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Butterflies in the Dream Cube

By Nancy Zhang | 2010-4-21 |



[Lighting effect of Shanghai Corporate Pavilion](#)

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THE Shanghai Corporate Pavilion, known as the Dream Cube, features high levels of interactivity and spectacular, shimmering, pulsating lighting effects inside and out. With an open mesh structure that makes the whole building transparent, it is envisioned by designers as an organism. Lighting brings the internal organs and functions to life. Interactivity symbolizes the spirit of cooperation in the Shanghai business community.

Its two internationally famous designers are Edwin Schlossberg, founder of ESI Design, known for creating interactive public spaces worldwide; and Robert Dickson, a celebrated lighting designer in the entertainment industry. His projects include US President Barack Obama's Inaugural Ball and the 1997 Hong Kong handover ceremony.

Q: Pavilion innovations?

Schlossberg: Modern life is characterized by interactivity in the widespread use of computers and the Internet - this is what we wanted to encapsulate in the Dream Cube.

Visitors are not just presented with a story, they're invited to participate in the story. It's a metaphor for how we all collaborate to create the future.

Before the pavilion was built, we invited ordinary people to take pictures around the city and post them online. We used the photos in the pavilion and visitors will recognize their own pictures as they enter. Also, there are fields of fiber glass rods that respond to visitors' touch by changing colors. There is a 360-degree performance theater where sensors detect clapping or raised hands to change animations inside and outside the pavilion.

Q: Light and interactivity?

Dickson: Designing lighting for an interactive experience is very different than for a passive performance. I didn't want visitors to be conscious of lighting or technology; we want them to feel comfortable so the design is subtle. It's difficult to impress Shanghainese because there's so much lighting here already so the Dream Cube is surprisingly calm.

Every night there's an eight-minute light show after the pavilion closes. Lights not used during the day will be on show, and it will be exciting and emotional.

Q: Comparisons?

Schlossberg: It's certainly different, it's a leap forward in immersion experiences.

Dickson: Interactive use of light is a new step and a challenge. Our creativity and inspiration are kept alive by challenges. I have designed lighting for many one-off events, but in this interactive experience every visit will be like another event.

Q: Chinese elements?

Schlossberg: This is my first visit to China but I read some Chinese literature at university, and the butterfly dream story from (the Taoist text) Zhuangzi has been an inspiration for the Dream Cube.

Zhuang Zhou dreamed he was a butterfly, but on awakening wondered if it was really the butterfly dreaming of him. Today we are switching back and forth between nature and technology, it's an unresolved issue. The solutions keep changing and we have to change with the solutions - the butterfly dream became a metaphor for this ambiguity used throughout the pavilion.

Q: "Green" features?

Dickson: All pavilions are sharply restricted in electricity use depending on size - ours is 700 kilowatt hours per day. Meeting these restrictions was our toughest challenge because we also wanted to do many special, innovative things. We used a lot of technology to achieve effects we wanted while meeting the criteria so visitors will not have a reduced experience.

Schlossberg: Innovative green technologies are displayed. They are not common yet, but demonstrate that though Shanghai businesses lead the way, they have not forgotten environmental responsibilities. Green features are also interactive to emphasize that to create change for a greener future, we all have to act.