

Lighting up France

BY ELLEN LAMPERT

■ As the demand for specialised lighting for French television increased, Dimaphot created a subsidiary company, D. Studios, to deal exclusively with studio lighting. D. Studios designed and installed lighting for almost half of the studios in France last year, including A.B. Studios (1, 2), one of France's largest TV producing companies.

● *Quand la demande d'éclairage spécialisé pour la télévision française s'est accru, Dimaphot a créé une société subsidiaire, D. Studios, afin de traiter en exclusivité l'éclairage des studios. Ils ont dessiné et fait l'installation pour environ la moitié des studios créés en France depuis l'année dernière, y compris A.B. Studios (1, 2), une des plus grandes sociétés de production française.*

▼ Als die Nachfrage nach spezieller Beleuchtungsausrüstung für das französische Fernsehen stieg, gründete Dimaphot die Tochtergesellschaft D. Studios, die sich ausschliesslich mit Studiobeleuchtung befasst. Im vergangenen Jahr entwarf und installierte D. Studios die Beleuchtung für fast die Hälfte der Fernsehstudios in Frankreich, einschliesslich A.B. Studios (1,2), eine der größten französischen TV-Produktionsgesellschaften.

There are three companies in France which share the pie," says Jean-François Hocquard, president of Dimaphot, one of three major French distributors of lighting equipment for photography, film and television. Dimaphot offers stiff competition to its rivals, L.T.M. and Eclalux, especially in the area of television studio lighting.

"There is nothing here to get excited about," says Hocquard, who admits to doing 24 million francs (UK £2.3 million, US \$4 million) worth of business last year. For although his slice may be the biggest, the pie it is cut from is not very big. According to Hocquard, the total sales of lighting equipment in France on an annual basis is only 200 million francs (UK £17 million, US \$30 million) and that includes lighting for theatre, dance, opera, film, and television. Why is the market so small? "Only 5,000 people in France are interested in lighting on a professional basis," Hocquard explains. "Lighting is not really valued as an art, especially in the French theatre, where until recently it served only to light the scenery." Hocquard goes on to say that the credit "lighting designed by" is only beginning to be important in the theatre.

"France is a country where people don't change very fast, and when they do they go too far. When designers here have the opportunity to use Vari*Lite, for example, they are too excessive," he comments wryly. "There are only a few real lighting designers in France, and those few work all the time and are very well paid. For many producers lighting designers are simply too expensive."

Hocquard's position can perhaps be explained by the lack of an educational market in France, and by the dense centralization of the performing arts and television and film production in Paris. Says Hocquard, "Generally, theatre is not taught in the high schools, and there are very few places for technicians to learn about lighting.

"The reading of the literature, yes," explains Hocquard, "the staging of the plays, no! As a result," he continues, "there is no school market and no real community theatre market to spark sales." In addition, many regional governments buy lighting equipment and make it available to local theatre companies. "This cuts into the market," says Hocquard. "The state is too involved, which cuts down on the normal rate of commerce." Photography, film and now television provide a livelier market. It is here that Dimaphot concentrates its efforts.

Dimaphot was founded in 1947, just after World War II, and served as the French distributor for Westinghouse photographic lighting equipment. Jean-François Hocquard bought Dimaphot in 1984, and remains its sole owner. Hocquard, a no-nonsense businessman, began his career importing photography equipment into France. In the early 1980s, as the French television industry began to expand dramatically, Hocquard bought the forty-year-old company. Today, Dimaphot offers a wide range of international lighting equipment, ranging from clamps, lamps, and tripods to Roscos and filters, for which they are the exclusive French distributor, and a full line of DeSisti lighting instruments imported from Italy. "The DeSisti