

Gilbert Lang Mathews

Founder and CEO of San Antonio, Texas-based Lucifer Lighting Company.

By Elizabeth Donoff



Gilbert Lang Mathews

Credit: Adam Tetzloff

Art and design have always been important to Gilbert Lang Mathews, Hon. AIA. His passion for fine art and architecture have remained true even as he studied law and went on to practice in Houston at the start of his professional career. But lighting was never far from his mind. He witnessed the power of what illumination could do to create atmosphere and highlight fashion in high-end department stores—Frost Bros.—owned by his family. They were one of the first to employ a European-imported low-voltage striplight for casework, what became known as the Lucifer light and served as the starting point for Lucifer Lighting Company, founded by Mathews in 1980. Now, with his children working alongside him, the company continues to evolve, exploring the potential that solid-state lighting has to offer, but never straying from the company’s commitment to design excellence.

What fascinates you about light?

The quality of light; it affects the mind and the body in ways that are still being learned.

What is your business philosophy?

We focus on fixture development that is minimalist, elegant, and that will disappear after defining the interiors. We talk about the three Ds: design, define, and disappear.

What makes a great luminaire?

It's a convergence of industrial design and control. But it's also about functionality and beauty. If you can design a product that achieves all that, you've succeeded.

How has lighting changed since you started Lucifer Lighting Company?

Lighting was more of a straightforward industry years ago. It was about hardware and big [lighting] footprints in ceilings. Low-voltage came along and created a degree of miniaturization. With the introduction of LEDs, lighting is now a high-tech industry. Lighting is no longer as straightforward as it once was.

What traditions are important to maintain as Lucifer Lighting Company grows?

We take pride in what we release; it's more than just a lighting product. I want people to believe that what we release is the best that can be done in industrial design.

What's key to running a successful lighting business as the industry evolves?

Successful businesses are marketing knowledge. Those that can impart information to allied professionals, contractors, and owners will have a place. Those that are most successful are going to be known as knowledge purveyors.

“The evolution of the lighting industry is more than just a shift to LEDs; it's about marrying sustainable design and energy efficiency with these new lamp sources. It requires a detailed understanding of how products can be deployed—and controlled. There's a great deal to know now to specify lighting correctly. Unless you have the time to really study this, you can get it wrong. That's why the future holds such great promise for lighting consultants.” —Gilbert Lang Mathews, CEO, Lucifer Lighting Company
