

Illuminating Great Design

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Proper lighting is a must rather than an afterthought.

Photography by Phillip Ennis



Light is evocative. In our living spaces light can energize us, or it can shift us into a peaceful and relaxed place. It can mute or intensify colors, and draw our eye to the objects and details we love in our home. It's been shown to boost our mood and give us a sense of well-being. Lighting fixtures and the stunning effects they can create are a fusion of quality, tactility and creativity that can feel seriously luxurious.

For any new construction or renovation project, especially when one envisions the atmosphere of finished spaces, proper lighting design is a must rather than an afterthought, as central to the success of a project as any other consideration. A sensible investment in well-conceived, flexible lighting schemes pays dividends in the long-term enjoyment of living spaces.

Lighting in Layers

Design and lighting professionals break down lighting into four simple types with common-sense names: ambient, task, accent and decorative. Most agree that a home's most important rooms should have three forms of lighting to cover these bases, with a "star player" like a magnificent chandelier, complemented by table and floor lamps, sconces and recessed lighting in supportive roles. A layered electrical plan results from the sum of these parts. Gone are the days when just one large fixture would carry lighting in a space.

ILLUMINATING GREAT DESIGN

Combining different types of fixtures in a room allows that space to have its own ambiance. Different rooms, different schemes, different feels. The old goal of matching lighting has all but disappeared. Similarities in shape, finish or color are enough to make a connection between different decorative lighting fixtures in creatively unique ways.

Sconces deservedly remain near the top of the home décor lighting list for several reasons. They free up table space and go the extra mile in small environments like city apartments. Perfect in foyers, powder rooms and dining rooms, they provide eye level lighting. When installed with a dimmer, sconces enable countless ambient lighting opportunities. They are the workhorse darlings in residential, hospitality and commercial settings.

Beautiful Unlit, too

Both design professionals and savvy consumers recognize that statement lighting – glittering table lamps or a bold ceiling fixture, for example – should be a key component in any design scheme. Decorative fixtures should be chosen for how good they look when not illuminated as well as when they are.

Sunburst and geometric wire forms are emerging as styles which introduce an architectural quality that is absent from many conventional decorative lighting fixtures. More and more, lighting is chosen on the basis of how good it looks both on and off. Lighting with multiple pendants suspended from a single canopy at different heights continues to be very popular and affords a less cluttered appearance on the ceiling.

Architectural lighting designed to illuminate surfaces, art and textiles has been advanced most recently by LED technology. LED lighting hidden in a soffit, for instance, can be used in conjunction with decorative ceiling and wall treatments to add flair to otherwise



Photography by Tim Williams

LED soffit lighting illuminates this gorgeous glass bead ceiling while crystal globes are suspended from a single canopy.



A home's most important rooms should have a star player, like a magnificent chandelier.

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featureless spaces. It can be a greener, more cost-effective way to wash design elements with dramatic lighting in a way that decorative fixtures cannot.

Lighting stands apart from other design elements in this: it has evolved the furthest and fastest technologically, so much so that the sea of lighting choices might intimidate some of us. But fear not: with the assistance of lighting professionals on the technical end, all we need do is focus on timeless design principles as they relate to scale and light color and the balance of light in the space. Pros can lead us to the neatest ways to control light to make it functional and convenient. (By the way, don't dismiss the trusty, simple dimmer switch – it remains a mighty tool that gives us instant and adjustable control over the mood of a room.)

Great lighting is a powerhouse design source. It's a tool that you can wield to transform a room from mundane to memorable!

LIGHTING MAKES THE SPACE

DESIGN TIPS

- Decorative lighting fixtures should be chosen for their appearance both on and off.
- Place sconces at 66-72" A.F.F. with 9' ceiling rooms and at 60-66" in 8' ceiling rooms.
- In single story entryways and foyers, the bottom of the fixture should be about 7' above finished floor.
- A light fixture should be hung 32-34" above a table. With higher than 8' ceilings, add about 3" to the hanging height per foot. Example: With 10' ceilings, hang the fixture 36-40" above the table.
- Proportion the fixture to the dimensions of the dining table. Determine the diameter of the table and subtract 12" to get the desired diameter of the lighting above.

Statement lighting from glittering table lamps to bold ceiling fixtures should be a key component in an design scheme.



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