

Bright Ideas

Seeing lighting in a whole new way

by Amy Durham

Lighting design is moving into the spotlight in Dallas homes. Illumination has become an art form. As Jim Rutledge of Lights Fantastic says, "People now understand that lighting is not only to see by, but to look at."

Beyond the bulb

Technological advances, such as advanced lighting controls, make lighting more accessible, functional and decorative. "Often customers spend so much money on great fixtures," says Rutledge, "but they don't make sure they can control them to ensure the lighting effect they want."

Advances in outdoor lighting intrigue Bruce Paul, president of Passion Lighting. He recommends outdoor-rated sconces and low-voltage chandeliers instead of porch lamps. "These work great on the outdoor living areas being done more frequently," he says.

In the spotlight

Rutledge encourages the trend of task and accent lighting. "Multiple layers of lighting really add drama, contrast and excitement to a space," he says. "With all the great new miniature fixtures, from mini-pendants to low-voltage monopoints, we are designing almost theatrical lighting effects."

Other trends include mid-century modern design, which incorporates clean lines and retro fittings. According to Rutledge, the hot fixture finishes are chrome, black, amber, satin nickel and bronze. What's not hot? "Plated or applied gold finishes," he says, "white washed shabby-chic and the 'Bahama' look."

Living with light

The living room is a tough place to light. Michele Alvarez of Lamps Plus says, "If there are children in the home, you may want to have sturdy lamps, such as floor lamps, where you have heavy foot traffic." She advises putting away the matching table lamps. "Different types of lighting in each room add more appeal to the eye," she says. "Examples are uplights in plants, art light to focus on pictures and recessed lighting to wash a textured wall."

Paul suggests using a low-voltage rail with miniature decorative spotlights to accent cabinets and bookshelves. "Room controls are another great addition," he says, "allowing multiple light systems to be joined to work together."

Focus on food

If you still have a box fluorescent light in your kitchen, it is time for an upgrade. "Chandeliers in the kitchen are a great look," says Paul. "Removing the fluorescent boxes is a high priority." He suggests a number of options to replace this general purpose light. Try under-cabinet light using Xenon or over-cabinet light using a rail system.

Alvarez offers another alternative; LED lighting under cabinets. "They do not get as hot as halogen lights," she says. Rope lighting on top of cabinets serves as nighttime illumination, and pendant lighting over the sink creates another layer. With a dimmer, you control the amount of light in each area. "Remember, the kitchen is used for both cooking and entertaining, so it's important to have lighting for both functionality and aesthetics," she says.

Shining dining

The same is true of the dining room, and Matthew Rahe of Webb-Burns Associates says to accomplish this a chandelier should be the focal point. "It should be placed 30 inches above the tabletop and should be at least 6 inches narrower than the table on each side."

Rahe also encourages the use of wall sconces on either side of a buffet or sideboard. "A new trend is actually incorporating a low-voltage lighting system inside the cabinets," he adds.

Restful radiance

Layers of light are important in the bedroom. An overhead light may not be necessary, but you could pair one with a fan. “Ceiling fans are becoming a distinct design tool,” says Paul. “While fans are still very functional, the upscale looks and huge breadth of products offer the customer many unique design options.”

Alvarez suggests installing a crystal chandelier with the fan to make the piece a focal point. “Rather than the traditional lamps over end tables,” she says, “adding two mini-chandeliers along with accent lamps on the dressers gives the room an upscale look.”

Bring in the experts

Lighting design creates mood and adds value to your home, so invest in the services of a lighting designer certified by the American Lighting Association. Asking for help is definitely a bright idea.