

All Aglow

The right lighting can increase visual space and improve environments

By Caroline Wilkes
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Lighting plays a key role in making any room feel more inviting. But it takes careful planning to achieve a balanced, evenly lit space that contributes to how well the room functions, while also flattering everything in it.

An interior designer first assesses a home's architectural characteristics before developing a lighting plan. Does the natural light come from north or south facing windows? Is the floor plan open with only a few interior walls? Are the ceilings higher than nine feet? The lifestyle of the homeowner is then taken into consideration. Do children live in the house? How does the family spend time in a particular room? All of this information is necessary in developing

an effective lighting plan. While improving existing lighting during a remodel is more common, the easiest time is during new construction when walls are open and the electrical wiring is accessible and can be placed anywhere without damaging finished walls and ceilings.

Good lighting design involves using multiple layers in a room. Ambient lighting, from recessed ceiling lights, is the first layer of general lighting that allows you to move safely around a room. But ceilings are a great distance away from table level so you need additional light sources to perform daily activities like reading or entertaining. The second layer of lighting, referred to as local lighting, is more specific like a chandelier over a dining table or a lamp in an entryway. Task lighting, such as a desk lamp, under-cabinet lighting or a pair of sconces flanking a vanity mirror, provides more focused light allowing us to perform such tasks as reading a book, preparing food or applying makeup. Lastly, accent lighting is more aesthetically pleasing than functional, but important in beautiful rooms nevertheless. You'll see this as the glow of cove-lighting inside the ledge of a tray ceiling, a floor canister that shoots light up through the branches of a palm or a recessed "wall washer" that splashes brightness on an otherwise dark wall. Lighting up those dark areas increases a room's "visual square-footage."

Think about balance when designing a lighting plan. Ask yourself "what are the elements I want to draw the eye to when entering the room and what fixtures will I need for the room's various tasks?" With a lighting plan in hand, the fun begins—selecting the right fixtures to enhance the room's design with your style and personality. Few aspects of interior design add the bling factor like lighting; consider it your room's jewelry. Where else do you have crystals dangling from both your chandelier and your chandelier



earrings? Swarovski, creators of exquisite crystal jewelry, now offers a stunning home lighting collection featuring fixtures that emulate brilliantly-cut diamonds.

While fancy, formal light fixtures will always be in style, one of the more interesting trends right now harkens back to a more modest time by using utilitarian elements evoking the Industrial Age. These handsome fixtures speak to our hard-working roots and bring a relaxed, nostalgic charm to rooms. We're seeing classic forms, like galvanized or powder coated metal lanterns and cage designs with bubbly, imperfect glass and a resurgence of the old-fashioned, tungsten filament light bulb. Restoration Hardware and Rejuvenation remain true to vintage style, and are excellent resources for such lighting with a collection that expresses the industrial trend in an authentic yet fresh and inspired way.

The majority of clientele of The Lighting Gallery (Huntington Station) are looking for "new traditional" fixtures, or what owner Michael Lichtenstein calls "shabby industrial." In most cases the new fixtures are not meant to be authentic replications. "Old styles that used to look rustic are being done in modern finishes," Lichtenstein says. "In many cases, polished chrome or nickel has replaced wrought iron, juxtaposing the unrefined with the refined."

Lichtenstein sees more fixtures made from repurposed or eco-friendly materials that provide a relaxed, hand-crafted feel homeowners are interested in. The Lighting Gallery carries reclaimed woods, lamps with naturally textured burlap shades and clean, contemporary bamboo ceiling fixtures. Other, non-traditional lighting materials are being used too. "Although the crystal chandelier still prevails, the crystals are being replaced by an assortment of beads and art glass or wood that make it a lot more interesting."

Today's lighting is not only beautiful, it's also more efficient. Consumers have long been in love with standard incandescent bulbs because they cast a flattering, soft glow and only cost a few bucks each. Those qualities are difficult to duplicate in the more energy-efficient, more expensive, compact fluorescent and halogen bulbs. But lighting technology has come a long way and selecting it today means making decisions about energy efficiency and the type of light quality preferred—from incandescent to halogen to the very latest LEDs (light-emitting diode).

The omnipresence of LEDs in the market is having a tremendous impact on residential lighting. Revco, a major electrical supply company headquartered in Southampton, is a leader in energy-efficient lighting on Long Island. "LED technology is the most energy-efficient so far in that the lamps—which is what we call light bulbs in the industry—have the longest life," says Brienne Sulzer, Revco's lighting department manager. "This saves maintenance time and money [and] the quality of the light we get from LED is most like incandescent."

LED technology is being adapted into every type of lighting from car headlights to keychain flashlights. Manufacturers are making fixtures with Edison-style universal sockets so consumers can easily opt for LED. More than half of Revco's customers are already asking for LEDs. "And if they're not specifying it, we are recommending it," says Sulzer.

Lighting Gallery's clientele are more concerned with energy efficiency than ever before and the store offers a sophisticated selection that reflects this trend. "We are referring to today's energy efficient options as 'refined efficiency'—they're definitely not your grandmother's fluorescent light bulbs," says Lichtenstein.

Ripping up existing electrical blueprints may not be feasible for most homes, but adopting some of these changes to fixtures and bulbs could make subtle improvements to lighting schemes. Also, adding lighting, like sconces and/or table and floor lamps, can be a relatively easy way to give a room a face lift without having to reinvent the electrical wheel.