



Light is Life arc caught up with Julia Hartmann and lightsphere to see how these women are dominating Switzerland.

H

headed by Julia Hartmann, alongside Project Director Melanie Heilgeist and Lighting Designer Carla Sigillo, lightsphere is an all female run lighting design practice based in Zurich, Switzerland.

Hartmann established the young team five years ago, after a successful eighteen years in the industry.

Reflecting on her desire to pursue a career that allowed her to be creative and inventive, she said: "Working as an independent lighting designer is a dream come true. As a child, I was interested in the relationships between nature, design and technology and was fascinated by the influence of light on humans.

"After completing my college degree in design, the path led me to interior design studies. There, I took part in a light workshop in the first semester, which inspired my professional future. The fascination for light and the use of light in the built environment soon became my passion," reflected Hartmann.

"I wanted to be an inventor and explorer when I was younger. At a later stage in life, this changed to product design with a focus on bionic structures. As life is not a straightforward path, things and situations change along the way. But, looking back and reflecting on my career, I am actually where I wanted to be.

In lighting design, we have to be inventors and explorers and at some stage we also have to develop or modify products. As well as that, as lighting designers, we are very close to nature and need to understand the influence of light on us as humans."

Hartmann completed a degree in Interior Design at the University of Applied Sciences in Coburg, Germany. She became a student assistant for the Department of Lighting

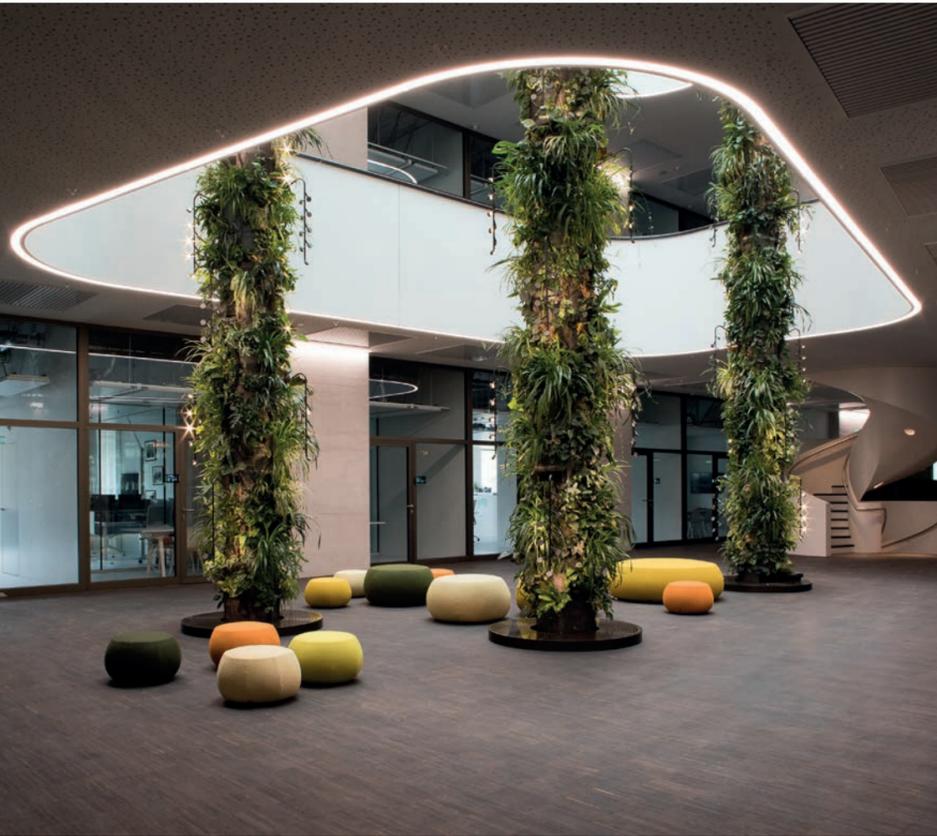
Technology during her time studying, which involved being partly responsible for establishing the university's own light laboratory and organising multiple light workshops in Coburg and the surrounding areas.

This interest in light led her to become a student member of the ELDA and later the PLDA, which gave her access to valuable contacts in the industry early on. She then went on to complete a scholarship earned internship at the prestigious Lighting Planners Associates (LPA) in Singapore. After graduating with honours, Hartmann followed work to one of Switzerland's largest lighting design offices, reflexion, where she stayed for six years. "During this time, as a project and team leader, I was able to pass on my passion for light to colleagues and customers and worked on exciting major national and international projects," she explained.

"At the age of 32, I decided to establish my own office in 2014 called lightsphere. Promoting young professionals has always been close to my heart, therefore I allowed students from the University of Wismar and Aalborg internship positions."

Heilgeist began her light journey whilst studying interior design at the University of Applied Sciences and Art in Hildesheim. "During my Bachelor degree thesis, where I designed the interior of a Kindergarden in a big industry hall, questions like *How do you bring interiors alive? How do you get light in the space when there is no daylight or it is a cloudy day? How do you create ambience, atmosphere or serve the use of a space with light?* came up and there I realised the importance of light, artificial light and daylight," she explained.

During her time at Hildesheim, she also took part in an exhibition, together with the lighting design students, that revealed the practicality of lighting a space and sparked her interest in the profession. Heilgeist then went on to complete a masters in Architectural Lighting Design in the UK and was later offered a job as a lighting



Previous Page From left: Melanie Heilgeist, Julia Hartmann and Carla Sigillo.
Far Left The main atrium at the Zurich Innovation Centre for Givaudan. Three living columns of ornamental indoor plants are kept alive using bespoke LED luminaires the team worked tirelessly to adapt for plant life.
Left A close up of one of the living columns in the atrium space. Research has shown the increased wellbeing and productivity in the workplace as a result of indoor plants. lightsphere and Dr. Karolina Zielinska Dabkowska completed a research paper into the impacts of LED lighting on the growth and sustainability of plant life.
This page top left, middle and bottom Lighting scenes for the Vaduzer-Saal project, highlighting the various settings.
Above The inside stairwell of the municipal centre Vaduzer-Saal in Liechtenstein. lightsphere was awarded this renovation assignment as its first project as an independent practice.
Below The Vaduzer-Saal was also awarded with an IES Award of Merit in Energy and Environmental Design and got the Swiss Energy Efficiency label for the renovation of its illumination. This was a milestone project for the team and gave them international recognition.

designer in the London office of dpa lighting consultants and later in its UAE Dubai office, where she gained the experience she took with her to lightsphere. Sigillo adds a construction element to the team at lightsphere with her experience as an architectural building engineer. At the age of 30, after working as an engineer for three years, Sigillo realised she was missing an element of creativity in her daily routine. “I began to reflect deeply on my passions – architecture, photography, light and design – and how to combine these creatively without moving too far from the building engineering and the skills I had gained during my education. This is how I came across the magical world of lighting design,” she explained. After completing her engineering masters, Sigillo went on to finish a masters in Lighting Design at Aalborg University in Denmark, and then a Daylighting intensive course at the Parsons School of Design. Designing “for the people” is one of the main focuses lightsphere maintains through its lighting practice. “We approach lighting design from a multidisciplinary standpoint. The effects on users and the biological effect of lighting means we now conduct more research within our workflow. We also follow other industries to see how innovations can cross over. We are always searching for new

inventions from all over design, research and science, so we can create the best possible results. Therefore, our clients’ needs are the key factor for our concept approach.” Heilgeist added: “I personally believe that great and harmonious lighting design can only be achieved in a team within the company and in cooperation with the project team. Designing a lighting scheme requires you to understand the user and requires experience and knowledge of special fields in lighting. lightsphere is a team of exactly that variety in personalities, experiences and knowledge. “On a daily basis, we strive to provide the best customised lighting solutions for each client technically, economically, but more importantly, in harmony with the look and feel of the space.” Hartmann became the Swiss Women in Lighting ambassador after a close working relationship with Light Collective formed during The Perfect Light project. “The key goal for me is that at some point in the future, we no longer talk about gender issues, and instead we talk about individuals and their achievements. It is all about sharing ideas and experiences within the profession,” described Hartmann about her role as a Women in Lighting ambassador. “My experience as a female in the industry is that sometimes a situation occurs where some project partners tend to have

preconceptions about your understanding of technical matters in a project, which leads to an assumption where they won’t take you seriously when dealing with technical questions. But, it’s always a great moment when they realise that you do know your job well, including the technical and control aspects. For me, it is more important to treat each individual respectfully to be able to collaborate in the best way possible,” she added. “Another great thing about the Women in Lighting project is to encourage more, especially younger females, in the lighting industry to speak up and improve their self-confidence.” With technology and scientific advancements happening at a rapid rate in the lighting industry, Hartmann maintains it is important to hold onto the foundations of the importance of good lighting. “With all the technical possibilities we have nowadays, lighting design has become more and more diverse and the freedom of creation seems endless. But, the core intention for lighting design is to play with emotions and let magic happen. “Knowing your tools is one thing. More importantly, empathy and the sense of creating beautiful spaces with light for the people using the space is key. I believe we have to work towards the direction to keep regulations in mind but not to blindly

trust those guidelines, instead to use our aesthetical common sense and demand in creating beautiful spaces with light and shadow to enable people to have a better life.” The importance of lighting and biological life is one area of research the team has dedicated a lot of time and effort into. Whilst working on the Zurich Innovation Centre for Givaudan, a world leader in producing flavours and fragrances, the team were required to create multiple lighting schemes for humans and plant life. The space was divided into laboratory workspaces and a main atrium, used for recreation and communication. “The architects, from Bauart Architects and Planners, wanted to set a comparison between the laboratories where people need to work with high precision and high quality standards. In contrast, the atrium space is used for communication, recreation and exhibitions,” explained Hartmann. “In addition to this remarkable building’s shape and use, the landscape architects from Schrämmli Landschaftsarchitektur wanted to integrate seven columns, twelve metres high, with living ornamental plants to enhance the atrium space and incorporate nature into the building.” To solve the challenge of finding a light source that would enable the plants to not only survive, but thrive indoors, the team

carried out numerous in-house experiments to find the ideal luminaire solution. At the time, Sigillo was completing her internship in the office and used this project as her Masters’ thesis research paper. “After the successful integration of the bespoke luminaire, we – myself and Carla – joined forces with Dr. Karolina Zielinska Dabkowska to complete a research paper that was published in the online research magazine *Sustainability*. We wanted to share the results and experiences we gained over the years with the lighting design community to create better awareness and understanding on the complexity and processes necessary for using indoor plants, as it’s a highly complex setup,” elaborated Hartmann. “Humans relate to light on an emotional and biological level. This happens individually in different ways; therefore it is important to understand the person or people using the space, building or environment. We, as humans react to light, it is important to carefully design the right light for the right time of day and task. We need to fulfil these requirements and demands but we also need to keep the magic and create a little sense of wonder.” Over the short amount of time lightsphere has been practicing, the trio has achieved a lot of recognition in the industry and won numerous awards for their contribution to

lighting design, including an IES Award of Merit for Energy and Environmental Lighting Design in 2017, the Lighting Design Studio of the Year 2019 Switzerland and Award for Excellence in Customised Luminaire Development 2019 by Lux Designer Awards, to name a few. Championing a sentiment many aspire to achieve in the lighting industry today, Sigillo added: “I hope that my genuine passion for light, coupled with my technical skills, will contribute to push the world towards new visions and new sustainable lighting solutions, where natural and artificial lighting can work together seamlessly, guided by environmentally friendly principles.” Furthering its journey, Hartmann described how she sees lightsphere moving forward and growing further: “We will keep going with our curiosity and love for light, and try to keep up to date with technology and design as well as science. We conduct our own research about various topics like biophilic design and LED light for indoor ornamental plants, which we want to foster and improve. With this mix and the magnificence of my team, which we will hopefully increase in the future, it motivates me and keeps me going. We will keep on exploring and inventing.” ■ www.lightsphere.ch