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November 2011

entertainment, presentation, installation

plasma media

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# Classic Gear: BlackWrap

Rob Halliday takes a nostalgic but instructive look back at the tools that have shaped the industry . . .

Even the best lighting fixture in an imperfect instrument. Sure, it directs most of the light towards the target, but there is always some stray, escaping from the edge of the beam, leaking from ventilation or accessory slots, or sneaking out of the gaps between the light itself and accessories like scrollers. Or the official beam control devices might not quite be up to the work demanded of them, barndoor flaps that are not quite long enough or with annoying gaps between them.

For all these situations, and countless more, there is a cure: BlackWrap.

It's a cool name that effectively describes both the product and the function of this simplest, most effective of classics: a matt black foil that can be wrapped around lighting fixtures, compensating for those imperfections by catching or controlling the stray light. Of course, its apparent simplicity only exists because the product has been refined behind the scenes until it is just right. Think about the way it is flexible enough to mould to any shape yet stiff enough to retain that shape, gripping on to whatever it is wrapped around. Think about how it stays black rather than flaking away when exposed to the heat of a lighting fixture - even the big ones beloved by the film world, where BlackWrap often provides the only beam control.

That refinement took place in the early eighties, in the hands of Joe Tawil and his company Great American Market - GAM. He recalls walking through a back alley at Samuelsons in London and seeing a guy spray painting aluminium foil black. When asked what it was for, the reply was, "I don't know, but the cameraman wants it." A few days later in New York another film company, another guy, another sheet of aluminium foil and another can of black spray paint triggered the proverbial lightbulb moment. A new product was born.

At least, the idea was born. Idea to reality took a few more years, of choosing a foil with that perfect balance of crumpleability and firmness (the goal to avoid having to use tape, since some poor soul would just have to clean the adhesive from the light later on), figuring out how to coat aluminium foil a robust flat black - even persuading suppliers used to much larger industries to play with the relatively small world of entertainment lighting.

Which meant BlackWrap did not appear until mid-1983. Tawil's dealers thought him crazy. But his customers loved the product straight away. "How did we make movies before there was BlackWrap?" was the comment from Paramount's purchasing agent, some years later once it was firmly established.

It has imitators now, of course, as all good products do. But it also has awards, receiving an 'Outstanding Achievement in Engineering Development' Television Arts & Science Award in 2004. It continues to be found everywhere, part of every lighting technician's toolkit. And it continues to be invaluable. Turns out even the latest, most technologically advanced lighting fixtures are also imperfect instruments - and BlackWrap is just as useful at curing their imperfections as it has been with the generations of lighting fixtures that have come before.

> **BlackWrap:** <http://plasa.me/blackwrap>



BlackWrap from GAM.

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