



## Introducing Paul Nulty

Paul Nulty founded his eponymous lighting design practice in 2011, breaking new ground in the lighting firmament. With a background in theatre design — he graduated in Performance Design from LIPA in 1996 — Nulty decided to leave the world of fantasy behind and focus on real-life scenarios. Crucially, he brought some of the fun and magic of the theatre with him: his ethos is less about fixtures and fittings and pretty much everything to do with creating the right sort of atmosphere.

With over 15 years' experience of collaborating with architects and interior designers on significant retail and hospitality residential and commercial projects, Nulty is fully versed in the interaction of light and space. Innovation continues to be his driving force. As well as pursuing clever concepts, Nulty investigates lighting design approaches that are sustainable and environmentally friendly. Energy efficiency, light pollution and environmental impact also feature high on his list of concerns.

As industry awards jostle for space on his mantelpiece, invitations to share his vision on Architectural Lighting as a speaker on the international stage are dropping through his letterbox. Paul Nulty is tripping the light fantastic but he made time to pop in and share some thoughts here:

**Paul Nulty,  
Lighting Design Consultant**

# “It’s great to see the shift towards LEDs now becoming more cost effective.”

As Lighting Designers, an important element of our work is the impact that the quality of light has on the built environment, and the emotional connection light facilitates between a person and their surroundings.

High-quality lighting encompasses a number of factors including colour rendering, consistency, light levels, intensity, direction, layering and contrast/drama. These attributes are tools that are used in our architectural lighting schemes - to build a composition of light, to enhance a space and create an engaging atmosphere for the people using it.

The shift towards human factors in lighting has been interesting. As designers, it is something that’s been spoken about for a long time: using light to get people to engage with their environment. Finding that human connection with light is crucial and yet it can be underestimated.

The collaboration between light and technology is stronger than ever. LED is now being used as an advanced marketing and sales tool and this, combined with smartphones, is radically changing the way consumers browse and purchase. Two-thirds of consumers shop with smartphones to purchase online; there is a need to bring customers back to the high street. >>

continuation article

# The quality of light and technology

<< Today's state-of-the-art luminaires can communicate via smartphones, tracking consumer movements and subtly increasing light levels to focus on particular products and offers. Light's power is that it is functional and aesthetic; it enables people to act and also feel. Get the combination right and it can positively encourage people to visit shops, buy and connect with the brand.

There is a move towards the blurring of retail and e-tail by enabling smartphones to gather and retain information on a shopper's previous purchases. Shoppers can be alerted with reminders as they walk past specific stores and light can be automatically adjusted to match the ambiance depending on what a customer is buying. This is particularly beneficial to the cosmetics industry, marking a new era in which in-store lighting can finally enhance and offer a truer representation of customers' skin tones as they buy cosmetics (further detail on this later on).

If you look at technology in the industry, it certainly has its place in

'lighting'. However, some technologies — control systems, for example, especially in retail environments — generate cynicism. Daylight linking around store entrances is a case in point because dwell times aren't very long in these spaces. Once you get into the deeper planned department stores, daylight linking almost becomes irrelevant and in some circumstances you need more light in the day than in the evenings.

## The shift from traditional lighting to LEDs

In some cases the shift towards LEDs has made lighting quite challenging, as they do not quite provide the 'sparkle' or peak intensity that traditional light sources do, rendering some spaces a little 'flat'.

Until recently it has also been rather difficult to justify the additional cost associated with LEDs.

Historically the tipping point between energy saving and increased capital expenditure has been three to five years, and most retailers only work on a three-year programme. As costs are obviously coming down, this is

becoming much easier. The landscape is changing and it's great to see the shift towards LEDs now becoming more cost effective.

## "LED radically changes the way consumers browse and purchase."

Gradually, there has been a move away from 'traditional' halide light to LED, which is positive. On the other hand there is still an issue with LED products. Many of these light sources have spectral outputs skewed towards blue or red wavelengths — it's rare to find a source that has both. So, it can be challenging. This is particularly the case in fashion retail where you have to think about trends — where clothing and colours change rapidly from week to week and season to season.

In general, LEDs are especially difficult to use as accent sources in jewellery stores or other shops where retailers need to make products 'pop' and 'sparkle'. It is slightly frustrating when it comes to CRI because when manufacturers produce LED sources

to fit the CRI measurement criteria, it doesn't necessarily mean that the gaps in between those CRI measurement points are good. This too can be challenging. Ideally, there would be a better way to compare LED chips on a broader spectrum than a small number of specific colours or wavelengths.

## Bespoke Lighting

At Nulty, we conducted intensive research for the cosmetics industry with University College London (UCL) in collaboration with LED manufacturers to see how we can blend sources of light to ensure an authentic quality of light to match make up colours to the skin. The results have been implemented in two of our clients' stores in London: the new Charlotte Tilbury boutique in Westfield and Cosmetics à La Carte in Sloane Square.

Creating bespoke solutions for our clients is crucial, especially in the kind of environment where the right lighting is imperative to ensure a successful sale and ultimately a happy customer. Essentially, the key thing about lighting in retail is that it can be used to enhance a brand and increase brand awareness.

At Nulty, a close relationship with our clients is essential to ensure we understand their aspirations and their specific brand values. For instance, trend-led retailers who aspire to have a dark and moody feel will need to have the appropriate lighting to reflect this. But we also work with retailers who need their space to be light and airy. Cosmetics à La Carte, for example, had a beautifully bespoke LED lighting scheme with simple track lighting and carefully positioned downlights to create the most flexibility and ensure the spotlight is always on the merchandise to encourage the customer to buy.

## A shift towards creativity

There is a shift towards better quality light sources, towards better efficiency and towards more cost-effective light sources. It's a 'win-win' situation as costs are going down and the quality of sources going up. Historically there have been too many manufacturers simply 'shoehorning' LED chips into traditional housings or copying each other's designs. Now there is also a shift towards better products. Ultimately, in this day and age, a light fitting is simply a biscuit tin that houses a LED chip and reflector

(this maybe oversimplifying a little). It's also positive to see more originality and creativity in product design and that's producing a wider palette of aesthetics to choose from.

Finally, when employing innovative design techniques to engage and attract customers to a space, a lighting designer needs to almost be a consumer psychologist who understands the moods and emotions of customers in order to drive their behaviour. By engaging early on in the design process, it is possible to achieve the perfect lighting solution to illuminate a space. Lighting is and continues to be a formidable tool in Retail Design. Technology is clearly a key factor in this. But it is also the considered application and emotional empathy that sets apart the very best lighting schemes.

