

CHELSON 75 YEARS: Q&A WITH WILL CHELSOM



How would you describe Chelson's approach to design?

Possibly the fundamental difference between the Chelson design approach and others is that we always begin by asking "Where is the product going to be located?". Designing a product for most interiors means you are creating something which could end up in almost any room, in any kind of property in terms of value, and in an unknown style of surroundings. Given our primary focus on hospitality, we begin with a guest room or a public area; a bedside or a desk; a headboard or a wall; modern or traditional; five star or three star; a hotel or a cruise ship. Whereas having those defined locations might in some way limit the design boundaries, they do actually enable a real design focus to ensure that a product looks great and functions perfectly within the space for which it was intended. Beyond that we approach design always wanting to push boundaries, never replicating what is already out there and always trying to lead in terms of trends by embracing the latest materials, finishes and technology. Because we continuously launch new collections, the design process never stops at Chelson and we are constantly evolving our product offering and never standing still. For our forthcoming collection, Edition 28, we have designed approximately 300 different products in the space of 6 months so it is an intensive process!

How do you balance aesthetics with technology in products?

That is a very fine balance indeed. For many years there was only aesthetics because the light source

was a simple 60W 'bulb' and technology didn't extend much further than that. What an incredibly exciting change technology has brought however in the last thirty or forty years. Incandescent lamps were superseded by halogens and then the first steps were taken into energy saving with the introduction of compact fluorescents and finally LED light sources have become the norm. Chelson has led all of those individual step changes incorporating the current technology into all its lighting products. Where balancing both becomes a problem usually relates to the control gear needed for each light source. Halogens needed a transformer, compact fluorescents needed a ballast and LED's need a driver. These components can seldom be located remotely in the hospitality industry and so they need to become integral to the product. Consequently, a table lamp will might need a deeper base to house a driver, a wall light a deeper back plate and a ceiling fitting a larger suspension rose. Great care is needed therefore to ensure proportions remain correct when designing a product. In terms of the light sources themselves, early versions of each type often had a major negative impact on aesthetics. Halogens gave off too much glare (and heat), compact fluorescents were bulky, slow to start, often flickered and gave a cold light and the early LEDs had a very cold colour temperature of 3000K at best. Thankfully all those problems have gone away and the current LED lamp gives a perfect, dimmable warm light from around 7W with a lifespan something like 50 times more than the

old 60W. On many projects these days, we work with both interior designers and lighting designers and it is always a brilliantly collaborative process in trying to reach the intended design aesthetic whilst also incorporating the latest in lighting technology, whether that be to do with light source, energy saving, dimming or a guestroom control system.

What role does lighting play in the guest experience at hotels?

I would argue it is possibly the most important contribution to the guest experience in hotels. Whether a hotel reception, bar, restaurant or the guestroom feels welcoming or not absolutely depends on the quality and level of lighting. Great expense and huge talent is involved in creating spectacular design schemes for hotels but if the wrong lighting is used, it can totally ruin the end result. In many cases, designers have worked towards the hotel experience being a "home from home" and lighting must play a major role in creating that feeling of comfort and ambiance. Multiple light points, greater lighting control and designs which support the interior concepts of the whole hotel are crucial for the best guest experience. Two of the greatest complaints from guests phoning down to the hotel concierge are either that there is insufficient lighting in the room to read or apply makeup or secondly that they do not know how to switch on the desk light, floor lamp or bedside reading lamp. Great care is therefore needed to avoid those negative guest experiences.

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