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Over 700 Elation lights for 2020 *Illumination* – *Tree Lights at The Morton Arboretum*

Lightswitch redesign preserves lighting magic for adaptive driving experience

For The Morton Arboretum, the idea of not running *Illumination* this past holiday season was not an option, says Lightswitch principal John Featherstone about the popular wintertime lighting display in Lisle, Illinois. *Illumination* continues to shine through after being redesigned for a drive-thru experience using additional Elation luminaires, the eighth year for the project.

“It’s about a partnership between a remarkable institution, and an industry full of incredibly creative, hardworking and motivated people who are still passionate about delivering remarkable experiences to an entertainment-starved public and bringing relief to people,” says Featherstone. “The motivating force behind why the Arboretum decided to pivot *Illumination* to a driving experience was not only to ensure guest safety in the middle of a pandemic, but also because we all felt there was something we owed the local community. For seven years, we’ve asked the guests of the Chicago area to come to the Arboretum and we felt a responsibility to honor that. This has been a year of ‘no’s’ and it would have been easy for the Arboretum to have skipped this year, but we wanted to deliver something to the people of Chicagoland that was a ‘yes.’”



New perspective, new experience

The design group (www.lightswitch.net) and the Morton Arboretum found innovative ways to find yeses, effectively making the pivot to a driving experience by utilizing some of the site’s 1,700 acres of beautiful gardens. The new driving experience includes favorite lighting displays re-envisioned along with six newly designed sights displayed along a two-mile road among the Arboretum’s magnificent trees. Guests immerse themselves in magical woodlands and landscapes filled with dramatic lighting and color-changing illumination, and, of course, they do it from the comfort and safety of their own car.

With guests sitting in their cars instead of walking a path closer to nature, Featherstone says they had to let go of what they’ve done in the past and focus on what they could do. “We didn’t want to try and

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make it feel simply like the walking experience from inside a car. In order to make it feel like something new we had to rethink it through the lens, or in this case the window, of what it's like to be in a vehicle which is very different than viewing it when walking the trail.” The designer says the team would usually spend a lot of time talking about things like the shape of a tree or how color plays on different textures of bark. “But that goes out the window when you look at it from a car window. You're just not close enough to the arbor, and you're in constant motion so you don't get those moments to stop and linger.”



Besides having to make displays shorter in duration due to the increased tempo, the tint of the vast majority of car windows reduce a surprising amount of the light. “It was a dramatic difference. The whole display needed to be brighter due to the difference in color and saturation when viewed through the automobile glass.” Projection mapping onto trees was dropped this year for the same reason. Another important difference was the more horizontal “cinema display” aspect ratio one gets from looking out a car window. “We couldn’t guide the eye from the base of the tree to its crown to reveal the majesty of the tree for example.” Another change this year was the opportunity for driving guests to listen to specially curated music on a dedicated radio station.

More visually dynamic

The result of the changes, Featherstone says, is a show that was more visually dynamic than past years with more Elation Professional luminaires used than ever before. Over 700 Elation fixtures form the foundation of the lighting including IP65 [Proteus Beam™](#) and [Proteus Hybrid™](#) moving heads, Arena Q7 Zoom™ PAR wash lights, Level Q7 IP™ RGBW PAR lights, and for the first time, Elation’s 50,000-lumen [Proteus Maximus™](#). The two-month, cold weather project proves an ideal environment for the multi-environmental Proteus series.

“Frankly, the Maximus is going to change the way we think about a lot of elements at the Arboretum,” Featherstone says. “It takes any kind of video projection technology that we can use out back behind the shed and steals its lunch money! It's brighter, it's crisper and we don't have to build an enclosure to protect it. We can tuck fixtures in places where we otherwise couldn't get video projectors so it's brilliant.” Outfitted with custom gobos and using the fixture’s animation system along with pan and tilt to create effects, the designer admits they only scratched the surface with it this year. “That fixture and the rest of the Proteus line are going to be a big part of our thinking, not only for *Illumination* but for all of the other institutions we work with, moving forward.”



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Lightswitch works closely with Intelligent Lighting Creations (ILC) on the *Illumination* project and again this year the Illinois-based design and rental house supplied the lighting fixtures. *Illumination* was once again extremely well attended with the initial closing date of January 3rd extended until January 10th.

In closing, Feathertone added, “We are so proud of the experience we were able to create with the staff at The Morton Arboretum in the middle of a global pandemic, and were able to keep both staff and guests safe. We can’t wait to return *Illumination* to the beloved walking experience in 2021, as we all look forward to a return to normal.”

Elation gear:

438 x Level Q7 IP™

190 x Arena Q7 Zoom™

47 x Proteus Hybrid™

33 x Proteus Beam™

4 x Proteus Maximus™

Photos: Matthew Taylor – The Morton Arboretum

About Elation Professional

Based in California with facilities in Florida and Mexico City, as well as European offices in The Netherlands, Elation designs and manufactures a comprehensive range of innovative lighting products known for its superior performance, excellent efficiency, and outstanding price:value ratio, all backed by a hard-earned reputation for Total Support. Elation also offers an advanced line of lighting control products through Obsidian Control Systems, as well as a full range of dependable specialty effects called Magmatic. Our mission has always been simple: to provide best-in-class products and service while offering the best value:performance ratio in the industry. Elation products continue to be a part of the industry’s most exciting projects across the globe. We invite you to take a closer look at www.elationlighting.com

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