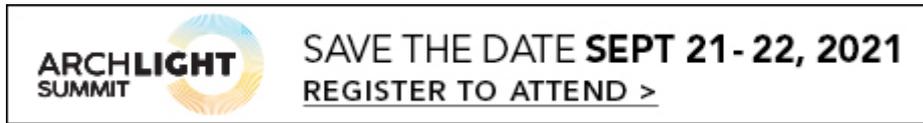




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Up Close with Dean Skira

by Randy Reid | Sep 1, 2021 | News



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World-renowned lighting designer, Dean Skira received his training at the Fashion Institute of Technology and began his career in New York, but after a few years he moved back to his home in Croatia. Croatia is on the Adriatic Sea and features beautiful islands, a great climate, wonderful food and wine, and a very strong hardworking population that appear to all be pulling in the same direction.

In 1994, Dean received his first big break as he was commissioned to light a church tower in Pula. In the mid '90s most designers would simply use floodlights with giant reflectors on the ground to light a tower, and, if you were lucky, the bottom half of the tower was illuminated. Dean's design was different, and even considered radical, as he was going to light the tower from the top down using metal halide mixed with blue fluorescent tubes.

The church accepted the design but there was one problem. He could not find an electrician that thought it was possible to install the structure, cables and fixtures on the tower itself. His father suggested going to a bar and finding three big men to ask for their help, telling them the electrician said it was 'impossible.' That worked and early the next morning Dean and the 3 men climbed to the top of the tower. Dean strapped a rope around his waist and leaned out over the tower with the men holding him by his legs. Passersby mistook the young man as suicidal and called police. At that point, Dean instructed one of the men to run down and lock the door, while Dean shouted to the police that he was only installing lights. More police and firefighters arrived at the scene; locked out, they had no choice but to simply watch. As the morning progressed huge crowds gathered around the tower to witness the installation. Once it was complete, the journalists conducted interviews and took pictures and young Dean Skira had made a name for himself in Pula!

As his career progressed it was time to move the office out of his bedroom, and he built a desk which consisted of an old door. Pula's mayor asked for a proposal to light the streets in the old part of town. Dean used a 300-dpi laser printer that he had brought from the U.S. and created a simulation for the floor plan of the entire town and its current illumination, then devised a floorplan with the new lighting. This radical design not only lit up the streets but also a little of the seashore, while throwing some backlight on the trees behind the street. The project was approved, and it became one of the first large jobs in Europe using a Type 5 Optic. Dean learned the importance of using visuals to promote his designs.

Dean's girlfriend at the time had a PhD in Architecture and many of Dean's friends were architects, so he began to offer architectural services with his lighting design—a combination unheard of then. His practice began to grow outside of Croatia.

During our visit, I saw several awards and many names looked familiar: IES, IALD, Architizer, and Red Dot.

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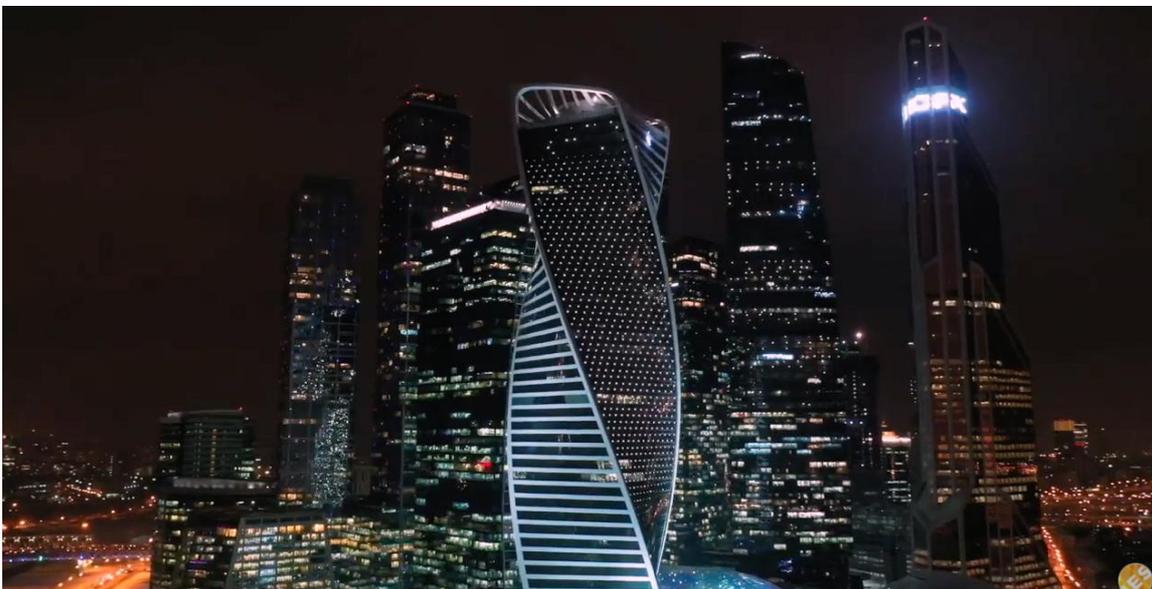
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We discussed a few of his favorite projects. One was the EURASIA tunnel in Istanbul connecting Europe and Asia. He acclaimed, “No project went that smoothly ever. Everything was by the book, and it was perfect.” Upon the successful completion of the tunnel, he was asked to design the entrances to the tunnel. Seven competing proposals had been submitted and all seven had been rejected by the heritage preservation commission. Dean’s design added arches as well as lighting and his proposal was accepted and installed.

Another important job was the Evolution Tower in Moscow which earned an IES award in 2019.

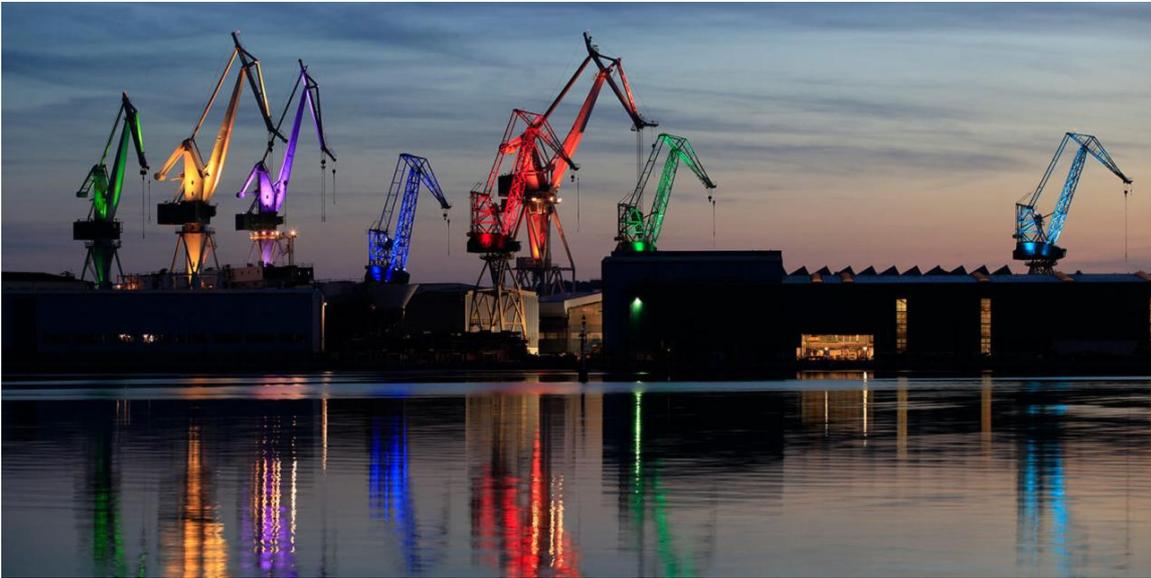


Shipyard Cranes Lighting Giants was also one of his favorite designs.

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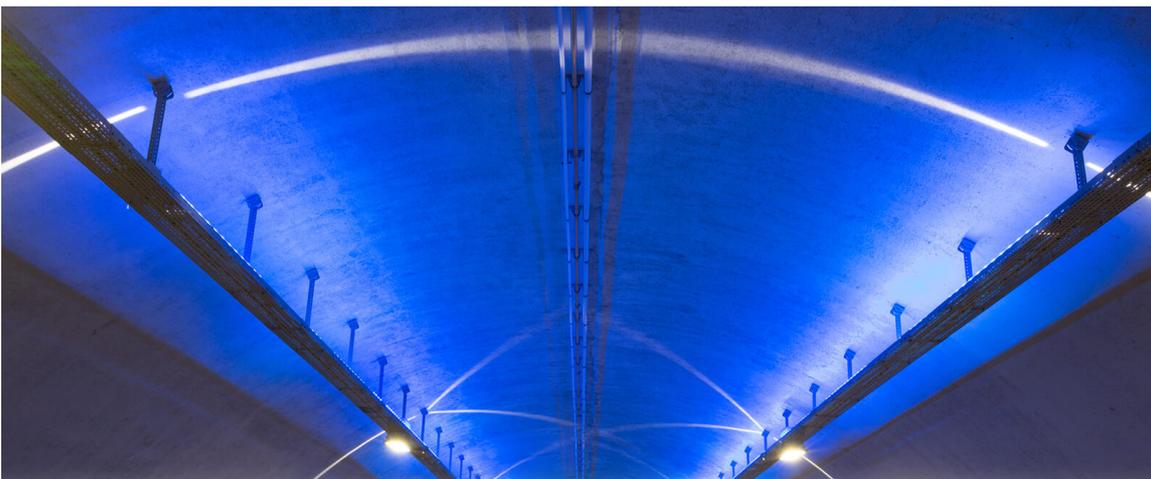
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We talked about the business of lighting design and one way he sells his services is by having the client picture the additional dollars earned by making an outdoor area appealing at night. He emphasizes that great lighting creates additional value. “Light openly invites people to new areas but you have to keep them coming back,” he said. “This is where dynamic lighting has a role. What is being lit should look different and the audience should expect the unexpected.”

Dean emphasized the importance of visuals in helping decision makers make an emotional connection to invest. He truly believes that great lighting is not just for safety, but it also brings increased revenue. On one current job he is proposing, he conducted a 3D scan of the entire village to show the various effects of dynamic lighting. “Imagine a concert in an ancient Roman theater and there is one look before the concert, a second scene during the concert where perhaps only the steps are lit and they look like they are glowing, and a third scene as people are departing,” he described. His rendering was very dramatic and appealing.



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speaks around the world at various events including PLDC and Light + Building. During the middle of one TED talk he asked the producer to bring up all the lighting in the room to 100% and then asked the audience to imagine a nice romantic dinner. He explained that when one walks into a room, subconsciously one has a hunch that something is wrong, but can't figure out it is the lighting until it is pointed out. Dean designs lighting, but unlike in the US market, he also designs luminaires. He asserted, "Designers love light, but we don't like fixtures." His recent design, Nime, is a luminaire completely hidden in the ceiling and the human eye sees no source. There is only a small 1 cm circle. The luminaire is manufactured by Delta Lighting and all the hardware is above the ceiling including three lenses. Dean said, "We break that beam to 0 degrees and that is where we have the 1 cm opening; below the ceiling the beam can be either 20 degrees or 50 degrees and can be rotated 360 degrees. Nime is scheduled to launch in the US in October.

We also spoke about the state of the design industry. Dean pointed out that he is the only true lighting designer in Croatia that charges for lighting design as most manufacturers give away a design for free. He said practicing is very different than in the US and the UK as most of the rest of the world does not appreciate the profession of lighting design.

Dean ended the conversation with a tease about a project he is presently developing that he thinks will be his legacy. He said, "It is the most important project of my career and will resolve most of the issues with light trespass, light pollution and energy savings."

*This article was originally featured in the [August issue](#) of *designing lighting (dl)**

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