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15-YEAR ITCH

Here are just a few of the hot-button topics identified at a lighting industry conference:

- Price competition and margin squeeze
- Regulatory oversight; codes
- Industrial globalization
- Personalization and customization of light
- New applications and uses of light
- Value propositions for lighting
- Asian competition

After the conference, an industry observer wrote, “There’s trouble in River City: commoditization, shrinking profit margins and a general lack of understanding among end users about the value of lighting were identified as the culprits.”

That conference—the Lighting Research Center’s “Bridges in Light”—took place in October 2003. And the quote above is from my “Editor’s Note” in the December 2003 issue of LD+A.

Fifteen years later, the LRC got the band back together at its Partner-Alliance meeting in September. And the pain points sounded awfully familiar. During the “Future of Lighting” panel discussion, Randy Reid of the *Edison Report* summarized the state of the industry in one word: “F_u_n_k.” Manufacturers are struggling to

‘Gentlemen, we are surrounded by insurmountable opportunities’

maintain price increases, layoffs are rampant, venture capital is drying up and what he calls “Big China LED” has created a race to the bottom on luminaire prices. Mark Lien of the IES added that the signs of a maturing industry can be found in the IES

Progress Report (see p. 47), in the decline of new product submissions from our largest companies—even as the total number of submissions remains relatively stable.

Still, there are some bright spots, many outside the big three applications of visual task, ambience and accent. These include horticulture, the use of light as a disinfectant and as a circadian remedy, and the burgeoning IoT/connected lighting niche wherever that may lead.

So is the arrow pointing up or down? The LRC’s Mark Rea channeled the comic strip character Pogo: “Gentlemen, we are surrounded by insurmountable opportunities.”

What was true in 2003 is true today.

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