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Robe SmartWhites for Al Jazeera London Studio

Products Involved

LEDWash 800™

A special version of Robe's ROBIN LEDWash 800 PureWhite SW fixture was specified by lighting designer and broadcast lighting and visual media effects specialist, Manfred Ollie Olma, from Cologne, Germany based lighting and visual design practice, mo2 design, for the new state-of-the-art Al Jazeera broadcast studio in London.

The studio, located on the 16th floor of The Shard in London features 80 of these Robe moving lights. mo2 design was commissioned by set design and constructor Studio Hamburg, Germany's leading production service centre for film and television, which installed the studio's set and infrastructure on the strength of their designs for other high profile TV studio installations. These have included Phönixhof in Hamburg (also using Robe lights) and Sky Sports News in Munich.

mo2 is known for its lateral and 'out-of-the-box' solutions to lighting challenging spaces, and they have also worked with Studio Hamburg and its various subsidiaries for many years on a diversity of TV and broadcast projects.

The 600 square metre London studio is divided into two elements - the News Studio and the News Room. The hub of the main studio is a 4 person desk in front of a video wall with a city view background, and a 3- person talk desk with a News Room background and a city view. The News Room features workstations buzzing with activity and the general hubbub of global news gathering. This is a format common to Al Jazeera facilities worldwide, and mo2 design had the chance to work on both spaces simultaneously, ensuring complete visual continuity.

Ollie and mo2 design Project Director Matthias Allhoffs' brief was to install a scheme offering the highest quality broadcast lighting in terms of uniformity, colour spectrum and perfect lighting angles to eliminate any shadowing on faces, etc.

The flexibility of mo2's solution means that lighting states can be changed and tweaked extremely quickly - imperative when broadcasting live on a daily basis.

Due to the low ceiling height of the space - just 2.7 metres - the idea was that the lighting fixtures remained in shot and became a visible and distinctive part of the Al Jazeera London set designed by Veech Media - along with the commanding panoramic London views out of the iconic Shard building!

This made the space a lot more dynamic, exciting and 'live' than the average TV studio set where lighting is usually hidden from the cameras, a fact that also affected the choice of lighting fixtures. So the mo2 design needed lighting that was appropriate for the technical tasks in hand as well as being truly harmonious with the visual environment. Being visible in all the studio shots, it was essential that the fixtures looked cool ... as well as doing their job.

Theoretically they had the choice between three different lightsources - tungsten / halogen, daylight or LED, however they picked Robe's tunable SmartWhite LED option because their warm and cold white outputs - something they had experimented with extensively in previous years - were excellent. A new version of the ROBIN LEDWash 800 PureWhite SW was produced, complete with a rotating beam-shaper, which in combination with the zoom gives additional control over the beam - and eliminates the need for barn-doors. The fixture is also made with the newest and brightest LEDs, has an increased efficiency ratio than the previous generation models, and is the same expedient size as the ROBIN LEDWash 600 even though it's an 800 fixture.

Moving lights are not particularly a standard or even common in news studios like this, but the low ceilings also meant that they would not be able to cover all the required camera / presenter / guest positions using a conventional fixed lighting rig.

The large window areas behind the Newsroom and the Studio revealing those fabulous views also meant that daylight and sunlight - bringing varying colour temperatures and intensity stream into the set during the daylight hours- so any luminaires had to be adjustable to compensate for either high or low brightness levels.

Another parameter reinforcing their somewhat unconventional choice of fixture was the 24-hour operation of Al Jazeera London, which meant that any equipment had to be 100% reliable. mo2 knew first-hand from its other projects - both in television studio and live entertainment lighting - that Robe hardware and engineering is rock solid!

Other advantages are the low maintenance requirements of the LED fixtures and the low heat output of the lightsource, which does not contribute significantly to temperatures in the studio.

The ROBIN LEDWash 800 PureWhite SW produces a flexible output and a uniform colour temperature, and moving - or multi-functional - fixtures as they prefer to call them in this context, also bring more advantages to a Newsroom / Studio scenario, like remote control of the movement ... allowing new positions to be created very quickly with minimal crew.

They offer plenty of light output to compensate for changing daylight conditions which can include very strong sunlight in this particular case. The colour temperature is variable between 3000 and 6000 Kelvin, the CRI / TLCI rendering is good, there is a 15 - 60 degree zoom and all functions can be accessed and operated via a DMX lighting console.

The 'theatre mode' for silent operation is also crucial for news studios at times, and the power-consumption-to-light-output ratio for a unit smaller than a fresnel is impressive.

And ... clearly visible on camera ... they look absolutely super cool! Matthias reports that "Robe also stepped right up to the mark with some special features after listening to our recommendations".

"It was a big step for Al Jazeera to go with this new and multi-functional approach to lighting," comments Matthias, "But they were interested right from the start in embracing the new and different ideas we suggested, and soon as they went on air, they realised how well it is working for them". The lighting installation and integration was completed by Lichtforum Berlin GmbH who supplied the Robe fixtures to the project's general contractor, Studio Hamburg. mo2 was supported throughout the project by Robe's German distributors, LMP.



