

Light up Your life

Add style and atmosphere to any space.

Whether you are remodeling, building a new home or perhaps you just want to brighten things up a bit, there are three components to consider about lighting in the home: aesthetics, functionality and energy efficiency.

"Lighting is kind of like any other type of fashion," says Stephanie Richeson, owner of The Lighting Studio in Lafayette. "It changes monthly."

Like anything else, installing proper lighting involves doing your homework, says Rex Hurst, sales consultant at All-Phase Electrical Supply Co. in Lafayette.

"The more time consumers spend studying where they want their light, the less money they will probably spend on the project."

Light that accents

When Richeson works with clients, the first question she asks is, "How are you going to use this room?" Richeson has a degree in interior design from Purdue University and has been working in the lighting business for more than 25 years. Sixty percent of her clients are remodeling or building a new home.

Decorative lighting isn't necessarily functional, Hurst notes. He uses a dining room chandelier as an example: "It is virtually nothing other than a pretty piece of equipment and functionality is poor. A chandelier throws light all over the place with no specific direction."

But you can add functionality to a chandelier by installing recessed lighting approximately 18 inches from each side of the chandelier, explains Hurst.

"Now you've got your functional lighting and you've got your decorative piece of art hanging in the center that you just dim down, and it's a pretty centerpiece." Hurst recommends using dimmers for lighting because they can save power and set the atmosphere you want. The recessed lighting is circular and recessed up into the ceiling.

Other reasons for aesthetic lighting are to highlight the items that you enjoy most in your home — such as a painting or a wall with family portraits -- by installing small fixtures on separate items, which bounce light off the objects rather than directly lighting the room.

You can also cast light inexpensively with lamps.

"I personally don't like overhead lights," Richeson says. "I like table and floor lamps in certain rooms."

The type of lights, in addition to the fixtures, can set the look as well, she adds. Halogen, including xenon halogens, create a brighter, whiter light than incandescent. The benefit of xenon is that it doesn't get as hot, she notes.

Bulbs now come in an array of colors: blues, reds, greens and amber, says Jill Thomas, a rehabilitation teacher for the visually impaired and blind. Thomas works with clients in Greater Lafayette as part of her position with Bosma Enterprises based in Indianapolis.

"It's personal preference," says Thomas. "See what you like the best, what color you like the best."

Layered lighting, or using several different light sources in a room, is important aesthetically, but also "as we age our vision requires more lighting," says Sue Ramsey, C&I (commercial and institutional)-residential specialist covering Indiana and Illinois for Kirby Risk Electrical Supply. »

Light for the task

Aesthetic light is the garnish, but functionality, or lighting for the task at hand, is the meat and potatoes.

Richeson points out that with functionality, it's often not really the quantity of light, but the quality of the light. In the kitchen, the brightness of halogens makes the colors in food preparation brighter and the print of a recipe pop off the paper.

Homeowners can install halogens in recessed fixtures in the kitchen to improve lighting.

"It's a great alternative for your kitchen," Richeson says. "Again, it's not necessarily a case of more light; it's just better light."

Under cabinet lights in the kitchen also enhance visibility, and they are relatively easy to install, she notes. The lights mount underneath your cabinet, and they usually come with a 6-foot cord.

Lighting has its own lexicon; some of the other kinds of lighting that can improve functionality are known as track and rail lighting, rope lighting and toe-kick lighting.

The benefit of using track lighting -- which is literally a thin piece of track -- is that it requires only one power source, Richeson explains. Several lights line the track and can be turned where you want the light to beam at a given time.

Rope lighting and toe-kick lighting might be considered more aesthetic because the actual fixture is not seen, but they are still functional because they throw light on specific areas rather than an entire room. Rope lighting looks like a garden hose with lights; toe-kick lighting is used to give brightness to certain items closer to the floor, such as tile.

Light for efficiency

Even if you are not one who is persuaded by the fashion or design of the times, recent federal legislation will require everyone to pay more attention to lighting. Passage of the Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007 means that after 2012, incandescent bulbs can no longer be manufactured, Richeson explains. The most common energy-saving alternative to the incandescent bulb is the compact fluorescent bulb (CFL), which is four times less the wattage than an incandescent and has 5,000 to 14,000 additional hours of light in its lifespan. A drawback to using compact fluorescents is that they have mercury in them and cannot be thrown in the household trash like an incandescent.

An emerging technology in energy saving lighting is LED lights or light-emitting diodes. Although they work well in flashlights, the technology is still evolving for home use, but strides are being made, says Ramsey.

"Under cabinet lighting, landscape lighting, accent lighting and some recess lighting are all options that are becoming quite common in homes," she notes.

At least one manufacturer is working on an affordable type of light that has the warm glow of the incandescent and all of the environmental benefits of LEDs and compact fluorescents but without the mercury. Richeson anticipates seeing the new technology produced by the manufacturer Vu1 ("view one") Corp. at an annual lighting market trade show in 2009. The new technology is called electron-stimulated luminescence or ESL(tm).

From a market standpoint, Richeson says consumers want lights that look good and save energy.

"It still comes down to pleasing the public," she says. "They don't want the colors in their house to be washed out." ❧



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