

WANT TO BECOME A LIGHTING OR VISUAL DESIGNER?

JOHN FEATHERSTONE
Has some advice for you!



Graduating can feel a bit like standing in front of a lighting console for the first time—lots of buttons, lots of possibilities and absolutely no idea where to start.

We asked John Featherstone, a leading, award winning lighting and visual designer, who co-founded Lightswitch, an international lighting, media and visual design firm, to share what every student, graduate and aspiring creative wants answered.

Grab a drink and take some notes...

WHAT makes someone STAND OUT?

Curiosity. Every time.

I can teach someone a lighting console or a piece of software. It's much harder to teach curiosity. I love people who ask "why?" as much as "how?".

People who notice things, who get excited by architecture, concerts, museums, films, art, nature... everything feeds great design.

And be nice. Seriously. We spend ridiculous amounts of time together on shows. I'd rather work with someone who's enthusiastic, humble and great to be around than someone who thinks they already know everything.



IS YOUR PORTFOLIO TELLING THE WHOLE STORY?

Show me how you think, not just what you've made.

Everyone puts in the glossy final render. I'm far more interested in the sketch that started it, the bad ideas you threw away, the problem you were trying to solve, and how you got to the final answer.

Also... quality beats quantity. I'd rather see six brilliant projects than sixty average ones.



NO OR LITTLE EXPERIENCE? START HERE.

Get yourself in the room.

Volunteer. Shadow people. Push road cases. Focus lights. Help in a local theatre. Program a charity event. Do literally anything that gets you working alongside people already doing the job.

This industry is surprisingly small and people hire people they enjoy working with. Your reputation starts on day one, long before your CV matters.

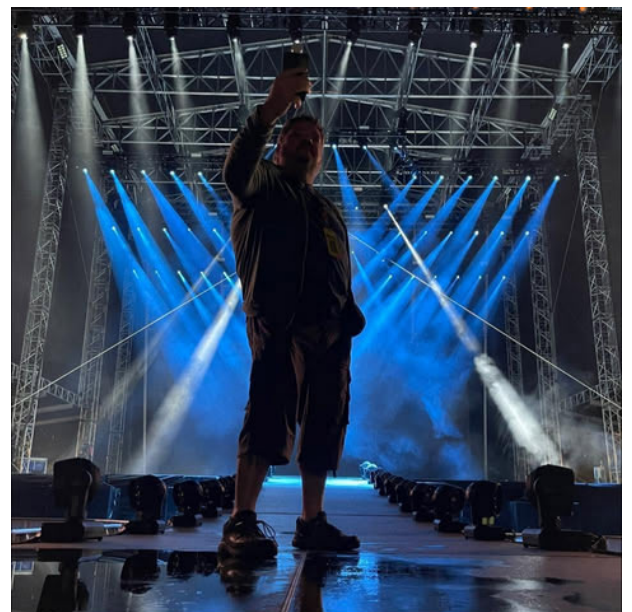
THE ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY IS CONSTANTLY EVOLVING, WHAT SHOULD YOU BE LEARNING RIGHT NOW?

Learn the technology... but don't become obsessed with it.

AI, real-time rendering, XR, automation, live data, virtual production—they're all brilliant tools, and they'll become increasingly important. But they're still just tools.

The real skill is storytelling. Understanding people. Knowing why you're using the technology instead of just showing off that you can.

The software will change every couple of years. Good design and compelling storytelling never goes out of fashion.



ONE LESSON FROM FORTY YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY

That the best idea isn't always the biggest idea.

Early in my career I probably tried to make everything bigger, brighter and more complicated. These days I'm much happier removing things until only the important bits remain.

I've also learned that great design lives in the overlap between creativity, budget and logistics. Ignore any one of those and the project usually falls over.

At Lightswitch we call it pragmatic design. It's not about lowering your ambitions—it's about making sure your best ideas actually get built. And after forty-odd years, I still think that's one of the most valuable lessons this industry has taught me.



FINAL TAKEAWAY

If there's one theme running through all of John's answers, it's this:

Great careers aren't built by knowing everything. They're built by staying curious, being easy to work with, showing your thinking, getting involved and never losing sight of the story you're trying to tell.

Technology will evolve. Software will change. Trends will come and go.

But curiosity, creativity, collaboration and storytelling will always have a place in this industry.

Head to our careers page if you're interested in doing placement with us!



Neg Earth Lights extends heartfelt gratitude to John Featherstone for his invaluable advice to the next gen.

 [@lightswitch.live](https://www.instagram.com/lightswitch.live)
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