

The Assistant Lighting Designer's Toolkit

Jack Wills reviews the latest edition of Anne McMills' book

The *Assistant Lighting Designer's Toolkit* is an incredibly in-depth guide of what is involved in lighting from the start to the end of the process. Anne McMills has written a very flowing, highly detailed, yet easy-to-navigate insight into each element of the lighting design journey, plus all the paperwork requirements and terms that come with it across various different scales of productions, venues and locations.

The book is also bursting with countless real-world examples of lighting rig plans, section drawings, followspot cue sheets, magic sheets and outstanding set electric drawings from the West End and Broadway, plus useful insights into getting the most out of Vectorworks and how to create professional looking lighting plans with the best layout and all the details in one place, to name only a few of the vast yet specific sections the book covers.

Alongside the extensive guidance on lighting paperwork, there is also a great section on who has which responsibilities in a team and how that differs from country to country. Anne has also put together a fantastic section on the different terms and phrases used in theatres in specific countries, covering everything from American theatres to German, Italian, French, Japanese and Chinese-speaking venues. There is also great guidance on what to expect when working abroad including cultural differences to consider and how to get the best out of your overall experience, especially helpful for those people who are just starting out in their lighting journey or have not done international touring before.

For those people who are just taking their first steps in the assistant lighting designer role, or who might simply want a refresh of information, there is a detailed

step-by-step checklist which acts as a fantastic guide to making sure you are not missing any responsibilities out and are doing tasks in the correct order. The checklist starts right in the design prep stage and discusses the basics like design meetings and venue drawings and continues on to printing and distributing the correct paperwork to each department. The incredibly helpful checklist continues into the build stages of the process then onto the load-in, focus sessions, tech sessions, previews, opening night and after opening night.

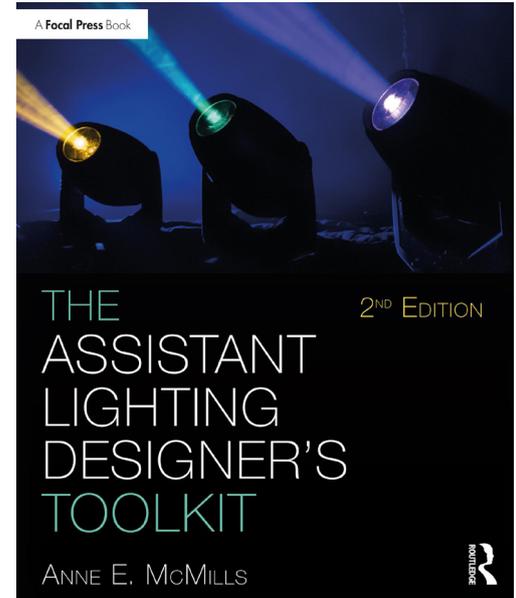
The Assistant Lighting Designer's Toolkit also discusses the benefits and transferable skills when it comes to working in related industries, including working in film and television, events, themed entertainment parks, and architectural lighting to name a few. Sections like this discuss the differences in the equipment we use

and also how some of the equipment is similar but used in a different way, such as ETC Nomads combined with wireless DMX, which is now becoming a very common control system for certain TV studios. The TV and film section also discusses how the demand for assistant work can vary depending on the project; for example, a movie musical will often have a theatrical lighting designer who will work with their assistant to only focus on getting the lighting perfect in a theatrical element and then the film lighting is overseen by the director of photography who looks after lighting for the cameras only.

Continuing on in the TV lighting section, in an interesting way, Anne has touched on even the smallest details like how the channel numbers are shown on the inside of the fixture symbols in TV rig plans and how fixtures are only referenced by

channel number alone. The book also touches on more unique processes such as the “chip board”, which is a printed colour gradient scale that all the cameras sync up to before filming as well as how sections are done with multiple lanterns as one group known as a “talent angles plan”. There are also small but crucial, genuine details noted, such as ensuring backlight might need to be cut off the presenter’s heads because their bald head might be “too hot” for the camera. All small details that can be so finely controlled in the television and film world might help us achieve even greater detail in theatre lighting, and again this section comes complete with a huge array of detailed, modern and well-labelled example images of some very pristine and detailed plans, sections and images.

The Assistant Lighting Designer’s Toolkit also has a brilliant section



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on architectural lighting and their lighting plans, known as “lighting layouts”, and how lighting is considered for architectural projects. Again, this section goes into the

same very high standard of examples and written detail, with additional pointers such as recording real-world light levels at certain times of the day and

the process of “redlining”, which is the industry standard way of making sure that every tiny detail has been noted and amended in digital form, with one or many junior architectural lighting designers leaving a red pen

mark over the area in question to show it was noticed.

Overall, *The Assistant Lighting Designer's Toolkit* is a stunningly detailed array of everything lighting

across various industries, which is informative for anyone to learn from at any stage of their career. There are countless modern-day examples right next to the text and everything has been laid out in a

very flowing, informative, yet easy to enjoy way. The toolkit covers so many areas in detail that it is hard to review without giving it away, but there was never a moment in the book that I felt any detail had

been missed out or any related questions unanswered. The layout of the toolkit is a spectacular mix of detail plus information, yet it is well paced to ensure you won't get bogged down with reading lots of unnecessary details.

The Assistant Lighting Designer's Toolkit serves very well as both a brilliant bit of reading for those interested in the industry and also a great reference point for anyone looking for advice in a range of industries alongside examples of how other people have approached complex plans, challenges and scenarios. ✨

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