POINT OF VIEW

Rick Meyer

HAS THE LUMINAIRE BUSINESS GOTTEN TOO BRIGHT?

It's time for manufacturers to place a little more emphasis on refinement and comfort

As the lighting industry gradually shifted from traditional sources to LED-driven technology, the composition of the lighting market changed with it. Suddenly existing luminaire choices—in many cases with proven and refined solutions—fell out of popularity in favor of fixtures that emphasized lumen output, longer lamp life, lower maintenance and effective lumen-per-dollar solutions.

In addition, other factors came into play during the past decade, including more stringent energy codes, a tighter economy, and market expectations that luminaire size and aperture size should decrease with the adoption of LED technology. At the early stages of commercial adaptation, smaller and narrower apertures didn't create a noticeable increase in fixture luminance or brightness because early commercial LED technology struggled with output. However, as the technology evolved, the capability was in reach to have sources that increased fixture luminance values.

You don't have to go far to see the effects of this trend. Today, visual-based fixtures such as sconces and pendants can be evaluated on sheer lumen output. Direct area lighting used in parking lots, warehouses and athletic venues can yield strong point-source visibility and narrower aperture slots. And smaller aperture downlights have become more favorable in higher-end design applications. Experienced and well-trained

lighting professionals know how to utilize and blend the new lighting tools into a space to maximize visual comfort for those working or living in the space day-to-day. But in my opinion, the lighting community as a whole might benefit from more tools with a higher level of refinement.

A SIMPLER TIME

As the lighting industry matured in its use of conventional sources, starting in the 1960s and evolving into the early 2000s, commercial lighting manufacturers honed their abilities on good fixture design. For decades, developing fixtures that could provide effective light in a manner that was smooth and comfortable was at the forefront of innovation.

Specification-grade companies turned to proven IES recommendations for shielding, cutoff and luminance recommendations. It was widely recognized that the discomfort from bright fixtures was something that needed to be controlled and softened from the viewing angles of people in their day-to-day lives. Fixtures at the top tier of the specification market not only worked off the mathematical and geometric principles of cutoff and shielding, but went further into managing the transitions of brightness, going beyond mathematical calculations to artistry.

Another component widely utilized during this period was point source-driven indirect fixtures. This was originally performed around high-output incandescent quartz sources and eventually, believe it or not, high-output metal halide sources. Professional lighting designers during this period had ample tools for effectively layering direct and indirect sources that emphasized comfort, and they were ensured a degree of comfort and refinement from proven and trusted manufacturers.

PORTFOLIO REBALANCING

The LED revolution in our industry was a giant shift from the norm that everything had been based upon. For the first time in decades, luminaire manufacturers had to turn over their portfolio. Almost without exception, a lighting fixture that was in a manufacturer's offering 10 years ago is obsolete today. This has resulted in pressure for existing companies to rebuild, redesign and re-engineer their lighting offerings, while staying current and managing the new technologies.

In some cases, this resulted in a narrowing of product portfolios and, in others, rapid expansion of portfolios with the implementation of new or replacement products. The revolution also welcomed the addition of new manufacturers into the market.

However, with the many changes over the past decade, perhaps in the rush to provide new lighting tools to design professionals, the refinement and sophistication of the past was lost. Unquestionably, it's an exciting time to be in the lighting industry, and the market seems stronger than ever. Maybe now is a good time for luminaire manufacturers to place a little more emphasis on refinement and comfort.

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As efficacies of LED sources continue to increase, maybe it's time that manufacturers look to provide indirect solutions based around a point source. And maybe we should make sure we aren't on the wrong side of IES recommendations on cutoff and start looking at smoother transitions.

Rick Meyer is vice president, sales & marketing for SPI Lighting.

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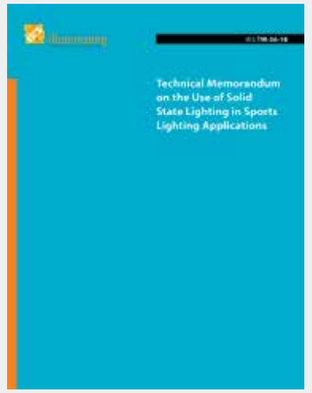

Technical Memorandum on the Use of Solid State Lighting in Sports Lighting Applications (TM-36-18)

This document is intended to be a supplement to the IES RP-6-15, *Recommended Practice for Sports and Recreational Area Lighting.* RP-6-15 covers design and application information critical to sports lighting that is not contained in this document. This document should not be used as a replacement for RP-6-15. This document presents light sources that are relatively new to the lighting industry and are currently being used or considered for use in sports and recreational lighting applications. Where appropriate, the new sources will be compared and contrasted with traditional sources. This document is meant to focus on mainly recreational sports lighting, encompassing the same breadth of projects as noted in RP-6-15. The lighting requirements for professional sports and the related broadcasting issues are not addressed in this document.

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