

James Harden – Bandit Lites

Posted on February 13, 2025

James Harden left sunny South Africa in 2001 and is the General Manager at Bandit Lights, London branch. We asked him a few questions and enjoyed reading his feedback.



James alongside his wife Jane

Q: *Full Name(s):*

A: James Philip Harden

Q: *What do your friends call you?*

A: James, Jimmy, Jimbob

Q: *In high school, what career did you think you would follow in the future?*

A: This is funny because I worked at JHB Zoo for four years while I was in boarding school. I worked every opportunity I could, weekends, school holidays and

even new years day. It was voluntary work but I loved working with the animals. So I wanted to go into Zoology and was very determined and focused on this, so focused that just before writing my matric final exams I went back down to standard 9 to repeat the standard 9 exams and get better marks to get into Pretoria university. I think there were 30 places and I didn't get accepted. My dad told me I had to study something so it was either Photography or Theatercraft at Wits technicon, I chose Theatercraft. But due to me being more interested in messing about in their studio doing lights and cameras etc I failed my first year. So I left there and went to study a private course in Television Production. In the meantime I started working for the band Cinema (remember them?) I started with a small show helping them setup at Cresta Shopping Centre; I couldn't even plug the guitar in. By the end 1989 (just before I did my military service) I was a partner in a lighting company and could run a full outdoor PA system.

Q: *Did you complete any further studies after school? If so, please describe.*

A: See above for studies, but the best lessons in life were those ones I learnt from my mistakes and working hands on and asking the right questions to the right people. And working damn hard for nothing but the T-shirt.

Q: *What was your career history before moving to England?*

A: While studying right out of school I started working for Cinema. I had to leave them to do my national service in 1990. I landed up going into the television unit and spent a year hanging out of helicopter doors with a camera on my shoulder or standing behind a jet with a boom mike. While in the air force I did band lighting every evening in some night club or other.

When I left the air force on the insistence of my mother to get a 'real job' I got a job at Roodepoort City Theatre, where I stayed for the next four years, designing opera's, ballets and anything else that came into the theatre. I also did sound and some of my recordings were on a couple of cds that were released.

While there I did band lighting and also landed up DJ'ing in a couple of night clubs. It was bizarre going from opera and 20 minutes later playing hardcore Techno in a nightclub. I missed the bands so in 1994 I spoke to Slam Factory and started transporting their equipment and also started to do the same for Just Ginger.

I needed something more challenging and through Slam Factory doing some fashion shows I met Strike productions. While with Strike I had a whole new experience as this as the corporate and fashion industry. One thing I learnt from David Hossy was how to juggle equipment and get the maximum use out of it, something I still use to this day.

Q: *Please could you give a description of the circumstances or events that finally led you to leave South Africa?*

A: I wanted something new and challenging (I do like to throw myself in the deep end). My wife, who I met while working for Strike had studied in the UK and wanted to go live there but while back in SA she met me and stayed. She wanted to go back to the UK so we decided to sell up and move to the UK to expand our careers.

Q: *Do you miss SA and, on the opposite side, what do you most enjoy about working abroad?*

A: Yes I miss SA, I miss the people, the lifestyle (everything is expensive over here), the space (if you've been to the UK you'll know what I'm talking about), the beaches, the weather, but I don't miss the crime. Working in the UK? I love the exposure to the international market. I'm in the centre of Rock 'n Roll working with industry legends, guys that toured with Iron Maiden for 18 years for example. Talking to and dealing with top LDs and top production managers. I also love the accessibility of spares, equipment etc.

Q: *What is your title & give a description of the service you provide to clients?*

A: General Manager for Bandit Lites, London branch. I'm involved in the

everyday running of the company, stock allocation and all the purchasing to keep us running.

Q: *What big events have you worked on?*

A: Too many to list in the past. Best periods and people for me would be working with the band Cinema, working at Roodepoort Theatre, working for and with David Hossy at Strike Productions, working for Bandit Lites. They have all taught me something that makes me into the person I am today.

Q: *Do you have any memories or stories that will either make our readers smile or any experiences that at the time seemed hair-raising and you still managed to pull through?*

A: I could tell you loads but it would be dropping friends and myself in trouble if I told you all the mischief we got up to. One good memory for me is standing FOH and watching Queen in 2005 and again in 2008, I watched them at Sun City when I was 16 and I remember telling my dad that one day I want my name in that program not thinking that one day my name would be in their touring itinerary as a contact for the lighting company and being involved the way I was with the tour, not quite with Queen but at least the tour.



James biking at Donnington Race Track... and an unfortunate crash on another occasion

Q: *Any milestones or things you are proud of that stand out since embarking on this journey?*

A: I think for me personally it is getting married and having a happy family and kids. Having a balanced family life means I have no stress at home which makes it easier to deal with stress at work, it allows me to focus on my work. The biggest career milestone for me is working for Bandit Lites, to be involved in a company that has pioneered the lighting industry and has been going for 40 years (in 2008) is amazing to me and I often have to pinch myself to make sure I'm not dreaming.

Q: *If you are married, could you name your spouse and their profession?*

A: My wife is Jane and we celebrated our 10th wedding anniversary January 2009, she works for the HR department for Belkin computers, a far cry from event management when I met her.

Q: *If you do have children, could you list their names and ages?*

A: Sean was born in 2000 in SA and my daughter, Taryn was born in 2004 in the UK. And a third expected in October 2009.

Q: *Any tips / advice?*

A: Work hard, have the 'Can Do' attitude. Believe in yourself but be humble. Also remember this is life not a rehearsal so make sure you enjoy what you do, if you don't, change it. Surround yourself with people you want to be with and that make you happy. You choose your own way – don't blame others for your under achievement. Never lose those nerves, if your not a little nervous before a show something is wrong.

Q: *What in your life has kept you doing what you do?*

A: Passion and the love for what I do. The satisfaction of putting a real good show

together. Being involved in an industry which has just as much entertainment backstage as it does on stage. The challenge of getting it right on the night.

Q: *Do you have any hobbies or particular interest outside the industry?*

A: It has always been lighting, music and working on shows. That's why I love what I do. I turned a hobby into a career. My passion at the moment (I tend to change them once in a while) is motorbikes. I do track days and live very close to a number of racetracks. Doing stupid speeds (183mph is the most I've seen on my speedo) on the motorbike in a safe environment is a thrill.

I also do decals/stickers for bikes and have built up quite a client base selling them to various people and racers. I've recently started model building (an old childhood hobby) and love the focus and attention it requires. And I've always been into computer games mostly strategy.