Pic by Ellen Dubin courtesy of Jazz at Lincoln Center, New York City

TECHNO ELEGANT

Francesca Bettridge tells Vilma Barr how she has inspired a talented design team to express lighting with sophistication and ultimate function

"THE LURE OF NEW TECHNOLOGY IS IRRESISTIBLE TO ME. IT SOLVES PROBLEMS, INCLUDING ENERGY USE, AND CREATES OPPORTUNITY."

Francesca Bettridge's own elegant deportment is evident in her lighting designs. Like couture apparel that has a timeless distinguishable elegance, her projects keep their luster and originality with the passage of time. From skyscrapers on the urban cityscape to personalised residences, she adapts her keen sensibility to the environment in which she is working.

After graduating from Barnard College, New York City, where she was an art history major, she studied at Parsons School of Design. Bettridge took a job with Guiseppe Zambonini, whom she recalls as a visionary. She helped to establish the Open Atelier of Design, a forum for young designers to present their designs which are critiqued by practicing professionals. At one of her presentations, lighting designer Carroll Cline was a juror. "He was formerly a vice president of design at Edison Price for fifteen years, and then went out on his own to start a lighting consulting practice. It was a new field then, and he asked me to join him.

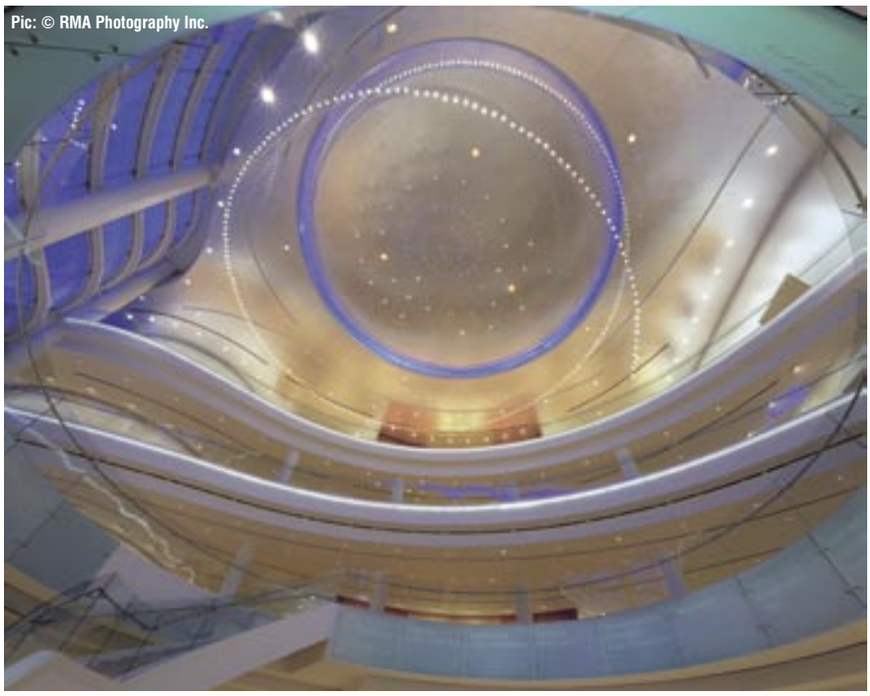
"I thought it was a great opportunity for me. You rarely saw a woman architect then, much less a female lighting designer. Carroll became my mentor. He was a brilliant and innovative architectural lighting designer, and a leader among the profession's first generation of designers. Carroll started to win Lumen awards in 1972; the first was for the Pratesi Linens store."

"Early on, we were partners with Jim Nuckolls," Bettridge says. "He was way ahead of his time, interested in computers as a design tool in the early '80s. In 1985, he left to pursue other interests, and that year, Stephen Bernstein joined us as our third partner. Stephen is a former Bloomingdale's merchandising executive with a business degree from the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School," she points out. "When he decided to redirect his career path, he began course work at Parson's and subsequently linked up with Carroll and me to form Cline Bettridge Bernstein Lighting Design (CBBLD)," Bettrige indicates.

Interviewed in her office in New York's Flatiron district in May, Bettridge acknowledged that some of the design offices her firm works with have cut back in personnel and the number of jobs underway. But with CBBLD's status as one of the country's leading lighting design consultants, Bettridge expressed confidence that CBBLD's 28-person firm's domestic and international activity level can remain strong. "Our diverse practice has helped us to stay busy during this economic downturn."

Her reference to diversity encompasses the breadth of the built environment: tower projects, performance spaces,


Pic: © dbox for Cook+Fox Architects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Clockwise from left One Bryant Park, New York City - expected to be the first skyscraper in the world to achieve a LEED platinum rating; Orange County Performing Arts Center, Costa Mesa, California - th
than allowed by California's challenging Title 24 energy codes; Jaan Restaurant, Equinox, Singapore

public spaces, hospitality, retail, museums, government, offices, institutional, plus exteriors and landscapes.

In the past nearly 25 years, the firm has created the lighting for dozens of trophy buildings designed by stars of the architectural profession. Bettridge readily admits that part of the excitement of lighting design comes from using new light sources and fixtures in unexpected ways.

"The lure of new technology is irresistible to me because it solves problems, including energy use, and creates opportunity. When they were first introduced into the market, we used MR16 fixtures, for longer life and small size, in an award-winning residence. In 1988, for a school library, with a challenging watt limitation, we created a family of decorative fixtures, using the then-new compact fluorescent lamp. In 1999, for the Orange County Performing Arts Center, we pioneered the use of LED technology in custom architectural and decorative fixtures to meet California's Title 24."

She believes that the need to conserve energy has gone from a virtue to an imperative. "We ask ourselves, 'What can I light with the watts I'm allowed to use? How little light can I afford to live with?' We spend a good deal of time in shaving watts. This aspect of the practice has become more important over the last 15 years. The time we spend in design development and construction drawings is shorter, but the response to the architectural design has to be the same," she notes.

The nature and the rhythm of the design process have changed, Bettridge observes. "Sketching and layout time have been reduced. On the other hand, our lighting designers are encouraged to be discerning and questioning, critical of solutions presented at office reviews. 'Show me what you think works and tell me why' is a typical internal meeting opener."

A current project that was one of the firm's most challenging is the Bank of America Tower at One Bryant Park, in New York, designed by Cook + Fox. "Lighting the building was tricky because of the extreme transparency of the glass and the brightness of the office interiors," Bettridge points out. "The top mechanical floors feature translucent glazing, and are lit with fluorescents to match the light emanating from the tower floors. The truss structure supporting the curtain wall above the roof is illuminated with metal halide floodlights," she describes.

The building is a strong candidate to be named the first commercial structure to receive a Platinum LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) rating for its sustainability premises: high performance glass curtain wall, LED lighting, green roofs, and recycled and locally-sourced materials.

Any projects you would like to change?
None really. Often, I will be working on a new project and think, "I wish I had this product when...." I reflect on how technology has changed, enabling us to do some things more easily, provide design solutions, that I could have only imagined in the past.

Projects you dislike?
I dislike glare from fixtures, in contrast to "sparkle." An unshielded fixture or unwanted brightness spoils a space for me immediately. Also, exterior lighting of buildings that are so over-lit that the details and architectural form are obliterated.

Projects you admire?
In New York City, the Seagram Building, by Mies van der Rohe and The Empire State Building by Shreve, Lamb & Harmon; Johnson Wax Co., Racine, Wisc. by Frank Lloyd Wright; Aarhus City Hall, Denmark, by Arne Jacobsen.

Lighting hero?
Obviously Carroll Cline would be the first of my lighting heroes. He was my mentor and really taught me what I know about lighting. He taught me to begin a project by asking the simple question, "What are we lighting?" From there it was about making the architecture and the lighting one. It was attention to detail and the understanding of how to layer light that distinguished his work. He showed me how to be fearless about exploring new sources and new technology.
Another hero was Edison Price. Ironically, Carroll began his lighting career with Edison. Edison was a not only a creator of many wonderful fixtures but he was also a master at composing with light. His collaborations with Richard Kelly, Isaac Goodbar and many other lighting designers are truly classics.

Notable projects?
• Clinton Presidential Center, Little Rock, Ark., Polshek Partnership, Architects. President Clinton asked us to make the lighting as sensitive to the environment as possible. The result was a Gold LEED certification, the first of many that the firm has worked on.
• Time Warner Center, New York City, Skidmore, Owings and Merrill Architects, James Carpenter Design, Rafael Viñoly Architects, and Elkus/Manfredi Architects, and The Rockwell Group.
• Orange County Performing Arts Center, Costa Mesa, Calif., Pelli Clarke Pelli Architects and Gruen Associates. This new performing arts center is truly a design of the twenty-first century.
• 7 World Trade Center, New York, New York City, Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, James Carpenter Designs. This LEED Gold tower, designed by SOM, New York, with James Carpenter is the first building to rise at Ground Zero after 9/11.

Current projects?
• Connecticut Science Center, Hartford, Conn., Pelli Clarke Pelli Architects. The 14,307-sqm. science museum and educational facility will redefine the Hartford skyline and generate a new level of activity in the downtown waterfront district.
• Emerson Paramount Center, Boston, Mass., Elkus/Manfredi Architects. This facility designed for Emerson College in Boston will include the rehabilitation of an Art Deco theater and the construction of a new educational building, concealed behind a landmarked façade.
• One Bryant Park, New York City, Cook + Fox Architects and Adamson Associates Architects. The new Bank of America Tower is the second tallest skyscraper in Manhattan, and one of the most highly efficient and ecologically friendly buildings in the world.
• Rosewood Hotel, Abu Dhabi, Handel Architects and BBGM Interiors. This hotel complex is being designed for LEED certification and will include an array of different spaces.
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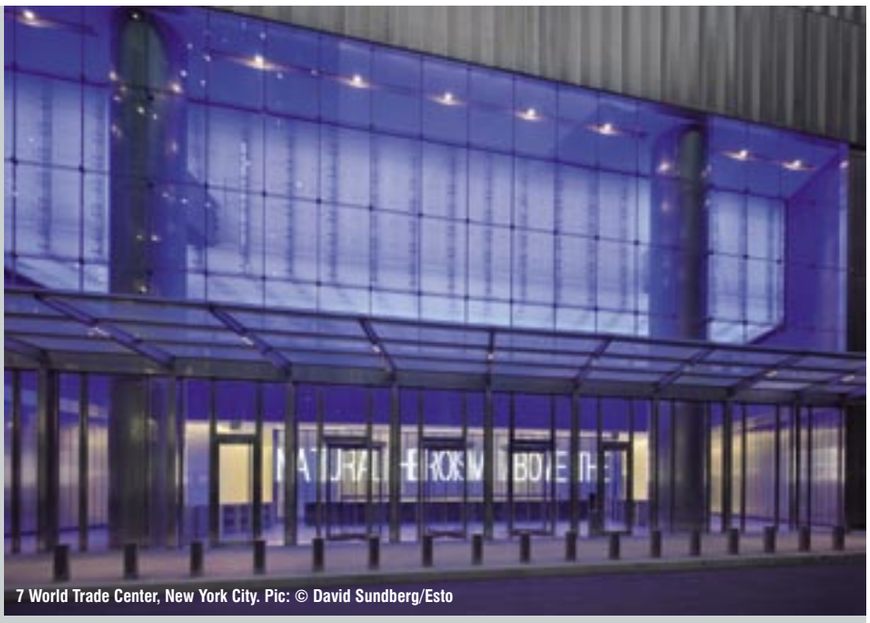
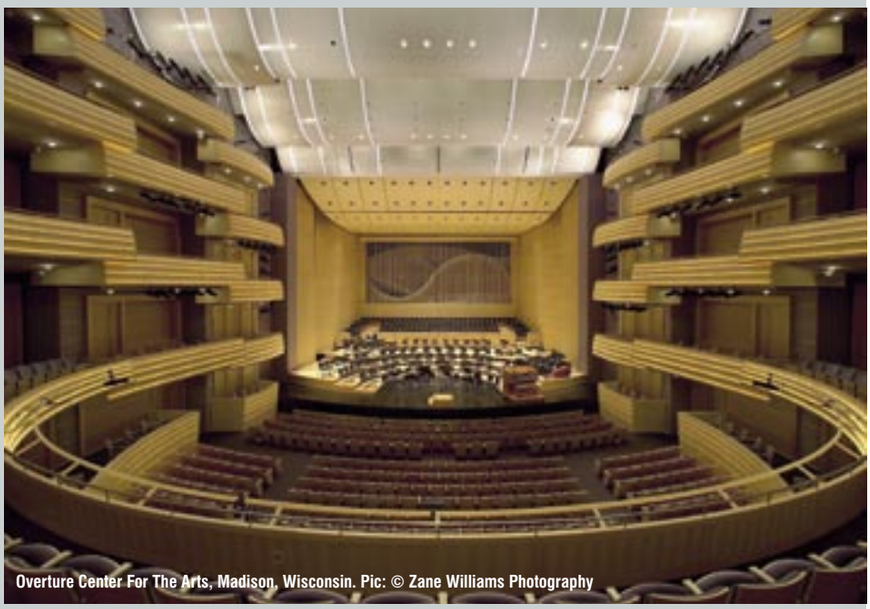

7 World Trade Center, New York City. Pic: © David Sundberg/Esto


Overture Center For The Arts, Madison, Wisconsin. Pic: © Zane Williams Photography


Cityspace Restaurant, Equinox, Singapore. Pic: © Gollings Photography (AUS)