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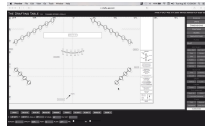Home    News    **Current Issue**    SM Kit    Illuminations    Gear    SD Video    Bookshelf    Theatre Resources Directory

# Current Issue

### Gear Review
## Simply Powerful


A basic plot in Drafty.

### Drafty hits the mark with a CAD program built for theatre

Email    Print    Email
Written by Craig Rutherford
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Today's CAD packages have—and this is perhaps an understatement—a lot of power beneath their proverbial hoods. An industry-standard drafting suite like Vectorworks or WYSIWYG costs thousands of dollars, not only in up-front costs but in ongoing update and maintenance fees. They also demand many hours in training or searching through forum posts or watching YouTube tutorials looking for the exact function one needs. The creators of Drafty decided this was unacceptable, and thus, Drafty was born.


Creating a mirror image of a group of lights is simple in Draft.

**Using the Software**

Unique among current software that provides similar functionality, Drafty runs entirely within your internet browser—just visit the webpage and go. Currently, only Safari and Chrome are supported browsers. This is a touch disappointing for a die-hard Firefox fan like myself, but the developers say that Firefox support is forthcoming.

Once there you are presented with an empty plot with a centerline and plasterline. The application helpfully fills in several industry-standard titleboxes on the right (symbol key, designer name and contact, scale, etc.). The right-hand toolbar contains most of the application's main functions—layer controls, object and drawing toolbars, project controls and file save, import/export functions—while the bottom part of the screen is a context-sensitive menu that changes depending on the currently-selected object.

Drawing in Drafty is easy. While the application lacks some of the more esoteric features found in other programs, it makes up for it with a more streamlined workflow. Placing objects in Drafty is done with the right-hand toolbar, and these buttons all use the modifier keys (Alt, Ctrl, Shift, and Command/Win Key) to access additional functionality of these controls. For instance, hold down Command and the "ERS" button becomes the "Mover" button. Hold down Shift and it inserts a PAR64 luminaire instead.

Objects can be modified with the context menu at the bottom of the screen. Selecting an object allows you to enter manual X/Y positions, rotational data, set the make and model on moving lights, change the color of an object, and more. Drafty uses a fixed layer set, and each object that you create will automatically assign itself to a layer based on what class of object it is. For instance, if you add a light while on the Scenic layer, Drafty will automatically move it to the Units layer. All scenic objects, from basic rectangles to chairs, automatically appear on the Scenic layer. This is a nice feature, and helps keeps things organized. Navigation-wise, only objects on the currently-selected layer can be moved or interacted with. Adding multiple lights quickly is a snap, with convenient duplication functions. The units automatically inherit their position name and number themselves sequentially based on their position on a pipe or truss, though of course you can add channel numbers, as well as gels colors, scrollers, top hats and other accessories.

It's hard to overstate how intelligent the designers have made this application: simple operations like rotating lights that are snapped to a pipe or truss works the way one *imagines* it should— select them and rotate. The lights will rotate around *their individual center points* on the pipe, instead of rotating around the center of the group and forcing the user to individually rotate them. Move that same pipe without selecting the lights first and the lights move with it without having to manually group them together first. Select a group of units and click "Mirror" and get exactly that —a mirror-image group, no further work required.
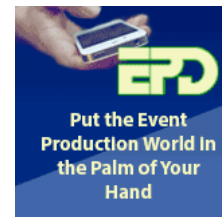
**Pushing Limits**

While primarily aimed at lighting and set paperwork, Drafty has some additional features that will make it attractive to both sound and video people, like rack layout and workflows. There's a lot of

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functionality here, and I recommend reading the Getting Started guide on the Drafty website for a more in-depth discussion of the capabilities of these tools.

Of all the limitations that Drafty has, perhaps the most significant is that the application itself resides on the internet, and without a connection to the internet the save and open functions will not be available. That said, once the program is cached in the browser, you will still be able to draw and continue without interruption when the network connection is reestablished. Secondly, while it does support importing PDF files to use as a base layer, it does not support the more industry-standard AutoCAD DXF/DWG file formats. Of course, there are free external viewers to turn these files into PDFs, but it's an extra step.

Ultimately, Drafty strives to balance usability and power, and presents itself as an effective solution for people who need to get things done quickly with a minimum of fuss while remaining affordable. It isn't a program to do *everything;* it's a program to accomplish essential paperwork in a streamlined and elegant package without weighing itself down with unnecessary excess.

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