

Bright Futures

It may have been a dark time for the lighting world this past year, but things are starting to look a little brighter

by STACEY MCLACHLAN

Checking in on the lighting industry is always an illuminating activity. Even through times of turmoil, technological advancements and project development carry on. A portrait of the industry today is one of both darkness (like supply chain struggles) and light (like incredible LED advancements that make almost any application possible), but it's clear that the future for the world of lighting is looking bright.

DELAY AND DISRUPTION

It hasn't been an easy year and a half for those in the lighting business, let's say that much.

While 2020 threw the entire construction and home improvement industry into a supply chain spiral, businesses scrambled to pivot and survive. In 2021, as the world took a turn towards a more optimistic outlook, though, many in the business found themselves still waiting for normalcy to return. Jim Ormshaw, product specialist for Robinson Lighting & Bath, has been waiting on a container of product since January 2021 to arrive. He's watched from afar as U.S. colleagues attended the big annual lighting trade show, saw shipping container prices jump up in price by 450 percent or more, and tried in vain to get a sense of new products over Zoom calls. "The whole process has just been really disrupted," says Ormshaw.

Freight experts are saying that the supply chain won't right itself until likely the first quarter of 2022. So in the meantime, lighting suppliers are stuck with the inventory they have, crossing their fingers that long-ago orders that have been lost at port in the scramble will eventually show up.

The chaos has meant that costs for the lighting products that are available have skyrocketed, typically being passed down to the buyer or end-user. That's if the product you want is actually in stock, of course. Ormshaw notes that builders of multi-family projects are in particularly hot water: "When you've planned whole buildings based on a certain light, how do you make that switch at those quantities?"

Ormshaw used to get containers of merchandise delivered like clockwork every two months; now he's lucky if it's every 20 weeks. His advice to developers, architects, designers, and homeowners is this: "If the stock is available, secure it. Don't wait three or four

weeks. If you're building stuff for the fall, put your orders in now – deliveries are four to five months out."

Despite the disruptions, construction carries on, however. And some things – esthetic trends – seem to be steady-as-she goes. "Black is still the hot colour," says Ormshaw. "It's the number one fixture request for light but also for faucets for bath and kitchen." Gold, too, continues to be a top choice for light fixtures big and small. Perhaps because of the scarcity of product, oversized pendant lights are taking top billing over multi-pendant-light designs. "We're seeing people selecting singles, instead of putting in two or three smaller ones," notes Ormshaw.

FLEXIBLE FUNCTION

In our post-pandemic world of design, control, for any space, is key. "The trend that we are seeing for both residential and commercial use is fixtures that are easily and heavily controllable," says Ben Rajewski, electrical team lead for Williams Engineering. "Clients want the ability to be able to change how their space is lit without buying new fixtures." Luckily, this is now more easily done than ever. Cost effective fixtures come with the ability to change their colour temperature output as well as their lumen output, via fixture control or dimmer switches. "At the higher end, fixtures are now being controlled to match the natural arc of colour temperature that we see outdoors during the day," he says.

You don't need to have a major commercial project or even a multi-family home to take advantage of these high-tech controls or options. "The scalability of lighting controls is vastly increased ranging from small to large spaces and various levels," says Emma Dodimead, marketing and personnel manager for Nemetz (S/A) & Associates. Home automation has changed the game, allowing flexibility of lighting control like never before, in combination with other technologies.

Similarly, the use of media walls for specific applications are gaining more traction depending on size and scale of project. It's a democratization of technology that's making exciting uses possible for residential and commercial spaces alike.

LOVE FOR LEDS

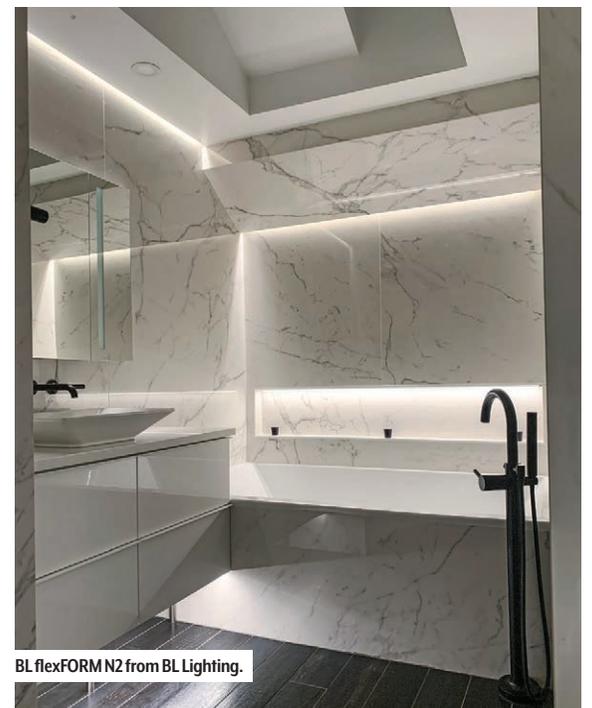
LED technology continues to evolve by leaps and bounds. Today's LEDs range from "tunable white and dim to warm," says Dodimead.



Mara Grande LED chandelier from Robinson Lighting & Bath.

"As LED technologies continue to improve, they are becoming more efficient, increasingly powerful, and provide better colour rendering, in smaller packages than ever before," adds Jennifer Mattson of BL Lighting. "This opens up more possibilities for us to create luminaires that beautifully transform architecture into luminous surfaces, and I'm sure we'll continue to see more of this in the years to come."

The company's BL flexFORM N2 is one of the world's thinnest and most powerful LED solutions, with a tiny profile just 4.5-millimetres wide; its new slim-format BL neonVIEW features a flexible silicone encapsulation that is very flexible, perfect for indoor or outdoor use. And then, there's the minimal dimensions of the BL flexFORM Dot-Free, which Mattson says, "provides light in pure form." Recent technological advancements allow BL to use incredibly small chips that create a highly uniform light even at close distances – no additional lens diffusers or channels required.



BL flexFORM N2 from BL Lighting.

With modern LED designs, any traditional design is now possible. Customers are requesting everything from “modern farmhouse” to super minimalist and modernist fixtures with LED lights, notes Belinda Palmer, inside sales for Ocean Pacific Lighting. “There’s a refinement in the technology of LEDs,” she says. “We’re seeing linear LED used for interiors, exteriors, commercial, and residential.”

When it comes to security applications, LEDs shine here, too, as Eaton products like the Crouse-Hinds lights demonstrate. Designed with safety, reliability, and efficiency in mind, these rugged fixtures pair high-tech LEDs with optimized thermal management, field-proven GRP enclosures and time-tested drivers. This means longer life and improved performance, even in the most extreme of circumstances.

ILLUMINATED APPRECIATION

Overall, a greater appreciation of the value of lighting is growing among consumers. “I think many clients and consumers on both the residential and commercial side have gained an understanding and realization that human centric design and lighting is important,” says Rajewski. The design community has been heavily focused on energy savings and green design for many years – and for good reason – but now, through organizations like the International WELL Building Institute and Fitwel, patrons are realizing that a human centric design is important, too. And designing spaces that are healthy and comfortable for the occupants means designing with the biological effect of light on humans in mind.

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“Many people have been working from home for over a year, and building owners and business owners want to bring their employees back to a healthy work environment and lighting can greatly contribute to this,” says Rajewski. Beyond basic illuminance, products like the Signify NatureConnect fixture are trying to make a room feel like it is fully lit from natural lighting sources.

Even in the office (once a cliché of poor lighting choices thanks to flickering, unflattering fluorescents adopted en masse in the last century), lighting has begun to take priority. More and more companies offer commercial and office-specific lighting solutions that accommodate functionality without sacrificing style. For example, Peerless Electric’s sleek modern Arclux series takes inspiration from modern design and architecture to create office lighting that’s high quality and beautifully crafted. The brand is committed to elevating even everyday experiences with its contemporary light products.

Award-winning lighting design company Mulvey & Banani has long appreciated the power of lighting. Creating dramatic spatial experiences worldwide, the team is well versed in shifting or creating mood with the power of lumens, with projects like the Canadian Museum of Human Rights or the FirstOntario Performing Arts Centre.

Light broadens how architecture communicates with its context; lighting enhances, it doesn’t distract. “We harness this technology to connect to a building’s vibe, to alter how we look at architecture in the evening,” explained Paul Boken, vice president of Mulvey & Banani Lighting, in a recent blog post. “Our lighting design mantra is to reinforce the architectural design and program narratives of a cultural building or place so profoundly as to elevate the very brand.”



Canadian Museum of Human Rights, Winnipeg, MB

It seems like wonderful timing that just as the world is learning to truly appreciate the impact and value of lighting on our productivity, our happiness, our moods, and our safety, design and manufacturing is at its most innovative. Despite a rocky past year, it’s clear the lighting industry will only continue to shine on. **A**



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