to an urban lighting plan that will study the image that light will give to the city. The most magical place for me is Morelia, because the lighting plan really brought a change to the facade of the city and life of the people there.

Robert Shook UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Robert Shook, IALD, LC, USA,
Founding Partner, Schuler Shook, Chicago

DESIGNER COMMENTS:

It is extremely important to keep urban areas human in scale and quality. Urban environments can easily be dominated by tall buildings, lending an “urban canyon” appearance to streets, with lots of blank walls.

Street lighting is one of the elements that can be employed to lend character and human scale to the urban environment.

We campaign hard not to “over-light” city streets. There seems to be a sensibility among elected officials that there is no such thing as too much light, and that “more light equals more safety”.

Hopefully, we are quickly reaching an end to the era in the United States of city streets being thought of as dangerous environments after dark, and we can begin to use more sensitivity in illuminating these areas.

In the general context of urban lighting, the most frustrating part of the job is when we have completed a Master Plan, only to see the elected officials who instituted this Master Plan voted out of office, thus producing the “former Master Plan.”

The renovation of State Street, Chicago, United States, is an 8-block renovation of an historically-important retail zone in downtown Chicago.

This zone had been transformed into a pedestrian-and-bus mall in

the early 1970’s. Like most of these transformations, this one was unsuccessful and business at the major retail stores had steadily declined.

State Street as a retail centre has rebounded significantly since the renovation was completed. One remarkable milestone was the return of Sears Roebuck & Co. after having deserted this street back in the 1980’s.

I think it’s always dangerous to try to predict the future, but I would certainly like to see more fixtures available that provide a beautiful daytime appearance while at the same time shielding the light sources from polluting the atmosphere.

Paris is a magical city because of the degree of pure whimsy evident in exterior lighting. There are many large, quality lighting installations in Paris, but there are also many makeshift installations on smaller buildings, and the pervasive quantity of all of this adds up to magic, for me.



LEFT: State Street, Chicago, IL, USA – an eight-block renovation of an historically-important retail zone in downtown Chicago. Architect: Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, USA. Lighting Designers: Robert Shook, IALD & James Baney, IALD, Schuler Shook, USA. Photographer: James Steinkamp, Steinkamp Ballogg, USA.

RIGHT: A new streetlight pole for the State Street renovation, Chicago, USA, is a recreation of the first streetlight pole installed there in 1921. The “acorns” at the top are prismatic glass with 250watt Deluxe High Pressure Sodium lamps. Architect: Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, USA. Lighting Designers: Robert Shook, IALD & James Baney, IALD, Schuler Shook, USA. Photographer: James Steinkamp, Steinkamp Ballogg, USA.

Roger Narboni FRANCE

Roger Narboni, Director, Concepto Agency

DESIGNER COMMENTS:

City lighting is an everyday lighting in the sense of perceptions, ambience and uses.

Urban spaces are not merely sceneries to be admired or spectacles. This is why the lighting designer needs a lot of experience to produce the “right” lighting solution that can be seen and appreciated for years, and on an everyday basis. This is associated with the three dimensional perception of public spaces which takes in the total liberty of movement and vision for the users.

Lighting of city areas is an element that affects between one third to one half of our daily waking time,

so the design of it is important for the wellbeing of city dwellers. One negative effect that has followed some of our work in public areas is a lack of adequate maintenance of the lighting equipment. But this is generally outweighed by the positive and real changes of perception and uses of the space. In our work for the French town of Tamont sur Gironde, we used mainly metal halide with ceramic discharge lamps (80–2800K or 3000K) and fluorescent lamps (85–3000K). Our aim was to construct a veritable night ambience in respect to the people living there, of the qualities of the urban site, of the impact of the landscape, of the environment and within the principles of sustainable development.

My inspiration comes from many places and in the case of Tamont sur Gironde it was derived from topography, geography, landscape and human history.

I would like to see more real lighting design projects that utilise shadows and darkness, in our cities now and in the future. But this requires a lot of pedagogy and education of city officials as well as inhabitants.

It is impossible for me to nominate one magical city. There are many that have that quality in day-time and night. Some worth mentioning that have significance for me are, Paris, Nantes, Bordeaux, Toulouse, New York, Tokyo, Roma, Lisbon, Barcelona, Sevilla and Algier.



IMAGES: The Concepto Agency in France designed the lighting scheme for the French town of Tamont sur Gironde – using the latest lighting technology to bring to life historic buildings and play with shadow and darkness. Images courtesy of Roger Narboni, Concepto Agency.





Tai Wei Lin TAIWAN

TaWei Lin, Design Director, CWI Lighting Design Inc.

DESIGNER COMMENTS:

For an exterior building lighting project, lighting designers need to observe the environment where the building is located from different points of view: urban scale, street scale and human scale.

A single building is like a person, but a city is a whole family. Understanding the urban hierarchy allows the designer to tailor a lighting master plan to a specific city. The balance between buildings, streets, plazas, monuments and people will create a unique characteristic, a unique family portrait. Without a sensitive master plan, lighting will only create chaos.

City spaces can seem scattered and lighting can give them unity, so people living there or visiting there feel a sense of recognition and welcoming at night. Citizens start to appreciate the nightscape, especially children, when they feel safer and happier. Good lighting is also a channel for aesthetic education, much more effective than a book or a class.

People will naturally become familiar with the different feelings offered by different lighting schemes. They start to expect a higher standard for their environment.

After making some mistakes early on, I realised that lighting designers have to pay attention both to existing activities of a space as well as to aesthetic concerns.

Maintaining the unique identity of a city, not flash-fusing it with international trends, is an issue for designers everywhere. Some cities need to cut down on lighting pollution, such as signage, while some cities need exciting lighting touches.

The history of a city is always the greatest inspiration. Even for a new urban lighting plan, using lighting to connect the past and future is a challenge and a delight, as it stretches the heart. I would like to see city lighting be technically sound and manifest a strong connection among architecture, urban planning, history, identity, and people, like a good piece of music. A magical city for me is Ankorwat, as the centre of the ancient city is not lit at all. Only sunset and sunrise present magical touches, macro-washes of multi-hued light that artificial lighting cannot achieve.

TOP: Hsinchu City Hall, which is covered by a canvas façade during its period of renovation. Lighting design by TaWei Lin, Image courtesy of Fu-Bin Chang.

MIDDLE LEFT: Lighting up a governmental building at one of the four corners of the Taipei President Hall Area to define an entrance to this area. Lighting design by TaWei Lin, Image courtesy of Fu-Bin Chang.

MIDDLE RIGHT: Custom-made fixture at a plaza, combining building floodlight and signage functions to light up vertical and horizontal space at the same time – Taishin International Bank. Lighting design by TaWei Lin, Image courtesy of Fu-Bin Chang.

BOTTOM: Police Station – friendly city corner. Lighting design by TaWei Lin, Image courtesy of Fu-Bin Chang.