



Featuring 2,000 Decorative Lighting Suppliers Worldwide

WOMEN IN LIGHTING



Just over a year ago the Women in Lighting initiative launched; a collaboration between Light Collective, formalighting and Archifos to highlight the work of female designers working with light. Today, the project continues to push boundaries and grow in presence.

darc magazine – along with sister magazine *arc* – has been a proud supporter of the WiL initiative since the very beginning, aiming to highlight the work of female designers around the world through the magazine content, our awards and events. As a continuation of this, we have dedicated this year's 'darc designers' feature to female designers working with decorative lighting – whether this is as a lighting designer, interior designer, product designer or architect. Over the next few pages we profile just a snapshot of women working with light - some of them you will have heard of, some of them will be less familiar to you, but this is exactly the point of Women in Lighting, to raise awareness of the creative talents behind some of the most stunning lighting schemes and product development out there. To kick things off, *darc* caught up with Sharon Stammers of Light Collective and Sharon Maghnagi of formalighting – two of the driving forces behind the Women in Lighting initiative.

Sharon Stammers is one half of lighting consultancy Light Collective in the UK, which she has run alongside Martin Lupton since 2008 – aiming to embody an array of lighting-based work. Their creative portfolio of work houses more than architectural lighting design and has grown to encompass many innovative projects that include marketing campaigns, competitions, curated exhibitions, lighting awards, trade shows, pop up events, guerrilla lighting, light education, light art and more.

"Our clients have ranged from the small-scale to the large," Stammers tells *darc*. "Designing for a school in Glasgow where the brief was set by the kids themselves, to a shopping mall in Kuwait, lighting an exhibition at the Museum of London, to starting a campaign for promoting Women in Lighting. We like to describe ourselves as 'lighting evangelists and light activists'." The concept of Women in Lighting originated after a showing of *The Perfect Light* in New York (a film looking at the ubiquitous use of LED, made with the support of Citizen LEDs), when female audience members approached Light Collective to ask why they hadn't included many women in the film.

"We were shocked by the observation, as it had never occurred to us that we had mainly interviewed men," says Stammers. "I guess we were suffering from the same unconscious bias that exists in many professions.

"After some research, a general trend of a lack of females in

conference line-ups, award juries and magazine panels became very apparent. Wanting to redress this imbalance, we set out to create an online platform where women in the industry can source inspiration, network and share their stories."

Having spent a great deal of her childhood at the formalighting UK office and showroom, Sharon Maghnagi was that kid running around London's Business Design Centre circa 1988 on a weekend. For Maghnagi, 'family time' always involved talk of production processes, trade shows, designers, samples, and passionate lectures from her dad on the ingenuity of Italian design. "My sister and I grew up playing with a library of design catalogues," Maghnagi tells *darc*. "Cutting out the pictures of architectural fixtures and furniture to create our design plans. At the ages of six and eight we were crafting spec sheets for imaginary projects. This passion for architectural lighting and design was cultivated and encouraged, which might explain why I (inevitably) chose to work in lighting."

Trained as a corporate lawyer, experienced in financial / fiscal consultancy and proficient in five languages, Maghnagi was deemed eligible to join formalighting's senior management in 2009 at the Hong Kong headquarters. Around the same time, only for her own personal development, she began a decade of service on the board of a non-profit HK Women's Organisation which introduced Maghnagi to various local and international associations advocating gender equality, female leadership, networking platforms, mentoring programmes and so on.

"I first met Martin Lupton and Sharon Stammers at the 2016 [d]arc awards, and in the summer of 2018, they reached out to me about possibly collaborating on their new project - Women in Lighting - an experience which I describe as my "professional awakening". formalighting's support of this project is truly authentic and we are all delighted to be involved.

"Sharon, Martin & Katia Kolovea of Archifos, have literally taken me and the formalighting team on a transformational journey, meeting and listening to inspirational women in the global lighting community, who have produced innovative and influential work. I have never had a deeper appreciation for the international lighting design community and as a result feel very proud to be serving it via the WIL project and as a delegate member of the IALD's LIRC Steering Committee.

How important is it that we have initiatives such as Women in Lighting?

Sharon Stammers: When we started WIL, we were inspired by a quote we saw online by interior designer Ilse Crawford. She talks about how it is important to inspire the next generation of female designers by making the current one visible. After analysing a huge amount of events, publications, awards and conferences, we realised that female lighting designers were less visible than their male counterparts. If we have done nothing else, we have successfully bombarded the lighting industry with images, videos and names of women in lighting all over the world!

Sharon Maghnagi: We couldn't have known it when the project first started, but I think now more than ever, we can see the importance of an initiative that creates a digital community and connects designers internationally. The era of lockdowns and uncertainty inevitably limits our work and professional interactions but at any time, anyone can visit the Women in Lighting website and listen to / read any of the interviews for inspiration. They can reach out / send a message knowing there is someone on the other side of it.

What has been the industry reaction to Women in Lighting?

SS: "In general, the response has been overwhelmingly positive and that includes men and women. Many organisations have embraced the 50/50 challenge in terms of trying to achieve a better gender balance at their events and we were amazed at how far and wide the project has travelled. We have however, met with some negativity that we honestly didn't expect. This is mainly about whether the project is necessary and this comes from countries where there are many women in lighting and they feel that a gender balance already exists. As there are so many countries, where it doesn't, we feel that the project is indeed necessary.

SM: "The remarkable turnout at the Women in Lighting Pecha Kucha during PLDC was unexpected and we felt support from so many male designers / colleagues. The participation in Women in Lighting social media campaigns has been surprising too. To see the final #collage / #montage of a given campaign gives a great snapshot of how well received the project is."

What has been Women in Lighting's biggest achievement so far?

SS: "We are amazed that we have engaged women in such a wide range of countries and created a supportive network. Some, where lighting design is well established and some, where it is fledgling. Personally, meeting some of the ambassadors and hearing what the project means to them has made us realise the importance of the project as a whole. We are really proud that we have created an online space where the voices of Women in Lighting can be heard and the fact that we have encouraged a few women to achieve things that they didn't think they could.

How can industry support women within design?

SS: "One of the best ways that organisations, companies and male colleagues can support women is to realise that unconscious bias exists and to encourage equality in all programs, events and teams; basically never be complacent and always keep asking "are we being inclusive?" It sounds obvious but equality and inclusion bring a positive balance to any working environment, organisation or event so it's important at all levels to work hard to create and maintain an atmosphere of respect, where everyone is encouraged to contribute, and where all views and perspectives are heard. Role models are incredibly important and if your senior leadership

teams or event speakers do not include a significant number of female lighting designers then you need to ask yourself why."

How can women help themselves in the workplace?

SS: "One of the things that came out of our interviews was that women don't seem to be as confident in asking for what they want in the workplace or from their employer. Lighting design practises are generally smaller businesses and are only as good as the designers they employ. It's really important for you to value yourself and your contribution and help your employer realise what is important to you as a designer and person. It is harder for smaller businesses and organisations to offer enhanced maternity (and paternity) but if you can help your employer understand what they can do for you to make your work / life balance better then they will benefit from your improved mental health and enjoyment of work, so it has to be worth the effort on all sides. Talk about what would work for you and understand that it might be different for other people. Helping to create a platform for working flexibly can be a great option, that will help you keep contributing and creating amazing lighting designs and will help your company hold on to you and attract the best talent in the market."

SM: "Identify your allies (regardless of gender); there is always someone who inspires or influences. Surround yourself with those individuals who bring out the best in you and your work - or find ways to get access to them. Your allies might even be the ones that tear you down the hardest when you make mistakes or show any sign of weakness, so don't fear them. Sit in the uncomfortable self-torture of your failures because success is a process which these failures help to build."

What still needs to change in terms of attitudes?

SS: "Tackling unconscious bias is something that we think is really important. Unconscious bias is a totally normal part of how we make decisions, a mental shortcut that fills gaps in our knowledge with similar data from past experiences and cultural norms. It can lead us to overlook great ideas, ignore an individual's potential, or create a less-than-ideal work experience for our colleagues. Common biases affect everyday decision making and can impact every facet of a business, from recruiting staff, to leadership effectiveness, communication, decision making and workplace interactions. Who takes the notes in the meeting? What does a CEO look like? Who makes the coffee in the morning? Who should be allowed to leave early for the school run? We need to continually question ourselves."

SM: "There is a wonderful quote provided by the WIL Ambassador for Italy - Giorgia Brusemini, which really resonates. "I ought to apologise to myself for believing that I was never enough..." (Alda Merini). It's just a reminder that we might need to work on our own attitudes too."

How can we as an industry continue to push forward to work towards equality?

SM: "The irony is that the profession is at least 50% female and quite probably more but the visible designers - the practise leaders, the keynote speakers, the awards judges, etc are more often male. By continuing to challenge this bias until it no longer exists, we can achieve equality. In some countries that should be easy, in others it won't be, but we now have experience to know that by standing up and presenting themselves as role models, women in these countries can help to motivate and inspire others all over the world."

www.womeninlighting.com

Sofia Hagen and Lisa Hinderdael

HagenHinderdael



Following their background in architecture and interiors, designers Sofia Hagen and Lisa Hinderdael, have come together to pursue a design approach that explores the relationship of lighting and large-scale installations in immersive environments.

With an ethos to design with the afterlife of their lights and installations in mind, through a new collaboration HagenHinderdael, they aim to work closely with local craftspeople to combine skilled methodologies with sustainable materials and cutting-edge technology, to produce elements and experiences that bear the incentive of a continuous afterlife.

Commenting on their individual experiences as female designers, Hagen notes how in "architecture and construction, it is still very much male-led, while interior and product design does seem to be more balanced. "The industry has definitely become more female-led throughout the last decade, but will probably still take another generation until it balances out," she tells *darc*. "Having trained under female architect icon Zaha Hadid, my experience is obviously rather exceptional and I've also had the opportunity to mainly worked in female-led teams throughout my career."

Hinderdael adds to this, saying: "Although female designers face corporate ceilings at times in terms of pay levels and reaching managerial status, I don't see this same challenge in the ability to express ourselves through design. I think that design, at its very core, is subjective and perhaps that is the beauty of it. That no matter what gender has produced a design, there will be those who love it and those who don't.

"I think in order to push forward towards equality, we need to be supporting one another through more collaborations, rather than competitive messaging. If design teams can ensure they have both women and men as creative leads, they will see a different balance in the type of work they produce."

Having both known from a young age that design was the career for them, Hinderdael expands on how the design duo draw inspiration from nature and its patterns and look to develop decorative lights that make a statement - expressing a true blend of art and architecture. "When light can capture this blend and become a sculpture within your home it can also transcend the boundaries of what we know as lighting design and bring a new dimension to the space," she says.

"The design style of our lights is always an organic or polygonal geometry inspired by nature, which the light source turns into jewellery-like pieces that work as standalone sculptures or in multiple forms," picks up Hagen. "Any work within product design requires you to find a solution to problems that haven't been tackled yet. With lighting design, the challenges are researching new methods and the effects lighting has on humans, space and well-being."

"I think that decorative lighting is like architectural jewellery," continues Hinderdael. "The last accessory that really draws the room together as jewellery does an outfit. It provides character and style, giving the space an identity in and of itself. Without the decorative fitting, the room is merely an architectural space that needs the personality of its user projected onto it."

"Lighting should enhance the narrative of an interior space," Hagen adds. "It defines the ambience, identity and aspects of well-being, which become more and more relevant in contemporary interior design. Very often, lighting is the feature of the space on a more obvious level and the reason people go there - for the wow factor."

Having graduated from Zaha Hadid's architectural design studio at the University of Applied Arts Vienna, Hagen began her career in design with a move to London where she worked as an architectural designer at Zaha Hadid Architects, Acme Space and Make for several years before getting into smaller-scale interior and installation design projects through her role as Design Director at Design Haus Liberty. "This is where I got into touch with designing my first bespoke lights," she says. "And also met my now business partner Lisa Hinderdael.

"My design catalyst was always about creating experiences that enhance and influence our lives, even if its just a momentary awe. Several scientific studies have proven that the experiences of awe and wonder increase happiness, lower stress levels and have a direct influence upon health and life expectancy. The feeling of awe has such an important physiological effect on our organism that it cannot only affect our mental health, but also how we behave and treat each other. This is a motive to be achieved within design beyond functionality, and that can happen at any scale."

For Hinderdael, her interest in design came around the time Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans in 2005. She was in the midst of deciding which school of architecture she wanted to attend and was touched by one particular project which saw bus stops being redesigned. "I became moved by the way in which small, artistic interventions could provoke major change in the psychology of a community," she says. "Combining my interests in architecture and psychology, I wanted to pursue design that was for the people - always giving back to its end-user. Having veered off to explore other areas of design such as interiors, urban planning and architectural building, I found that it is the tactility with the human scale and psychological impact of design that always pulled me back in my career and re-focused my path. Leading me to find a synergy in the micro-macro relationship of lighting and installation design."

Hinderdael's interest in light was further cemented when she was asked to create an installation for a residential project in New York. "Inspired by water falling out of a carafe, I developed the Teardrop light for Design Haus Liberty that is now seen in luxury hotels and retail stores worldwide," she says. "I became immersed in the organic shapes of nature, obsessed with the engineering challenge of integrating slimline technology in an elegant form, and inspired by working with family-run businesses who had skillsets and were able to teach me how to push the limit of each material I work with.

"There are an abundance of lights readily available on the market, and although there have been several technological advancements in lighting - there is still a large disconnect in transforming these advancements into functional, decorative fixtures and more importantly eco-friendly design. If we can learn to research and work more collaboratively across the design process - merging our abilities as designers with the material knowledge and craftsmanship of local artisans - I think then we are starting to get to a place where lighting will challenge the norm and capture the advancements we see in other technological sectors. Whether this is through bar lights that charge our phones, emergency lights with a design edge, or sustainable materials being used in new and innovative ways - if we are to catch up with the curve, the blending of techniques passed on through generations of family-run businesses and the lifecycle of our products need to be as important as the design itself."