



Alex Calle

Alex Calle, previously director of design at Entertainment Design Corp., founded by Jeremy Railton, recently became CEO of the company. He talks to *Lighting & Sound America* about his background, the firm's diverse project portfolio, and what's next for EDC.

LSA: What is your professional background?

Alex Calle: I've been in the theatre since I was seven, but I started out as an actor. It wasn't until I was nine or 10 that I realized there were other people in the theatre telling stories, but with inanimate objects; lights, costumes, effects, and scenic elements were all at their disposal! I came out to CalArts, where I got my bachelors in theatrical scenic design. I worked in LA as an art director for live events, feature films, and TV specials. All was hunky-dory until I found myself out of work in the recession. On some idle Tuesday, I wandered into a bookstore and there was an old art directors directory from '97 or '98. I started at "A" and started making calls! I got to "R," and that was Jeremy Railton. He said, "I need someone who can go to Singapore next week; can you go?" So I was in Singapore for eight or nine months, working on the Crane Dance project.

LSA: What's a mistake you can make when trying to tell a story?

AC: Building a story on a new technology for technology's sake. A new technology comes in, everyone wants to embrace it, and we don't really know how to use it to tell a story; it becomes a gimmick. Inevitably, the hype dies down, and that gimmick becomes a tool in the tool box. That's when it can be an effective device to tell a story. I think that's what we're doing with AR! AR [augmented reality] right now is a gimmick; it hasn't quite found its place in the storytelling toolbox...but I think we'll get there.

LSA: What are some projects EDC has been working on?

AC: We have a huge diversity of projects, from film work to TV to theatre to branding attractions like the Crane Dance, to dark rides for theme parks. We just finished two Dreamworks dark rides at Dubai Parks and Resorts' Motiongate Park, as well as Nicki Minaj's *Pinkprint Tour*. Currently, we're developing a permanent music festival site in Southern California, two nighttime spectacular shows in China and the UAE, a permanent exhibit for a museum in Texas, and a car reveal for the upcoming Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas.

LSA: Coming from a purely design background, how did you find yourself CEO of EDC?

AC: We were actually looking for a CEO while I was director of design. In the interim, I took on more responsibilities and then, probably eight months later, we found I was doing a lot of that work anyway. So we sat down and chatted it through and it just came naturally. Jeremy has really prided himself on our diverse portfolio. We like to take ideas from the themed world and apply them to the theatre world, or take ideas from the theatre world and put them into the art world. It keeps our designers on their toes and has always been one of Jeremy's core values. We share that, and many other values, so I think that's why the step to CEO was so smooth.

LSA: What was the transition like from director of design to CEO?

AC: I love the creative side, but I also really love the business side. I don't think you can focus on the creative elements without the considering the business, but, at the same time, you can't have the business without the creative. Unless you find the true balance, I don't think you can support yourself creatively as well as economically, and I'm forever on the quest to find that sweet spot between the budgeting, the accounting, etc. with the really fun, crazy, and off-the-wall stuff.

LSA: What are the future goals for EDC?

AC: We definitely want to work in New York. We have yet to design a Broadway show; I think we have the design capacity, talent, and wherewithal to do it. We want to keep opening up our Asian division. We have an office in Macau, and we'd love to branch out and create more branding attractions. We're also finding ourselves interested in more fine art installations while continuing to cultivate our roots in live events and award shows. Right now, it's really about us branching out and seeing how many awesome, cool people we can meet and how many awesome, cool projects we can create! 📶