

Pixel imperfect

Mysteries. Life is full of Mysteries. The very first thing I remember being mystified by was how Santa Claus would be able to negotiate our new gas fire. I was perfectly comfortable with the idea of a jolly fat man in a red suit dropping down the chimney onto a grate of hot coals – perfectly natural – it's what jolly fat men did in those days. But gas fires? How weird was that?

Soon after that I became mystified by girls. What were they for? How did they work? (That mystery still stands by the way, so any help on the matter would be gratefully received.)

And it wasn't long before I was asking the same questions of valves – just how did a fancy light bulb make a radio work – and transistors. Questions, by the way, I am also still asking.

I once took a motorcycle apart. Just the once, because having put it back together it never worked again. It stood there, with a definite air of accusation, as if I'd attached its headlamp to its exhaust – which may have been one of the problems. Another mystery, you see. And so it goes on. Puzzle upon riddle upon dilemma. Which brings me to this month's plea.

There will be lots of people who remember what 'cut and paste' really means. Back in the days of paper and scissors and jars of gum, before the time of the colour photocopier and – oh, yes – before the days of scanner and computer. A time that time forgot. Design studios produced ideas boards – mood boards – furniture and fittings combinations, all from manufacturers' catalogues, which meant that lighting companies went through an awful lot of catalogues.

A single project, the cut of scalpel through glossy page, and a ruined catalogue. Can we have another one please? This one's not usable any more. The next project, the cut of the scalpel... and so on. The development of the colour photocopier,



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or even world domination by the computer can reasonably be placed at the collective door of sales and marketing managers going through their company's printing costs.

And then there was the internet, and e-catalogues. Bloody e-catalogues. Ooh, look! We don't have to print our catalogues on paper any more; we can shove everything we do onto our website and just wait for the specifications to roll in. Well, yes, I can see the benefits and hear the arguments, but there's just one thing missing. How to get a decent image off my screen and into an electronic presentation, that modern version of the mood board.

The most important word in that rant is *decent*. Yes, you can pull images off the screen, by fair means or foul, but the chance of getting something worthwhile – larger than a postage stamp and with more than just the two pixels, thank you very much – is rare.

At this point, I'll draw breath and say it's not everyone. I'm not throwing a blanket of opprobrium over the entire industry. Just huge chunks of it.

So if it's helpful – and I trust it will be, because otherwise manufacturers are all doing it on purpose – here's how its meant to go:

The lighting designer (who, for the sake of example, we'll call 'me') is looking for a light fitting. In truth, I'm probably looking for loads of light fittings, so this isn't a one-off before I go and make a cup of tea.

Catalogues, particularly from the more decorative end of the game, are hard to come by. But there are always loads of websites to chase across the keyboard. Look! There's something now. That'll do the job. It won't have the lamp configuration that I'm looking for, the glass diffuser won't be the proper shade of white and, yes, its chrome and not nickel, but what the hell.

And then: I just want a picture of it! That I can paste into a Word document!

That's all. Simple, really. So: can I leave that with you? Cheers.

John Bullock

