

PAUL GREGORY

Lighting Designer

Paul Gregory has a reputation. Anyone who goes into some of Manhattan's trendiest restaurants and notices the whimsical, colorful lighting is likely to assume Gregory was behind it. From Le Cirque 2000 to the Tribeca Grand Hotel, New York hot spots are branded with his unique flair for color, atmosphere and attention to detail.

But his work is not just found in spots that would make a good hangout for Carrie and the girls on *Sex and the City*; he has done retail showrooms, theaters, amazing outdoor applications and even private homes. As the lighting designer of choice for such wonderful architects as David Rockwell, Karem Rashid, Hani Rashid, Adam Tihany and others, Gregory's work ranges from the silly to the sublime, from the droll to the dramatic. Of course, the wide emotional range of his lighting should come as no surprise considering he got his first taste of "creative lighting" while he was still in high school participating with the theater department's creative team. After high school, Gregory attended the Goodman Theatre School, part of the Art Institute of Chicago, where he further honed his craft.

"There are two components to theatrical lighting that really help the designer: creativity and sheer volume," Gregory said. "If you do 100 shows in five years, that gives you 100 opportunities to try different things. You can place different lights at different angles and see how it affects the actors' faces and the scenery. It gives you the chance and the assuredness to turn your concepts into reality."

After completing almost 100 shows, with each show in some way a creative triumph for the young designer, he



wanted to design something that would not be dismantled after the final curtain. Thus, a career in architectural lighting design was born, which he later honed at the Parsons School of Design in New York City. He began the architectural part of his career in 1975 when he founded the Litelab Corporation where he designed the lighting for museums, restaurants, theaters and a variety of other projects.

"Thankfully, my experience in the theater allowed me ample opportunity to make mistakes and test my own theories," he said. "By the time I applied these

theories to architecture, they turned out to be correct. You don't get the chance for a 'dress rehearsal' when you're working on an architectural installation."

He quickly found that architectural lighting was a natural extension of his lighting for the stage and was fully immersed in the architectural aspects by 1985 when he founded Focus Lighting where he serves as the company's president and principal designer. "Architects are also very creative, but there are restrictions," he said. "Unlike the theater, you are designing something to last for 100 years and viewed from 360 degrees. In the theater, your designs are viewed from one fixed angle for only a few weeks."

Gregory says that lighting designers who were trained in theater look at a space from the outside, looking in and get an all-encompassing view of the space they are lighting. "We look at a space like it was a picture with a focus, a foreground and a background," he said. "While the architect really gets to know a space's interior dimensions, from floor to ceiling, from column to column, it's up to the lighting designer to help the architect turn those dimensions into a scene."

His designs also have a strong natural connection. "We pull our feelings from nature. It's hard to beat the beauty of a lovely sunset," he said. "The light passing through a canopy of trees is an outrageous green. The blues created by a night sky in Hawaii are amazing. What can possibly outdo that?" One example of nature's influence on Gregory can be found at the Mohegan Sun Casino where he wrapped an entire space in blue to mimic a night sky.

Approaching an architectural project as if he were painting a picture allows Gregory to tie together the architect's vision, the interior designer's scheme and the owner's desires. The result is a cohesive image that is viewed by the patron, whether dining in a restaurant, shooting craps at the Mohegan Sun Casino or shopping for toys at the new Toys "R" Us in Manhattan's Times Square.

Most importantly, Gregory wants his designs to evoke a memory. "Everyone remembers the first time they saw the Empire State Building or their first Broadway show," he said. "It's wonderful to be able to create an image in someone's mind that will stay with them forever." ■

—Mark A. Newman



Tribeca Grand

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