

A trip to Robert Juliat and down memory lane



When international dealers were invited to the Robert Juliat factory in France earlier this year, it was an eye-opening experience to see the dedication in which the company is run.

Robert Izzett from DWR Distribution, the South African distributor, joined the tour and training, was very impressed. "I had the impression that it was a small manufacturer," he said. "They produce more than 10 000 luminaires a year and added to this, make everything except the glass lenses. The factory is extraordinary." The modern factory is mechanised where everything is done from the steel work to the final assembly.



Robert Juliat currently employs around 80 people dedicated to designing and manufacturing stage lighting products. The company operates from a 9.000 m² factory in the suburbs of Paris. Robert Juliat lighting solutions are distributed through a worldwide network including more than 50 distributors on the five continents.

"There is no other company who makes followspots like they do," said Robert. "Robert Juliat is more costly but their product is in a league of its own."



The trip included product training, presented by Ludwig Lepage, Product Manager, known for his lovely nature and huge product knowledge. "I learnt many things I did not know before about RJ Profile and Fresnels," said Robert. "Ludwig was hands on and we disassembled the fixtures and then put them back together again. When I returned to South Africa, I presented the same training to our sales team and it was great to pass this information on."



There is something very special about Robert Juliat as a whole. "The team are incredibly passionate about what they do, believe their products are the best and superior and I think they are right," explained Robert. "Robert Juliat is a family own business and the history goes back to 1919."

Back in time with Robert Juliat



Séverine Zucchiatti and François Juliat on their stand at Prolight and Sound in Frankfurt.

Séverine Zucchiatti, Communications Officer at RJ, explains that the history actually goes back a lot further than that. Her eyes shine as she speaks of the four generation family story that started in 1896 with the beginning of the cinema industry.

Jean Juliat, the founder, was among the pioneers in visual effects, being the technician for Georges Méliès, the inventor of visual effects ("Trip to the Moon", 1902).



His son, Robert Juliat, gave the company its name in 1919. This inventor designed and manufactured not only motion picture projectors, but also some stage lighting fixtures. Why stage lighting for motion picture applications? Simply because a complete movie took several film reels, and while the projectionist was changing the film, there were attractions on stage to keep the audience entertained. Considered a marginal activity at the time, Robert Juliat's future would reveal a real passion for manufacturing stage lighting equipment.



Robert Juliat retired in 1975 and his son, Jean-Charles, took over the company's reigns. Lighting design was Jean-Charles' first love: Starting in 1962, he designed lighting for many festivals and Sound & Light shows. At that time, the Robert Juliat company employed only 7 people. The cinema product line was reaching the end of its life and was discontinued in 1967, but Jean-Charles had expanded the company's efforts in manufacturing stage lighting and, in the early 1970s, he introduced the first modern ranges of theatrical luminaires including the industry's first HMI followspot.



In the 80's, French cultural policies permitted Robert Juliat to grow into a major manufacturer, being the supplier for big projects including Opéra Bastille, Opéra de Lyon, and Théâtre National de Strasbourg. Export also became a priority with successful partnerships in Asia (Tokyo Grand Theater, Shanghai Opera), in North America (Cirque du Soleil, Céline Dion, Broadway shows, San Francisco Opera, Carnegie Hall), and indeed in Europe (2004 Athens Olympic games, Copenhagen Royal Opera, London Royal Opera House, Teatro La Piacenza in Italy, and many more...).



Today, Jean-Charles Juliat leans on his two sons, Frédéric and François, to forward the Robert Juliat philosophy. Managing Director François Juliat is proud of the company's history and keeps the spirit and dynamism alive. He sees growing opportunities for both conventional and new LED ranges and is determined to stay relevant to the modern market.



Did you know?

Robert Juliat often name new lighting fixtures after children born within the RJ family!