

# LIGHTING NEWS LETTER

a periodic newsletter on lighting design issues

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**IN THE HOME, LIGHTING IS SOMETIMES AN AFTERTHOUGHT. IALD AWARD WINNING LIGHTING DESIGNER STEFAN GRAF SHEDS SOME LIGHT ON THE SUBJECT OF RESIDENTIAL ILLUMINATION.**

**Q: How is lighting for new residential spaces determined?**

**A:** In some homes, lighting is provided simply by table lamps and ceiling lights. In other projects, an architect, interior designer or even the electrical contractor, provides the owner with lighting ideas and specifications. An architect usually is interested in integrated lighting systems, recessed downlights and so on. The interior designer is most often concerned about the design of the fixture, its appearance or style. Electricians have been wiring homes for many years and they have a base knowledge of various lighting systems. Many lighting plans are also created by lighting salespeople working with the professions indicated above, or working with the owner directly.

**Q: Why is there a need for professional lighting designers?**

**A:** Lighting technologies has moved so quickly and there's so much new equipment now available that it requires dedication, education and research – full time – to just keep up with it. People in other professions just don't have that kind of time. From a design standpoint, the lighting designer brings unique, creative solutions to the project that will beautify your home and stay within your budget. In many cases salespeople acting as lighting designers might be more apt to suggest lighting solutions that fit their specific inventory rather than the homeowners need or budget.

**Q: What kind of cost is involved in using a lighting designer?**

**A:** It depends on whom you contact and the relative size of the project. If you're dealing with a lighting salesperson or a sales consultant, the service may be free, but you may pay more for equipment than necessary. Many sales consultants and lighting salespeople don't have the level of expertise available from a professional designer, but may use the term lighting designer, so it is important to ask how they work. Professional designers charge a fee for their service but do not sell equipment. Professional lighting designers estimate fees based on the size of the project, areas to be designed and how many services the client wishes for us to provide. Our designs also aren't restricted to an inventory of equipment we must sell. We can select the best product for the job from literally dozens of manufacturers. This provides a greater value to the client, helps reduce costs and creates the best lighting solution for your individual home.

**Q: How do you go about selecting a lighting designer?**

**A:** Either by referral or through an interview process – just like selecting an interior designer. Look at their project experience, years in business, awards they may have received and see if their personality is a good fit. After all, its about working with someone you can get along with and trust. IALD (International Association of Lighting Designers) credentials are valuable since you'll know that they're a member of a respected organization of design professionals. Membership in the IALD is based on important criteria so not just anyone can be a member.

**Q: How can lighting beautify the home?**

**A:** Great lighting can add dimension to a space that helps provide the "wow" factor. Illumination can be soft or dramatic, warm or cool, attract attention to an object, highlight architecture, feature interior design elements and aid visibility. Light creates atmosphere and affects psychological response. Ask yourself how you feel in your home on a sunny day vs. a cloudy day. How does a room lit with candles affect your perception? It's the patterns of illumination that affects your feelings. Electric lighting can now be designed to provide this flexibility and change your environment at the push of a button. This is especially valuable in northern climates where we have long periods of time with little or no sunlight.

**Q: Can modern lighting technology work in a traditional interior?**

**A:** Yes, as long as it's done discretely. You want to limit the number of down lights, keep the aperture openings small and use more lighting that is decorative. Then use accent lighting to highlight areas of interest: art, furniture, and so on.

**Q: Is it important to have dimmers in your lighting system?**

**A:** A very important part of the lighting system is the ability to control your lighting. Lighting without dimmers is like a sound system with no volume control. Dimming enables you to set mood and create drama. New control systems provide convenience, flexibility and enable the lighting to be integrated with other systems like security systems. A control system design should provide the benefits of these features but be kept very simple, easy to use and understand.

**Q: Where can people see examples of good residential lighting design?**

**A:** The web is a great source of information. Check out Amazon.com and search residential lighting. There are a number of books that have good illustrations of how lighting creates visually stimulating interiors. Randal Whitehead has authored 2 books that have great illustrations. In addition, pay attention to the lighting dynamics in interior design magazines- look for 'patterns of light'. You'll find the more dramatic photos have great lighting.

**Q: What advice can you give to those thinking about better lighting for their home?**

**A:** Understand that there are various systems of lighting that all work together to create the visual picture consisting of:

- **Decorative lighting:** sconces, chandeliers, table lamps all fall into this category. Decorative lighting is mostly a selection that is determined by the interior designer. We have worked on homes where the owner did not want any decorative lighting and all illumination came from concealed, recessed lighting.
- **General lighting:** this creates a soft ambient glow in the space and may come from decorative lighting, recessed downlights or combination of the two.
- **Accent lighting:** These are systems of recessed adjustable or sometimes track lights that spotlight art, sculpture and areas of visual interest. We call it focal glow.
- **Architectural lighting:** When there are interesting features to the architecture, lighting can be designed to compliment them; vaulted ceilings, niches, soffit's etc.
- **Task lights:** Areas such as counter tops or where good light for reading is essential may require supplemental task lighting systems.
- **Security lighting:** This may be a separate system that works in conjunction with the home security systems.

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