

Considerations behind creating successful bespoke projects

British lighting designer, Chelsom, discusses that all-important balance of design, function and cost needed to execute a custom project successfully ...

Creating the Chelsom lighting collections which we launch every two years with a new catalogue and website is of course challenging, but to us it's also a great joy. Within our business, the design ethos leads and we are constantly buzzing with new ideas and new design directions.

I hope that our ranges have a cohesive feel and have the Chelsom handwriting on them no matter which space they are designed for, which country they go to or for whatever price level. It's a wide design brief given that we supply the marine industry as well as the hospitality sector and we export to 70 countries around the world, winning hotel projects from 3-star to 6-star.

Along with all our standard product, a huge amount of sales come from the design and manufacture of bespoke lighting products. We are fortunate to have close working relationships with many of the world's leading interior design practices and for most of them, product design is a part of their skill set. They constantly want to push the boundaries and are always looking for unique lighting to enhance their latest stunning scheme.

We massively respect the breadth of their design skills, meaning that whereas we as a company focus purely on lighting, they must work with every aspect of interior furnishings and decoration.

I believe that many interior designers come to Chelsom just because we are so focussed on our own field. We have worked in hospitality lighting for over 70 years and so we understand not only the aesthetics of a product but its need for perfect and long-term functionality in what can often be a tough environment.

The role of someone like us is to understand in the greatest depth the designer's aesthetic

product concept and its relationship with the space in which it sits. It's also imperative to understand the balance between ambience and light output. The manufacturers' role must be that of adding technical lighting expertise and manufacturing know how so that the three crucial aspects of design, function and cost come together perfectly.



Saying 'no' is not something that comes naturally to us. However, if we are the lighting manufacturer working collaboratively with a designer, we must sound the warning that a design concept will not meet the functional standards required or will be way outside budget constraints.

For example we will say no if we know a light source in a confined space will

overheat, a portable luminaire will tip over due to insufficient base weight, light output will be insufficient for the task required or compatibility with existing dimming systems is a problem.

Of course we will always find an alternative solution and that's our duty in the whole scope of the project. On the budget side we have

become experts in the value engineering process. There are so many manufacturing tweaks that can be made in order that little or no aesthetic difference can be seen but sometimes as much as 30% can be saved in costings.

This is absolutely not about reducing quality – it's just about having the manufacturing skills to know-how the same look is achieved at less cost.

Whether it be hundreds of pieces of a black ceramic bulldog table lamp for guestrooms or a one off 5m diameter chandelier that drops down three decks on a cruise ship, the skill set and infrastructure to deliver such custom product is paramount and hard earned through experience.

Remember that every custom piece of lighting is a prototype in that it's never been manufactured before. It therefore needs all the experience of design drawings, technology skills, engineering capabilities, manufacturing prowess and finish detailing

to bring that unique piece to a successful conclusion.

Of course that means as a company we are tested and challenged daily, but it also brings great pride when a piece of lighting that has never been seen before achieves the intended wow factor and does its job for years to come.

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