



## Rick Hutton

The founder of Dallas-based InLight Gobos, Rick Hutton has enjoyed a storied career. He talks about some of his many gigs. He also notes that lighting products come and go, but gobos are forever.

**Lighting&Sound America:** How did you get started in the business?

**Rick Hutton:** I have always known that this was the industry I wanted to work in. In my senior year of high school, I did sound and lighting for local bands. I found a job with a little sound and lighting company in Dallas called Stillwater Group Industries, starting out in audio and moving into lighting. I went from there to Little Stage Lighting, doing technical service on dimmers and working in the manufacturing facility. I also worked for Edwin Jones Company, and then I joined Show Lights in Dallas in 1982. Then I hit the road touring—first with Journey and then on Van Halen’s *Diver Down Tour*. I went to work for Vari-Lite in 1984, going out as a road tech with The Thompson Twins and numerous other bands. In 1985, I became Eric Clapton’s lighting designer while also transitioning into Vari-Lite’s research-and-development group for the VL4, 5, 6, and 7, doing a lot of the optical design.

I developed the industry’s first laser-ablated gobos in 1994. I talked with Vari-Lite about branching off and starting an independent gobo company, but they weren’t interested; they wanted to keep it in-house. I left Vari-Lite at the end of ’98 and had another business going, buying and selling laser and optics equipment over the Internet. A couple of years later, I was introduced to Michael [Tannemyr, of Beacon AB]. He offered for me to open a gobo company in Dallas, using his gobo technology. We opened our doors in 2002. We’re coming up on 15 years in August.

**LSA:** How has InLight Gobos grown over time?

**RH:** I’ve opted to keep the company small and focused on what we do best, manufacturing the best colored gobos in the world. I’m very hands-on on the production side, along with my wife, Adriana. We deal directly with high-end designers and production houses, as opposed to having dealers around the country, as our competitors have done. With them, if you’re somewhere and have a problem, you’ve got to call the dealer, and they’ve got to call the manufacturer, and, typically, by the time you’ve got that all in place, it’s too late to ship anything that day. Our manufacturing is streamlined; we can have gobos delivered within the same

day, pretty much anywhere in the country. We can respond instantaneously and we have expedited shipping methods. Being centrally located in Texas, we’re good for both the East and West Coasts. We’ve had numerous emails saying, “You have no idea what this means to us!”

**LSA:** How relevant are gobos in the age of LED productions?

**RH:** Gobos are going to outlast pretty much everything. Incandescent lamps use gobos, arc lamps use gobos, LEDs use gobos. Whatever the next source may be, there will still be gobos. The luminaire manufacturers still build projection stops that use gobos. There are millions out there and millions more coming. With LED technology, everybody said, “Okay, great, there’s no heat, so you can print your own gobos!” And that’s true, with lower-powered LEDs. When you get into the higher-powered LEDs used in automated lights, plastic gobos last a very short time, because the energy density from the visible light through the projection gate still absorbs, and you have failures. Dichroic gobos can withstand the energy densities.

**LSA:** How does InLight Gobos support the environment?

**RH:** We are environmentally conscious as people and as a company. We do whatever we can to help the environment. Replacing all the lamps with ballast-free LEDs was a huge change—in illumination levels through the building, reduction of noise hum from ballasts, and heat. We’ve wanted to do this for a couple of years, but the price of LED tubes was high and the efficiency wasn’t really good. But, in the last year, prices have gone down, efficiency has gone up, and I thought it was time to do it.

**LSA:** What would you say to companies who think going more energy-efficient is too much trouble?

**RH:** It’s not. It’s just about getting with it and doing it.

**LSA:** What can we expect from InLight Gobos in the future?

**RH:** More and more! Keep making gobos, and we’re looking at other things that might come along in the future. But we plan to keep making our clients happy. 🎧