

product design

officeinsight



The Amble Light. Design: Stephan Copeland. Photography: Courtesy of LightCorp.

LightCorp Illuminates it's New Direction

by Bob Beck

LightCorp will unveil an astonishing and significant new LED task light by **Stephan Copeland** next week at NeoCon. Astonishing, because this lean, minimalist lamp has only one moving part – and yet, it's a celebration of mobility. Indeed, it's a faithful companion for whoever uses it. And significant because the lamp is unexpected in its form, and perhaps unprecedented in its function – but when you see the simplicity of how it works, you'll smile, smack your forehead and say, "Of course!"

Copeland has dubbed the light "Amble," which is *à propos* because it conveys relaxed and easy movement.

Amble is also significant because it marks a sharpened focus for LightCorp. Founded in 1986 and celebrating 30 years this fall, Grand Haven, Michigan-based LightCorp is probably best known as an OEM supplier to such giants as Steelcase and Herman Miller – but it's also a company that's emerging as a notable lighting marketer in its own right, even as it continues to manufacture products for others.

"Amble represents LightCorp's intentional move toward being a more design-centric organization where innovation, form and function come together as one," said LightCorp



Stephan Copeland. Photo: courtesy of Copeland Studio

General Manager **Kyle Verplank**.
 “We’re elevating our ‘design IQ’ – and Stephan, the Amble light and more products that are in the pipeline are all part of that vision.”



Kyle Verplank. Photography courtesy of LightCorp

I saw a prototype of Amble several months ago at Mr. Copeland’s studio outside Philadelphia. Stephan and I go back as long as LightCorp’s been in existence, to 1986 when he was beginning his career as a designer and I was working for Atelier International.

Montreal-born, Stephan’s work has taken him from Canada to Italy to the United States, and then to Norway and to China, and back again to the U.S. Through the years, he’s become known for evolving the adjustable desk lamp in a series of award-winning design incarnations.

His first lamp with iconic Italian light company FLOS launched at the 1989 Milan Furniture Fair and brought him instant recognition as a lighting designer to be reckoned with. “Tango” broke the mechanical preconception for adjustable arms and achieved a fluid organic movement that was unprecedented. The lamp even appeared

in James Bond films. Not a bad start to a career in lighting.

He then caught the attention of the world’s largest office furniture manufacturer. Steelcase brought Mr. Copeland and Palo Alto design firm IDEO together in the late 1980s, early 1990s when developing its Details brand. The result of that collaboration was the “IOS” light, which became a bestseller. The lamp holds the distinction of being in the permanent collection at the Cooper Hewitt Smithsonian Design Museum in New York and still graces one of my desks. And guess what – the lamp was manufactured for Steelcase by LightCorp!

Mr. Copeland also designed a lamp for **Knoll** (the “Copeland”) and lights for **Luxo** of Norway. His reputation for creative problem solving led to collaborations with NASA and MIT, where he pioneered new levels of performance in computer ergonomics and disabled



CUMBERLAND

beautiful objects that work

Elle Collection seating and table, designed by Cory Grosser, convey motion and energy through continuous lines.

cumberlandfurniture.com 800.401.7877

product design

cycling. He has also enjoyed opportunities to work with the Rhode Island School of Design and the University of the Arts in Philadelphia.

Sometimes, designers get commissioned by companies to design products and other times, the designer has already envisioned, designed, even prototyped the product – and goes shopping for a partner to manufacture it. Such was the case with Amble, and Mr. Copeland took care to find the right match.

Having worked all over the world, Mr. Copeland has seen the pros and cons of working with domestic versus overseas manufacturers. That LightCorp is a U.S.-based manufacturer was a major factor when he started looking for a company to produce the Amble light.

There were other contenders for Amble, including a company in Europe. He'd met LightCorp's leaders at a design show a couple of years before and subsequently was invited to visit its headquarters. At the time, Mr. Verplank was just beginning to form a new team that would take the company in a re-honed direction.

"LightCorp had made lights for such companies as Steelcase and Herman Miller, and I know the expectations these companies have for quality," said Mr. Copeland. "It appealed to me that an American company could produce quality lighting competitively; I love that the jobs making Amble will be here. And I respected the vision and culture that Kyle had begun mapping out for LightCorp."

Mr. Verplank's "Design IQ" vision was formed by studying how the workplace is rapidly evolving with demands for healthier, more sustainable environments.

"Our new organization has been built around our customers, who play in a rapidly changing marketplace where flexibility and agility are required to succeed," said Mr. Verplank.

Looking at these needs, LightCorp

made a strategic decision in January to exit the industrial-lighting market and focus solely on task lighting for several vertical markets. The company contracted with Mr. Copeland to bring Amble to fruition, but also to begin designing other products that fit within its new vision.

Mr. Copeland says a successful design-centric culture starts at the top and then permeates all levels of a company:

"It's really essential, because innovating can be risky and expensive – it often doesn't fit in the model of 'predictable activities' that a lot of businesspeople like to operate in – so there has to be a commitment from leadership. You have to build a culture that's willing and accepting of that process, with the conviction to stick with it and go for the long-term goal. LightCorp has that commitment and conviction and is laser-focused on developing some amazing new products."

LightCorp and Mr. Copeland want to shift the conversation of lighting products from "accessories" to "essential tools."

Mr. Copeland explained, "Lighting designers and interior designers know it's not just about 'a light'; it's about the right lighting. And good lighting must do several things. First, it must help people understand and hopefully feel comfortable in the space they are in.

Second, it must set mood and tone, and ideally convey the personality of a space or an organization. And third, and most important, lighting must focus the flow of visual information so people can do their best work."

As such, Mr. Copeland sees his lights not as workplace accessories but as extensions of their users:

"If you come at it from the point of view of the person, light is more than how one feels in a space. It's about creating great vision. Does that sound like a job for an accessory? No, that's a core component of the performance of a workstation."

Meanwhile, workstations today are more open, their sizes vary, they may be shared, and desks are increasingly height adjustable. These dynamics demand that task lights be adjustable and mobile as well.

"Amble moves with the user," said Mr. Copeland. "Its minimalist, sculpted shape and subtle durability invite the kind of intuitive engagement that's key to great ergonomic lighting."

With no moving joints, hinges, springs or articulation, Amble is a study in reductionism and simplicity.

"Amble brings mechanical movement without the mechanics," said Mr. Verplank. "It's unique in that it addresses a human-centric need that many don't realize they are missing.



Three distinct pools of asymmetrical illumination

product design

officeinsight

It's a lighting experience unlike any other, and when you see how Amble works, it's an 'a-ha!' moment."

Amble is a feat of design and engineering that enables three distinct pools of asymmetrical illumination, ranging from expansive to concentrated, which the user selects simply by tilting the lamp – that's the "a-ha" moment!

A healthy collaboration between design and engineering also allowed LightCorp to achieve such enhanced features as mobility through the use of batteries.

"The battery-powered option makes Amble even more usable in work areas where there might not be power outlets," noted LightCorp Director of Research and Development **Bill Beland**.

"We're breaking new ground here, and there's a lot of excitement internally over the battery option," said LightCorp Marketing Manager **Meghan Meier**. "You can take the light to different spaces and automatically make that space your personalized work center. It has tremendous usability

beyond the obvious office space."

Meier sees Amble being specified not only in offices but also in education, healthcare and lab environments where there may be minimal desktop space for lights.

Amble's only moving part is a gravity-driven gimbal "eye," which automatically prevents the glare so common with adjustable task lights.

"The gimbal eye is as important as the light's mobility," said Mr. Copeland. "The biggest negative with adjustable task lighting is unintended glare, which is when someone adjusts the light in a way that's good for them but exposes the light source to someone else. And LED lights are especially bright and even dangerous to look directly into. Amble solves the problem because the gimbal shade automatically falls to gravity, preventing glare."

Amble also offers built-in USB charging, an occupancy sensor and other technologies that make it a sustainable and significant solution for modern work environments. But, as with all of Mr. Copeland's designs, it makes an

emotional connection with the user.

"How the lamp presents itself to the user is a really big part of the solution," said Mr. Copeland. "Think about it: You're sharing space with an object closer than you probably sit next to people all day. So we designed Amble in a way that's comfortable and sort of flows and blends with the dynamic person in the workspace. I'm a big believer that objects should be physically and emotionally compatible with people – and tools like lights should be especially friendly and approachable."

"Stephan has designed a brilliant light that signals to the market what we're capable of and where we're headed," said Mr. Verplank.

So while LightCorp is celebrating its 30-year anniversary, it is striking out in a new direction, having undergone a corporate rebranding as part of marking the milestone and moving into the future on the shoulders of a breakthrough product. I strongly recommend that you stop by space 7-8062 at NeoCon to experience Amble for yourself and see if I've exaggerated. ■



Amble's "gimbal eye" automatically rotates as the position of the light is changed, thus preventing glare.