

See The Light! By Sheila Selby



Home & Garden

Prepare to be enlightened. I'm not attempting religious proselytism, but I hope to convert you to believing that lighting is an important part of room design. Lighting dramatically affects a room's aesthetics and functionality, but is often dealt with as an afterthought. Granted, it's not the first thing to consider when you're designing or decorating a space. You need to decide how you're going to use your space and how your furniture will be laid out before you choose your lighting fixtures and placement. However, you should incorporate lighting in the design process, especially if you're installing lights in the ceiling or walls.

Artificial Light Sources

Three types of light bulbs are typically used in homes: incandescent, fluorescent, and halogen.

Incandescent bulbs provide soft, warm light. These bulbs are probably what first come to mind when you think of a light bulb. Lighting is a major energy consumer, and incandescent light is the least energy-efficient source of these three sources of artificial light.

Fluorescent bulbs have changed quite a bit from the old days, when we often used them as the sole source of light in kitchens, bathrooms, and work areas. Those old fluorescents often produced a bluish, cool light. Today, compact fluorescent lights (CFLs) are becoming popular and are available in both warm and cool tones. Most, if not all, CFLs are ENERGY STAR compliant. To reduce your electric costs and conserve energy, consider replacing some of your incandescent bulbs

with CFLs. Many will fit into regular light fixtures.

Halogen bulbs create a very bright, white light. In residential settings, you often find halogens in torchiere lamps or in pendants. Because halogens get extremely hot, they can be a fire hazard. Don't use them in closets or near flammable items, such as curtains.

Lighting Functions

Lighting provides three functions: direct lighting for tasks, accent lighting for aesthetics, and indirect lighting for general purposes and ambience.

Task lighting is functional. It's for reading, hobbies, or any chore requiring direct light. Task lighting can be provided by a variety of fixtures, including a lamp, a recessed downlight, or track lighting. Use task lighting with other lighting types to prevent eyestrain from too much contrast.

Accent or decorative lighting is used for decorative flair. The fixture itself could be decorative or could be used to highlight decorative elements. Accent lighting should not be the only lighting source in a room.

General or ambient lighting fills in the gap between task and accent lighting. A basic lamp and a ceiling fixture are examples of general lighting. Every space should have general lighting.

When lighting a room other than a hallway, the light should come from a number of sources. The quantity and type of lights depend on the use of the space.

Shopping Tips

When you're shopping for lighting, don't be confused if the professional

you're working with points to a light bulb and calls it a "lamp." Lamp is the technical term for what we commonly refer to as a light bulb.

Take into account the shade or diffuser material and color. A clear or translucent glass diffuser or a light-colored translucent shade will allow light to diffuse in all directions, while a dark or opaque shade will only allow light to emanate from its openings.

When purchasing a lamp, consider the lighting purpose. Do you want it to provide down-lighting – good for tasks? If you're looking for ambient lighting, consider a torchiere that provides uplighting – bouncing indirect light off the ceiling, cutting down on glare, and providing a more uniform light throughout the space.



Recessed or can lights come in a variety of configurations. Spotlights are used to accent a decorative element or illuminate a task area. Wallwashers are similar to spotlights, but grouped correctly can illuminate an entire wall. Floodlights provide general lighting over a wide range.

Don't overdo the lighting! Too much lighting can lead to stress, eyestrain, increased blood pressure, and frequent headaches.

Lighting by Room

The bathroom and kitchen need specific lighting sources. In the bathroom, provide more than one source of light over the vanity. Ideally, you should provide light on either side of your face and from overhead. Light coming from different angles properly illuminates your face and helps with shaving and applying makeup.

In the kitchen, it's important to provide task lighting over the work areas, such as counters, islands, and sinks.

The dining room is the perfect place for lighting on dimmer switches, allowing you to change the room's atmosphere.

In the bedroom, general lighting with side lamps next to the bed is preferable. If you share the bedroom, use darker shades on the side lamps to help confine light to your own space.

I Saw the Light

While I was writing this column, I had not one, but two songs constantly going through my head: Todd Rundgren's *I Saw The Light* and the like-titled country gospel song written by Hank Williams. I apologize if mentioning this causes either of these songs to repeat in your mind, too, but maybe the association with this article will make the light bulb go on when you're thinking about your lighting needs.

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