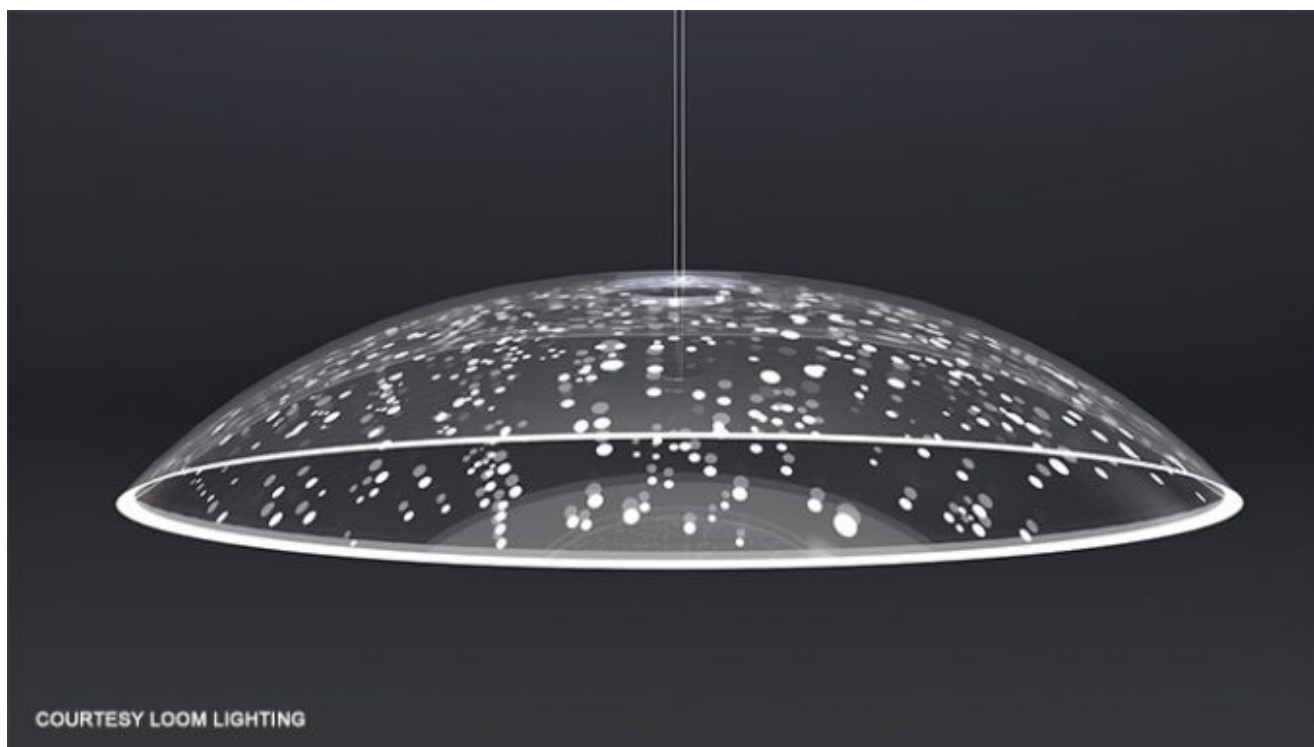


The Space In Between: LEDs Drive Contemporary Luminaire Design

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Today's decorative luminaire designs express more about what's not there than what is. The LED has freed designers from clunky lamps and the heavy luminaire structures and optics needed to house them. Minimalism captures the zeitgeist, and contemporary technologies make it possible. Decorative and linear pendants float and bend. Sconces, post tops and bollards are shells of their former selves, holding negative space within.

Mirage sconce is an empty, open frame with the simplest of reflectors, an unobstructed mirror. The sconce is "mysteriously lit" by a concealed LED panel, which sets off the clean lines. It was "distilled" – a particularly apt term – by Sherry Williamson and Brayton Hughes Design for Boyd Lighting.

"It's an expression of the design capabilities of a minimal source. There's plenty of products out there where they're stuffing LEDs into the same old form factor – fluorescents and compact fluorescents and flat panels," said lighting educator and artist Therese Lahaie, founder and CEO of Apparatus Design. "It's refreshing to see people taking this flexible, minimal, low-voltage technology and designing around it. And I think that the negative space is a design benefit and result of the form factor itself."

Element Reflections by Tech Lighting.

Some of these linear pendants and recessed troffers (square and round) play with depth perception: is it convex or concave? Inbox, also from Fluxwerx, and Prudential Lighting's Stream Oval embrace the space within. Stream Oval advertises continuous runs of “lens-free, veiled source ambient” lighting. Element Reflections by Tech Lighting even embosses designs in the hollow downlight dome. It won the Design Excellence Award at Lightfair 2017.



“Because of the small form factor – the flexibility of the form factor of LEDs and the amazing optics that have been designed to make what is a directional source into an omnidirectional source – we have much more minimal and sculptural lighting solutions available,” said Lahaie.



LED runs rings around fluorescent

We're seeing floating circular fixtures everywhere. Some are empty “rim” fixtures and others so light and airy they seem to be orbits, often stacked, nested or tilted – sometimes all three.

“Now you’ve got pretty much an endless array of capability,” said Robin Aleta, vice president of sales at [Birchwood Lighting](#). “You can reduce the scope and size of a fixture substantially, where you couldn’t do that before with a fluorescent lamp or an HID source.” He works to equip lighting designers with sleek fixtures, potentially using fewer fixtures than in years past. “Minimalism is key in the marketplace. So even though we talk about a very large ring – it might be a 10 or 15 ft diameter ring – being able to do that with a very small profile of 1 or 2 inches is very appealing. It still puts functional light out into the space.”

[Vode Lighting](#) took home the top prize at Lightfair 2017 with the Zip Three bidirectional wallmount fixture. The minimalist “blade of light” seems to float on the wall in a 0.27 inch by 3.78 inch projection. “What happens when you ask the design team to imagine a light that is almost invisible?” asked Scott Yu, principal and chief creative officer at Vode.

In the past, bollards provided lighting from stanchions and generally portrayed solidity with little ornamentation. But today’s bollards are disappearing. Concealed LEDs shine from removed chunks or large apertures opened in posts. Some are mere frames or slender columns with much of their solidity lathed away. Even classic post-top streetlights are today stripped of lamps and diffusers. Only the frame and a simplified upper housing remain.

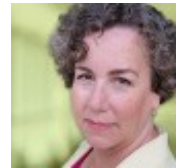


Both Diaphanous and Elleni by Loom Lighting use waveguides and LEDs to denude the common residential fixture.

Light guides are helping luminaire designers reinterpret traditional forms and styles. Matt Kennedy won a second-place prize in the [2016 LAMP awards](#), which promotes emerging talent internationally. His Diaphanous product uses a waveguide dome, laser-etched to extract light from the small ring of LEDs. “My whole intention is to re-create more conventional lighting, or more residential or decorative lighting, in an Art Deco kind of style. But with the best technology that we have to offer,” said Kennedy, who is founder and CEO at [Loom Lighting](#).

Conventional shades and diffusers are intended to dampen a light source to control glare. Here the shade itself emits the light. Because of the missing lamp and socket, Diaphanous holds space within. There's a void inside the fixture and a dark hole at the center. "Both of those things add to the levity of the product, especially since there's a translucency to the light guide. This thing is ethereal."

The style of these luminaires is modern, according to Kennedy, driven by the possibilities of the technology. "There is definitely an opportunity for sophisticated tech products to be part of any kind of aesthetic. So, in a sense, we're making a tech product, not just a light fixture."



About Lois I. Hutchinson

Lois I. Hutchinson is a freelance writer specializing in lighting and energy issues. She is also the content marketing mastermind behind Inverse Square LLC, a Los Angeles–based consultancy. Contact her via lightinginsider@exponation.net with your comments and any article ideas that concern the lighting community here in the Southwest.