Creative and Unique: idesign

How Miami-based idesign uses Avolites' Ai media servers to drive projection forward in clubs and architectural venues.

Based out of Miami, Florida, idesign has established a stellar reputation for itself at the forefront of lighting design since it was set up in 2004. Known for some truly ground-breaking work in club environments and increasingly for architectural installations as well, the company's individual design ethos stems from co-founder, lead designer and programmer Michael Meacham's desire to always keep pushing the boundaries.

"We always try to come up with something different," he says. "There's not any one of our designs that are exactly the same. It would do an injustice to our clients to copy and paste a design from one to the other; we want to try to always make it unique and innovative to every single venue."

Early days

Meacham grew up in Washington, DC and was fascinated by lighting from an early age, mowing his Mobile DJ neighbour's lawn in exchange for parts and components from Radio Shack to stage small light shows in his bedroom. This led to a job running lighting in clubs in his late teens and into a successful DJ'ing career. He always knew that DJ'ing was going to have a finite lifespan and by the time that he moved to Miami to become Crobar nightclub's new visual designer, he was very much concentrating on lighting.

LED lighting installs in various nightlife venues in Miami Beach led to work in New Orleans and New York and the eventual launch of idesign. Their client base is still growing to this day which ranges from Miami across the US to the Caribbean and worldwide. The portfolio is increasingly impressive from high-end nightclubs, lounges, and hotels, to building facades and fountains.

"I have a style and I try to remain true to that style, which is a lot of negative space and high contrast," he says. "We don't do ubiquitous LED walls, that's almost every other venue. We take it apart, we break it, we try to make some interesting shapes on it. And in that lies the ethos of our design; it's when you find that one feature that you can build everything around, that one visual element when people walk into the room and say "That's really interesting. That's why we're here.""

Evolving technology

Increasingly, in the past 10 years, the technology that has helped idesign create those moments in its clientele has pivoted around the Avolites Ai media server.

"I was first introduced to Avolites by a colleague, Scott Chmielewski from Digital Media Designs, which is also where I met Ruben Laine from Creative Integrations Studio. Ruben works with us on all our complex Ai installs" explains Meacham. "The projects were becoming increasingly involved.

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Typical media servers were just not able to handle needs such as complex UV mapping. When we started using Ai Infinity 8 servers at E11even in Miami, one of the world's most well-known clubs, Ai was the only media server in 2013 that could handle such a video mapping and elaborate project."

Meacham says that both he and the technology have grown together over time. "There's no way I could have done 10/15 years ago what I'm doing now. You evolve with the technology and you evolve with the tools that you have in front of you. I remember the first time that I saw Ayrton magic panels and transparent video screens at a Nine Inch Nails 'Tension Tour' show in 2013. That was the creative seed behind the transparent cubes installation at Atlanta's Cheetah Lounge club. All of these experiences over the years, the creative shows that we see, and seeing what our industry colleagues can do, goes into our inspiration arsenal."

So, what is it that he likes so much about Avolites AI? What keeps him coming back to it for the latest projects idesign is working on?

"The fact that it's such a stable system," he says. "We have installs running Ai 24 hours a day, seven days a week and it handles everything that we can throw at it without any issues. One of my favourite features of Ai is the ability to take an LED video tile or LED fixture and turn it into a RGB-type fixture. We're able to do very interesting complex programming with that feature alone. Between that and the complex UV mapping, we can create great visual effects.

"Take the Atlanta transparent cube project," he continues. "The cubes were mapped in three different interesting ways. One map is an unfolded cube so that every side of it can be individually mapped. Second map is every side of the cube is duplicated. Third is the entire cube structure has video flowing through it. It becomes a compelling, abstract way of managing content; and with each one, you get completely different looks. That's again one of the flexibilities that Ai brings; just being able to change the mapping layer with the touch of a button."

Visualizing in VR

Meacham says one of the other benefits of using Ai is that when the team is putting a project together they always know exactly how it is going to land and how it is going to look before it starts.

Avolites and VR are just a few of the tools that idesign will continue to use as it approaches its 20th anniversary. Still very much at the top of its game with an increasingly global portfolio that encompasses everything from the international super clubs to unique architectural spaces.

"Ai is is absolutely one of our our main tools in our arsenal," concludes Meacham. "The bigger the project is, the more complexity that there is to it, there's never been a point where Ai has not been able to handle the task."

Photo E11even, Cheetah, and Ora: Adi Adinayev: adinayev.com

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