



PROFESSIONAL PROFILE:

Name: Anne Dresbach
Profession: Sr. Lighting Designer
Company: VDA Inc.
Experience: 20+ years
Hometown: Berkeley, California, USA
Location: Boston, Massachusetts, USA
Blog Article: [VDA's Viewpoints featuring Anne Dresbach](#)
Recent Shows: *We Belong* art installation, INBOUND Conference, CrowdStrike Fal.con Conference, ArtBeat, Boston Gay Men's Chorus Performances

Senior Lighting Designer Anne Dresbach is a powerhouse Project Manager and Lead Lighting Designer at VDA Inc. With a wealth of experience in the theatre and event space, Anne is a trailblazer in the lighting industry. Her journey began in high school when she signed up for the tech crew for the school's spring musical, where she learned to focus lights and then moved on to run the light board. She received her BFA from Emerson College in Boston, Mass., and has worked for 20+ years in the Greater Boston area, lighting projects ranging from experiential art to dance to corporate trade shows and more.

THE INTERVIEW:

City Theatrical (CT): Hi Anne! Congrats on all your success as an experiential lighting designer with VDA Inc. in Boston and beyond! Can you tell us about a recent or favorite project that you've created with our QolorFLEX NuNeon® linear lighting?

Anne Dresbach (AD): We were involved in a project called [We Belong](#). It was with an artist called Yu-Wen Wu, and a company called [BRM Production Management](#), a partner on this project, brought us on. They do project management for big art projects. The final art installation was first located in East Boston, outdoors on the side of a building, and it is now located at Boston City Hall.

Our role in the project was to fabricate an artist's vision of inspirational words written around an eight-foot circle. It says, 'We belong here together, guided by the same stars'. One of the reasons that we took on

the project is because we thought it was a great message for the community.

We used QolorFLEX NuNeon, RGB for the 'We' and the 'belong here together'. The words, 'guided by the same stars', were all single color QolorFLEX NuNeon strips mounted onto a metal frame. We built a circular 'target' frame to be able to attach the cursive words seamlessly, using something as simple as zip ties in most places. It all gets connected to make a constellation using 12V LEDs, based on the layout of different neighborhoods in the city of Boston, then it cycles through, over and over. We used QolorFLEX 24x3A Dimmers to provide dimming control within a temperature-rated control box. All the components inside the box, including power supplies, are outdoor rated.

The framing is all welded together and then we made sure things were close to the right cut points. We put brackets in to help support some of the words. We wired everything through the back. The words

'We Belong' are on a different level than the other words. We made little points to elevate different words and see if there's any better pictures. Then we just sealed everything we could with different tapes. It was an interesting project!

CT: Why did you choose QolorFLEX NuNeon, RGB for the first part of the *We Belong* art installation?

AD: We wanted everything to be QolorFLEX NuNeon, RGB, for the most flexibility of color depending on the installation space. Price point, of course, dictated the decision to make half of the installation in single color QolorFLEX NuNeon, as the artist wanted multiple languages and different layers at first. It was fascinating working with an artist who doesn't know the medium of LED lighting, as she works more in fabric. We had to work with her to understand price point, time, labor, and how it all goes together. We discounted as much as we could because it is for public art. VDA Inc. tries to work with



We Belong. Photo credit: Yu-Wen Wu.

“Our role was to fabricate an artist’s vision of inspirational words written around an eight-foot circle, ‘We belong here together, guided by the same stars’. We took on the project because we thought it was a great message for the community.”

artists on projects like this that are for the community. Check out more great photos of the project available through.

CT: Where in Boston City Hall is the We Belong art installation now?

AD: It is located upstairs, hanging down from the balcony. It is on one of the walkways to get around to many of the offices through City Hall.

We pre-programmed it for the East Boston outdoor location, where it was from June 2022 through January 2023. We then reprogrammed it for City Hall such that the colors are different from those used outside in East Boston. It is a different atmosphere in City Hall, so we decided to make some things change faster, and make some things slower.

It's large and impactful and we are very happy with how it turned out! Look forward to seeing where it goes next.

CT: How did you get started as a Lighting Designer?

AD: I grew up in northern California and came to Boston to go to [Emerson College](#). I graduated with a full-time job as the House Electrician for the [Huntington Theatre Company](#), when they were building a new theater. I was with them for two seasons. I freelanced for a while, and then I was a Lighting Director.

My background is in lighting, doing mostly dance. That's what got me into it. I love it!

“My background is lighting dance. That’s what got me into it. My role is now doing lighting design for trade shows booths, corporate meetings, and other large-scale events. And we’ve always done LED on scenic. That work has just bloomed.”

If I could make a living off of lighting only dance, I would.

My role is now a Senior Lighting Designer for VDA Inc. I was brought into the company to do lighting design for exhibit and conference projects, corporate meetings, and other large-scale events that we do. Then COVID happened, and my role morphed, and I used my skills to do a lot of virtual events and renderings. We also started doing a lot more permanent installations during that time, and we've always done LED on scenic. I started taking over some of that and it just bloomed.

Now, I do most of the LED installations. If I'm not the one physically soldering it, I'm at least figuring out all the math to make sure that we've got the right dimmers, drivers, and power supplies, and have a team who can put it together. Here at VDA Inc., I do a lot less lighting design, and a lot more fabrication and help getting the overall vision done as a project manager.

CT: Have you worked with our newest QolorFLEX NuNeon models, which include windows along the side walls to see the soldering pad locations, for easier cutting and soldering?

AD: I'm really excited to be able to see into windows so it doesn't feel like I'm doing surgery on the neon with my exacto scalpel. I can't wait to try it out!

That's been one of the interesting things, going through the generations of lighting technology. The previous version of LED neon we used to use felt like fake silicone. It had everything printed on the outside, and you'd have to jab into it and pray that you got it right. It was around 18" cutting increments. Your current QolorFLEX NuNeon with 5cm cutting increments is crazy small compared to that! I love that QolorFLEX NuNeon's 5cm cutting increments give you that flexibility to get close to what our designers come up with. I can get exactly what I want.

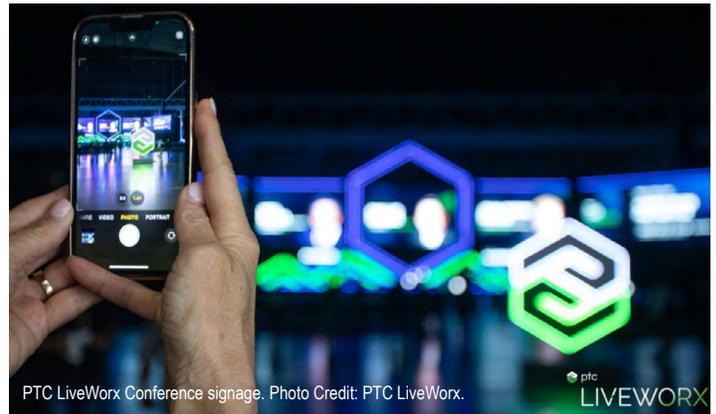
CT: Can you tell us about any other interactive or experiential projects that used QolorFLEX NuNeon?

AD: We did a conference called INBOUND in 2022. They used the word INBOUND as a scenic piece, complete with an archway that conference participants could walk through. The client wanted a colored archway with neon strips on the bottom, so the colored light would shine in. I used



**CITY
THEATRICAL**
NEW YORK • LONDON

“When you’re designing a space, you’re looking at everything: brightly painted places, what light we’re hitting it with, and areas to keep hidden.”



PTC LiveWorx Conference signage. Photo Credit: PTC LiveWorx.

QolorFLEX NuNeon at the bottom to light the way.

When you’re designing light for a space, you’re looking at what other colors they’re using around you’re installation. It means you’re looking at everything: places that are really brightly painted, what gates are being used, what light we’re hitting it with, where we don’t want it to hit and how to keep that hidden.

With QolorFLEX NuNeon, we’re able to make funky corners! We use the LED ribbon to make corners light enough, and often we’re able to use a little bit of extra silicone past the final LED to get the light behind it as well. Again, it’s nice to have QolorFLEX NuNeon’s 5cm cutting increment and be able to get it exactly how you want.

CT: Can you tell us more about the design, assembly and transportation of this larger than life scenic element?

AD: We were able to get the QolorFLEX NuNeon all the way up to the middle and had a cap on the end of each piece. It had to have a split there because we wanted it to travel as two pieces.

For INBOUND and similar exhibit and conference installations, I go on location for the installation because of how much QolorFLEX NuNeon is used in it. We needed to make sure that should something go wrong, I can solder it up and fix any LED issues that may arise. I usually send extra LED neon, usually full spools, in case I need to put something together quickly.

Other jobs I design, like CrowdStrike Fal.con Conference, we use QolorFLEX

NuNeon to highlight various scenic elements. We had the opportunity to design the entire Expo experience, including the center booth and giant Adversary Sculptures, which are awesome! They then lit the Adversary Sculptures and made them look even cooler than they already were.

CT: Do you work with another designer or design team to put together these large scenic elements?

AD: VDA Inc.’s experiential marketing is designed by [David G. Breen](#), who is the Founder and Principal Designer of VDA Inc. His background is in scenic design. He also went to Emerson College, which is how we met, but we didn’t go at the same time.

Our scenic designers will come up with the design approved by the clients. Then I’ll work with them on design and fabrication, often to ensure the LED ribbon in all scenic design builds is connected, functioning, and beautiful.

CT: Have you standardized how you use QolorFLEX NuNeon in scenery, i.e. using standard sizes or making portions of strips into fixtures?

AD: Yes, we commonly use QolorFLEX NuNeon, RGB in eight-foot lengths, but also have sizes ranging from eight- to 10-feet for different projects. We have a bunch of drivers on boards that I can use for everything as well. I like to be able to connect however many strips I need to each driver.

CT: Do you have a process for using/reusing these standard sized cuts of QolorFLEX NuNeon?

AD: In general, if we’re going to use it, we try to make it reusable. We even have a repurposing project in which if materials are not needed again, we’ll post them on the Facebook page for VDA Inc., such that artists are able to come and get the LED strips or other materials and reuse them.

We also do a lot of graphic wraps for one-time events, many of which have the meeting info and dates printed on them and can never be used by us again. After the event, we like it when artists come and take the graphic wraps as fabrics to reuse them into different projects. It helps the artists save money and keep things out of landfills. It’s a win-win.

CT: Sounds like you have a great variety of projects going on for you in Boston with VDA Inc.! Are you working on any other projects you want to mention?

AD: Yes! It’s busy. The art projects are mostly here in Boston, and exhibit and conference projects range from the New England area to Las Vegas and beyond. As the PM or the SLD for an exhibit or conference project, you’re going to make sure that everything lights up right and is beautiful. It’s fun.

I never thought corporate lighting would be what I’d do, but [David G. Breen, Principal Designer of VDA Inc.](#), is great because he understands that all of us are artists as well. I have outside clients I had before I started working at VDA Inc., and so I still get to light Boston area concerts and dance shows.

**CITY
THEATRICAL**
NEW YORK • LONDON



I work with [ArtBeat](#) in the city of Somerville, Massachusetts. They shut down Davis Square, which is one of their neighborhood areas, and put on an art festival with vendors up and down the street. I'm in one of the theaters.

Artbeat includes nine dance companies that I'm doing lights for, and it's a crash tech on everything the morning of the performance. In 20 minutes per dance, we then run the show that afternoon and then it's done. I get to work with the choreographers and dancers, so that is one of the coolest aspects of this work. I get to borrow gear from VDA Inc. to work on shows like these, Artbeat as well as five different dance companies, which is nice.

CT: Which fixtures that you love to use for live events?

AD: I typically choose my fixtures based on the gobos that are already inside of them, and what matches the company's branding. When I'm working outside of VDA Inc. projects, I work with a lot of companies that don't have much budget for lighting. I get more creative when I see my limitations. How do I help create your vision within these limitations? It's a challenge I enjoy.

CT: When did you start working on smaller shows?

AD: When I was getting my BFA in Design and Technology at Emerson College. I love lighting design and the production electrician work. I like working on small shows on which I end up doing both, because they don't have the budget. I don't

mind doing both. I run the shows often too, because they are on a smaller scale.

CT: What is your favorite project that you've worked on, whether it's a student project or your own freelance project or a VDA Inc. project?

AD: [Boston Gay Men's Chorus](#) is one of one of my favorite companies to work with. We have a blast every time.

I do three dance shows a year with them, with the March, Pride, and Holiday concerts. They're at [Jordan Hall](#) typically. A choreographer I worked with before mentioned to me that it's like choreographing in a bowling alley, specifically in a bowling lane, in this venue for this large group. You end up having the orchestra upstage or the choir and their musicians upstage, and a narrow space to choreograph for 12-15 dancers on different songs, or for the group on the risers. I work mostly directly with the choreographer but [Reuben Reynolds](#), the Music Director, is very involved in all components of the performance.

One of my favorite dance choreographers, Michelle Chassé, wanted them to dance with lights in their hands. We bought [Astera Tubes](#) at VDA Inc., and I controlled those and designed them to be different colors, like a lightsaber. They used the song '[Relax](#)', and choreography to work with the song. This performance, like all the others, was so much fun.

CT: How would you describe your aesthetic in a couple of words?

AD: Painting with light is one way I think of it. Even in a corporate scenario, I get to paint with light. Dance is so much painting with light, shadows, and the artists. The dancers are my canvas.

CT: Are there any special techniques you use when lighting dance, or other live performance?

AD: Light helps draw on emotions. Even the slightest color changes can pull so much out of a moment. Then speed can also help. If something's slow on stage, you make the change slowly and with even intensity. The dance hits the person one more way than just seeing them move.

A few years ago, we did a piece with choreographer Janet Taisey Craft, based on four sisters and 40 years of their family photos. I didn't do saturated colors on that one. It was more of varying the different shades of white light and a little more amber, a little more pink, and a little more blue. Just that subtlety can really draw a lot more emotion out of your design.

CT: If there could be any lighting technology added to your toolbox, what would it be?

AD: I often don't realize that I'm missing something until I see that thing being used. I bought a [DMXcat](#) recently, after I saw someone else using it on a site. I now realize it makes life much better!

CT: Do you work primarily with LED tape and QolorFLEX NuNeon in terms of the scenic stuff that you're doing or are you working with fixtures with gobos?

AD: Pre-COVID it was more on the design side, with fixtures. Post-COVID, it's more on the LED side.

I'm probably installing 75% LEDs in the scenic stuff and its mostly LED tape. We'll do glow columns, or a column that glows with different LED strips in it. When we build things for TV studios, I always turn to City Theatrical to learn more

about the latest and greatest LED tape technology.

CT: When you make a glow column, how do you build the structure?

AD: Usually we'll play the tape out straight because it's typically just the front face that glows. Most of our booths are against walls, it depends if there is storage space in the center. We then only have to make it pretty on the outside.

The build usually consists of an acrylic front, which is what we make glow, and then run the tape and add the connectors. Then we wire things to whatever we need



INBOUND Conference 2022. Photo credit: VDA Inc.

to and find a spot in the back to put the controllers, which are just screwed onto a board. I can then attach the board wherever the best location in the storage closet is.

CT: Any shout outs that you want to do for people who have helped you or people that you want to promote?

AD: Lance James, who got me into lighting. He ran my high school theater. He was the Technical Director. We had a Roadhouse on our campus at [Berkeley High School](#). I got to work on the tours as a high school student. I was pretty lucky. He was the one who made sure to always assign me with the lighting during those shows and got me into the direction that I am now.

Russ Swift and Scott Pickney were two of my professors and mentors at Emerson. They both did a lot for me. Jason Ries helped me back into this industry again, after having kids. He gave me good opportunities and took a chance on me,

which I will always appreciate. Aparna Sindhoor and Anil Natyaveda are directors from [Navarasa Dance Theater](#) who inspire my design aesthetic and creativity.

CT: Do you consider yourself more East Coast or West Coast?

AD: Emerson College was why I left Berkeley for Boston. Graduating with the full-time job among other life things is why I didn't go back. My original plans were to go back to Berkeley and establish my career in the Bay Area, because I love it there. I moved to Boston in 2000 for college, so it's been 23 years now on the East Coast. It's

now also home.

I miss the Bay Area. It is still home in so many ways, but in this industry, to graduate a full-time job is not common. It was a great opportunity, and I took it. I had my kids here, and I'm still here.

CT: What do you see for the future of lighting?

AD: I've been enjoying seeing the improvements in LED technology. I always love going to [LDI Show](#) in Vegas and seeing the latest and greatest lighting technology out there.

While I'm not able to predict the future, I do sometimes wish that decoders and power supplies were somehow even smaller. That way, they could better 'hide' inside the scenic elements we are building. I don't know, however, how you can get a high wattage in a smaller space like that, and allow physics to exist. I guess we shall see!

CT: Do you have any advice for up-and-coming designers?

AD: It makes a difference when you're working with people who are passionate. I'm fortunate I work with a lot of people who are very passionate about things. I get excited about all sorts of quirky things, and many of my co-workers at VDA Inc. are the same way. We learn a lot from each other, and grow together.

So I would say, surround yourself by people who inspire you, especially those who are as passionate as you are about your work.

“Painting with light is one way I think of [my lighting aesthetic]. Even in a corporate scenario, I get to paint with light, and shadows.”

To learn more about Anne Dresbach and her work at VDA Inc., visit:
<https://www.vdainc.com/>

Projects Designed by Senior Lighting Designer Anne Dresbach:



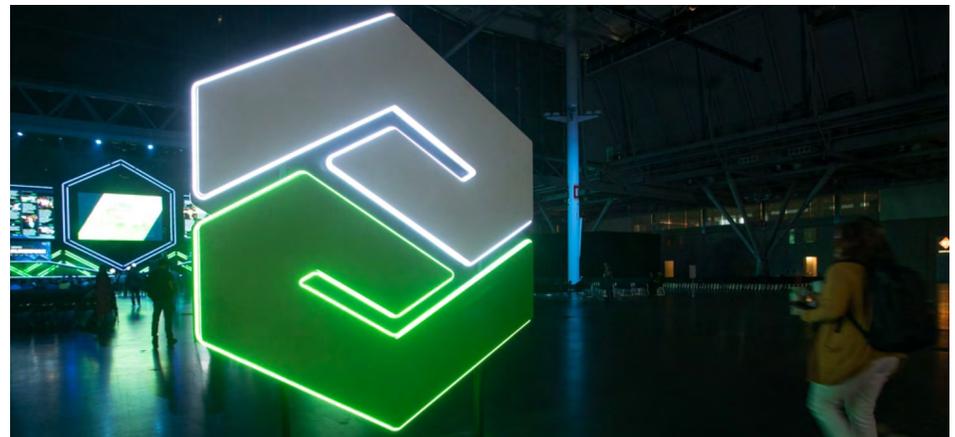
We Belong (left and right). Photo credit: Yu-Wen Wu. Installation location: Boston City Hall.



BVI Medical (left and right). The Lab: The Future in Focus.



CrowdStrike Fal.con Conference. Photo credit: [Silicon Angle](#).



PTC LiveWorx Conference signage. Photo Credit: PTC LiveWorx.



INBOUND Conference 2022 (left and right). Photo credit: VDA Inc.