

Steve Eastham visits SA with the Robe Fixture Workshop



Years ago, Steve Eastham, a sailor at the time, would pass the Cape in South Africa. On one occasion the merchant ship he worked on stopped off limits to 'stock up on provisions' – in fact the captain had run out of lemons for his gin and tonics!

This time around, in his role as International Customer Support at Robe, Steve was on his first official visit to South Africa as he presented three-day Robe Fixture Workshops, in conjunction with local distributor DWR Distribution, at their offices in Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban during February 2018.

With a great sense of humour and a wonderful ability to tell stories, Steve instructed technicians in the industry on fixture calibration and software updating, and hands-on training on the range of LED and discharge fixtures for maintenance and servicing purposes.



Putting things together and apart is second nature to Steve, a bit of a legend in his time. As a nine-year-old, he remembers taking a clock apart. “I had the bare clock mechanism in front of me and I was taking out one screw at a time,” he fondly recalls. “I got to the very last screw and the spring shot up. Everything flew all over the place and being a good Catholic boy, I prayed to Jesus to put it all together again!”

Steve did not ever get to put everything back together again, but that did not stop his curiosity. “I was always interested in lighting, long before moving lights were around actually. Not from an artistic point of view, but from a technical aspect; I just liked the idea of putting things together. I made a home-built lighting rig out of paint cans and this was my first introduction to the industry.”

He went a step further and built a lighting rig for local bands. “I used to operate this rig with several bands around the town but then my career took over. At that time, I was a Merchant Navy Engineer Officer when in 1986 I heard about Vari-Lite. It just captured my imagination completely! I thought I'd really like to work for this company but coming from the North of England, it wasn't what I would have thought of as a 'proper job'.”



Circumstances changed and when Steve came back ashore, he ended up in a job he wasn't particularly fond of. Again his thoughts wandered to Vari-Lite and he knew he had to give it a try. “I wrote to Vari-Lite in London and asked if there was any chance of a job. They replied, ‘Come down for an interview and we'll see’.”

Steve went down for the interview and spent the whole day being shown around by the manager in the service department. “He asked me, ‘Well if you join us, where do you see yourself?’ and I said, ‘Definitely in the service department.’ He said, ‘You don't want to go on the road?’, and I said, ‘No I don't’, and he replied, ‘In that case

start tomorrow.'

The year was 1992 and Steve stayed on for another 17 years. Steve managed the department through its transition to VLPS after the sale of the Vari-lite brand, and thereafter PRG. When PRG moved up to Birmingham and closed the London office, Steve was invited to move with the company, but he opted instead to go freelance, which he did for three years.

"Until I met Mick Hannaford who heads the Robe UK Operation," he explains. "I remember Mick asking me how I'd fancy joining Robe, and I thought Robe UK, but his vision was for Robe Corporate, and so in 2012, I joined the company. One thing that was very similar to Vari-Lite was the passion that everybody had for what they did. I've been very fulfilled ever since."



Training has become a major part of the international support role as Robe has expanded, new products have been introduced, and new customers have taken up the brand.

Having presented training across the globe, DWR was excited to welcome Steve to South Africa, where any interested technicians within the industry were invited to attend.

The course was well received from the local industry in South Africa as well as from DWR's Workshop Manager Derek Kruger and technician Basinki.

"I think the course helped everyone who was on it," said Derek Kruger, Workshop Manager at DWR. "Steve told us stories of jobs he had worked on which was interesting. He taught many things which were helpful, little tricks we didn't know. It was worthwhile."

Basinki Sekori, a technician at DWR agrees. "The training was motivating, and I learnt a lot."

Ends Steve, "I was very happy to be amongst people, a total of 41 trainees, who were very clued up and incredibly enthusiastic. It's always a good starting point when people at least know which end of the screwdriver to use ;-)"

