

# Lighting Professionals Gather in Madrid

The third Professional Lighting Designers' Convention (PLDC) was held in Madrid, Spain, from October 19-22. Sadly, your Editor had to hot-foot it back to London for a prior engagement after giving his paper on Light Nuisance on the first morning – but Editorial Board member, Graham Festenstein, adds his own personal impressions

## Carl Gardner

The weather was glorious, the city was buzzing, the venue was handsome (if eccentric) – and the various social events enabled the 1200 delegates from 61 countries to let their hair down. Most importantly, the 65 papers presented were a fascinating mix of the practical, the informative and the inspiring. All in all, the third PLDC event in Madrid represented a big step forward for professional lighting design and its practitioners. I must admit, though, that the 'streamed' Convention format, with parallel sessions on four themes (Exterior Lighting Solutions, Lighting Design Case Studies, Professional Practice Issues and Lighting Application Research – plus some papers by younger practitioners on the final day, under the Vox Juventa, banner) can be frustrating. But with so much to cover, a conventional

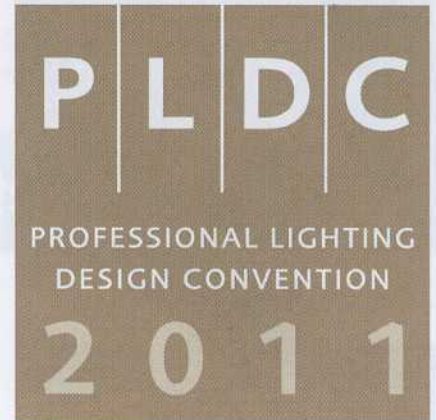
conference format would, of course, need days and days.

On the eve (Oct 19) of the conference proper there was an opening reception, with speeches, held on the roof of the superb convention venue, the Circulo de Bellas Artes, designed by Antonio Palacios and built in 1926. This lovely building serves as an important centre for all kinds of artistic and cultural organisations and events – and has, incidentally, an exceptionally erotic sculpture of a reclining nude in the ground-floor restaurant (which certainly wouldn't have been allowed in Franco's day). Many delegates' eyes were distracted from the formal proceedings by the extensive roof-top views over Madrid in all directions, which revealed some lighting gems, as well as some awful light-polluting blights on the horizon.

The first morning started with a keynote speech from veteran US lighting designer, Paul Marantz, who spoke about the plethora of regulations bearing down on lighting designers everywhere – and in particular in the USA. Instead of the crazy and complex energy-saving regulations being put into statute in a number of countries, he came up with a very simple proposal – and one with a strong affinity to the LENI system currently being floated in Europe.

## Energy Allowances

As Marantz pointed out, smart metering (should) now make it possible to precisely quantify the energy used by various building functions, including lighting. Each building should be given an annual energy allowance in KYUs – kilowatts per annum per area unit (in our case, square metres). This allowance in kW/annum/m<sup>2</sup> would be charged at the basic, standard tariff and when that allowance is exceeded, the excess energy would be charged at three



times the basic tariff – and the proceeds given to green energy production or research. In this way, building owners and users could plan to use their energy in specific ways, for their own priorities, knowing the likely end cost.

This sensible proposal chimed in with another provocative paper on the first morning, given by UK lighting designer, Kevan Shaw – 'Lighting Legislation: a Failure to Deliver Sustainability'. As ever, Shaw was at his combative best as he took regulations such as Part L and the WEEE regulations to task for their unworkability and ineffectiveness. We hope to carry a version of this paper in a future *Lighting Journal*. It was gratifying to note that two of the papers presented under the Vox Juventa banner at the event – Natalia Sokol's paper on Domestic Lighting and Jemima Unwin's on Hospital Lighting – have already appeared in these pages earlier this year.

## Graham Festenstein

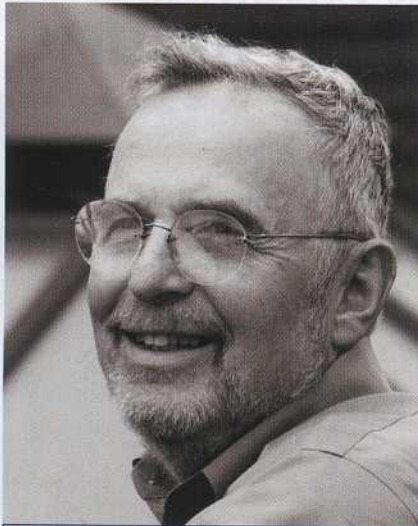
The first day saw three excellent papers on professional practice issues. The first was by Canadian, Professor Philip Gabriel, who discussed the ethical issues involved in lighting design. He described several practice models from purely independent design to design-and-supply and shared the views of a number of well-known lighting designers on the ethical dilemmas of accepting payment, or providing services to manufacturers, including anecdotal evidence of supposed independent designers demanding commissions from manufacturers to include them on their specifications.

## Running a Practice

This was followed by two papers that discussed setting up and running a new practice from the coffee table through to established and successful businesses. Paul



Venue for the Convention – Madrid's wonderful Circulo de Bellas Artes



Paul Marantz made some sensible proposals on energy saving on the first day

Beale, founder of Electrolight in Melbourne, Australia, described how he left the security of a senior job at Arup to build his own practice of 12 staff in just six years. Kai Piippo from Sweden spoke about building his business, which was established in 1991.

Both discussed the importance of knowing your clients and building links with the wider design community, in Paul's case by running competitions for eco-friendly lighting and getting involved in local festivals. Kai was the founder of the PLDA workshop in Alingsas, which became a model for the regular programme of international workshops run by the PLDA. It was particularly interesting to hear both of them stress, as one of the most important pieces of advice to anyone starting a new practice, how important it is to get the work-life balance right and not let your business take over your whole life.

Malcolm Innes gave us two interesting papers over the course of the Convention – one outlined his research into the impact of colour temperature on the perception of brightness in the low-light environments of art galleries and museums. He had good evidence that we do find that 'cooler' colour temperatures increase our perception of the brightness of a space. However, in his haste to prove his point he also made an unexpected discovery – that the effect is subtle and if pushed too far will result in the opposite effect, or at the least uncertainty and inconsistency in how the space is perceived. This has interesting implications, particularly in relation to the spectrum changes between conventional sources and LEDs which we are all still getting to grips with.

Malcolm's second paper was a report on the outcome of the Educators' Summit

that took place in April this year and was born out of the PLDA Lighting Educators network. The outcome of these discussions included the proposal for an online database of published and proposed, lighting research, to assist students and professionals. This will be an independently run initiative that should hopefully be up and running soon. He also presented the results of surveys which gauged the views of lighting educators on how to best introduce and regulate international standards of education – and on the inclusion of professional designers within the process of education.

### Beauty and the Brain

Keeping with the academic theme, in a paper entitled 'The Measurement of Beauty', Professor Semir Zeki, Professor of Neuroethics at University College, London, explored the responses within the brain and how he believed beauty and ugliness could be defined within an NMR scanner. This fascinating and entertaining perspective was made even more interesting by a brief debate between Professor Zeki and Dr Linnaea Tillett, an environmental psychologist and award-winning lighting designer from the USA. Dr Tillett had previously presented a fascinating paper, where she had criticised the way designers assert that they can modify human emotions. Her point was that lighting can affect our feelings but under no circumstances should a lighting designer attempt to elicit an emotional response. Her criticism of Professor Zeki was that he claimed to be able to know

from a brain-scan that a subject finds something beautiful. She was not happy that beauty should be defined by a mere physical response. Professor Zeki did not disagree, but stated that his assertions are based on observations.

As two years ago in Berlin, Christopher Cuttle once more came up with one of the event's most highly regarded papers. This time he described a system he called PAI, or Perceived Adequacy of Illumination, for measuring the adequacy of a lighting design, based on whether the users of a space judge the lighting to be adequate. His premise is that current standards are inadequate and rely too heavily on measurements of illumination at the working plane, while ignoring reflectance and vertical illumination. Taking light level readings to assess the compliance of a scheme, he implied, does not prove that the scheme is adequate, it only proves that the light meter works. His concern is that there is a trend for current standards to become mandatory, rather than merely guidelines – and this, he argued, should make all designers challenge standards that promote lighting by numbers and restrict creativity.

Later on the afternoon of Friday, October 21, Emily Dufner and Vasiliki Malakasi gave an interesting talk on an integrated approach to urban lighting which reflected current best practice on the integration of lighting with urban design. As a fellow practitioner, it is good to see that this approach is now widespread.



A scene from the latest PLDA workshop in Alingsas, in Sweden, founded by conference speaker, Kai Piippo