



BIG SKY JOURNAL

# HOME

Mountain Living and Architectural Design



## Lights, Automation, Atmosphere

Today's Lighting Options Offer Everything Under the Sun

BY CYNTHIA LOGAN

EVER SINCE THAT RASCAL PROMETHEUS stole fire from the Gods and brought it back to Earth, humankind has been fascinated with his gift. We love campfires, hearth fires and the Sun just as our ancestors did. And ever since that uber-rascally Benjamin Franklin flew his famous kite, preparing the way for Thomas Edison to put electricity into a light bulb (actually, English scientist Humphry Davy did that—he invented an electric battery, then connected wires and a glowing carbon filament)—we've had light when and where we wanted it. Fire in a bottle, essentially.

Modern architects, interior designers, builders and buyers consider lighting design as carefully as they do the architectural schematic and landscape layout of a new house. It's the latest statement in home fashion—building to accommodate

light. Bill Fiedler, owner of Distinctive Lighting in Bozeman comments; "Modern humans use exactly the same technology used 1000 years ago; it's just like the candle they used for light, warmth and cooking, but now we control it, make it more efficient. And in the last 15 years we've refined that relationship so that we can change mood and create whatever levels of ambiance we want with the flip of a switch." A distinctly modern man, the short, 30ish blond sports hair that thrusts upward, as if subjected to an electric socket. He wears a single earring; a barbell pierces his left eyebrow.

"Most of the time, lighting is an after-thought, but if you poorly light a home you can't see all the other design decisions / elements," suggests Fiedler, who insists it doesn't have to be expensive to light correctly. People underestimate their ability

Custom lighting changes a mood and delineates separate living areas in a house



Photos Courtesy Architectural Lighting Consultants

Photo Courtesy Distinctive Lighting

to change the mood in their homes, he says. “Dimmers, floor or table lamps and inexpensive up lights (particularly in corners) are simple retrofits that dramatically change how a room feels.

For those not concerned with cost, the sky is the limit. Torchieres might be a first tier to welcome guests, along with low-voltage footpath and muted flood or ‘down’ lights illuminating sculpture, exotic plants or a carefully tended garden as they approach.

Bozeman architect Frank Cikan, who frequently entertains, installed halogen point-source pin lights in a vaulted entryway; the ‘stars’ bounce off the warm tones of the wood, casting a warm glow as visitors hang coats and doff shoes. Cikan designed the home to invite natural light in at any hour on every façade. The orientation and extraordinary use of windows allows the Sun to wake occupants, nourish them throughout the day, and gentle them to bed, minimizing the need for man-made light during all but the darkest winter nights.

Gone in any home should be the single, overhead ceiling fixture (“truly the most unflattering light I can imagine,” cringes Fiedler). Replacing it are “lighting layers,” a combination of recessed, wall (sconces work well) and accent lights. The latest stylistic trend is eclecticism, he reports. “We have a regionalized style in the West that tends towards Rustic; now we’re seeing the integration of soft modern along with some early electric (a pre-cursor of Art Deco, early electric was typical of 20th century farmhouses, and featured clean lines, developing into the Craftsman & Mission styles). Hot finishes are satin nickel and oil-rubbed bronze. Even hotter are custom finishes.

Fiedler sets his second cup of coffee down to demonstrate an architectural ‘build in’. At the flip of a switch, a large, purple-tinted vase glows. The effect is seen and felt, but the fixture is not noticed. Its function is to accent, perhaps to draw attention to an architectural detail. “It can be hard on a light designer’s ego to flatter what the architect has in mind—to bring attention to the woodwork or countertops rather than to a fabulous fixture,” he notes. He takes pencil to paper, considering a redesign. “We want at least three layers: something for ambient



Eclectic fixtures in the laundry room hint at utility and provide ample light for practical use.

lighting, something with a soft, indirect quality, and some sort of accent on prominent art or architecture” (even a modest fireplace counts here). Depending on the room, let’s add a cove or a soffit—maybe bump up the contrast on the art light.”

In the kitchen, under-cabinet task lighting might be the first layer; recessed ceiling ‘cans’ should be positioned directly over work surfaces (“light the cabinets, not the floor”). Pendants are popular over islands, providing both ambient and task lighting, not to mention a bit of drama, especially if they are Italian glass, like those Frank Cikan chose. If the cabinets contain glass, they can be lit from the inside, as well as shone off by indirect light from above. Fiedler has been flicking switches on and off, demonstrating ‘food preparation’, ‘dining’ and ‘dessert’ modes. He flicks once more, activating a ‘toe kick’ that sends a river of light along the floor, just under the cabinets. “You can move around and no one needs to see the dirty dishes,” he smiles. During dinner, a focus fixture (“this should be pretty, with a warm, soft, sexy glow”) should emanate, not glare. If there is a buffet, a table lamp adds atmosphere. Strip lights atop a China hutch are alluring and show off the piece.

According to Fiedler, floor and table lamps are often over-



Lighting allows for expressive creativity with a function.

looked. "They bring an amazing sense of intimacy," he states. "And for a general ability to change the mood, you can't beat dimmers. The best way to calm kids down is to bring the lighting level down. You can't physically move that fast in low light. You have to slow down."

Home automation, known in the industry as "Whole House" or "Central Lighting" is a big segment of the market, but can get complicated, says Fiedler. "Most systems require a computer engineer." That's just what Gay and Rich Hovey of Home Automation Unlimited do—automate and program the layers homeowners create.

"Lighting is the first system you touch in the morning and the last you touch at night," says Rich, almost reverently. "More and more people are becoming aware of how lighting adds a touch of class to their homes, as well as influences how they feel about and use them," adds Gay. As lighting control consultants, the couple raves about the "soft on, soft off" feature they offer.

"Lighting is the first system you touch in the morning and the last you touch at night,"

"Think about it—flicking a switch on and off is very abrupt, and very hard on the bulb. This feature creates a gradual fade in / fade out, an effect that has Gay completely hooked. "Once you've experienced it, you can't go back," she claims.

Imagine this: instead of a light switch, each room of your home has a keypad labeled with customized, predetermined 'scenes and pathways.' Press Party and a whole sequence of lights, along with their appropriate brightness and beam spread are activated. Après-party guides guests gracefully to their vehicles via a glowing beam. Movie is a popular selection: the "theater" room is darkened, while subdued pathways to the bathroom and kitchen (for popcorn) are activated. Weekend Mornings are other popular choices for pre-set buttons. There's almost no limit to the options, and each keypad can hold different settings. "One of our clients had 64 buttons just on his kitchen keypad," recalls Rich.

For physicians, an On Call setting can be a lifesaver. When the beeper goes off in the middle of the night, a single button activates a lighting scenario that's dim in the bedroom, brighter in the bath and dressing rooms and soft in the hallway, letting the doc respond without waking the family or tripping over the dog.

Centralized lighting systems are hard-wired into new construction: for retrofits, wireless technology is employed. Lutron, a popular high-tech manufacturer, produces "Radio Ra." Presumably a commercial cash in on the Egyptian Sun God, this home dimming system "gives you convenient, one-touch control...lights can be turned on and off from anywhere, including your car. Touch the visor's "Home" button to turn on interior and exterior lights, safely lighting a path into and through your home."

Ok, so centralized lighting can punch up your home's curbside appeal, enhance entertaining and add comfort and convenience, but how about that 'mega-trend,' energy efficiency? The Hoveys enthuse over the savings afforded by "soft on / soft off" and brightness / dimming control. Integrating the lighting system with electronic blinds and thermostats can optimize heating and cooling for further economy.

Enlightened consumers may choose to go "Green" by

embracing the new solar and fluorescent technologies. Brian Segal, of Birdman Unlimited in Bozeman practices what he calls "Transitional Architecture," installing inexpensive 10" reflective solar tubes, and exchanging incandescent bulbs containing magnetic ballasts' (current flow regulators) for fluorescents with electronic ballasts. Fluorescents now are very sleek & slim, and are available in sizes and shapes appropriate for nearly every application. They render a color quality that can mimic a standard incandescent. "Natural, full-spectrum light is essential for our mental health," states Segal. "The wavelengths coming through our eyes affect how our brains work." Fortunately, the cycling of a modern fluorescent is impossible to see, so it's a crisp, clean quality of light without any noticeable hum.

Lance Mackay, General Manager of Architectural Lighting Consultants, Inc., counters Segal's claim about fluorescent technology's advances. "The color hasn't been embraced," he states, adding that many of ALC's clients prefer the Rustic theme, which employs warm, amber hues in conventional fixtures. He is enthusiastic about the potential of LEDs (light-emitting

diodes), which are very energy efficient. "The only problem is that you need a lot of them and they are still expensive." Though much of the recent building in the Gallatin Valley has been done by contractors sans architects, and lighting consists of "lots of windows and some fixtures from a big-box store," Mackay sees the long-term trend for custom homes holding strong and growing. "Nearly all our clients want whole home control from buttons or touch screens that coordinate lighting, HVAC, shades, hot tub covers, audio / visual and security systems. Add landscape, architectural and artistic lighting, layering and scene schematics, and you've got the entire spectrum of what modern lighting can do.

Still, simplicity can be enthralling: nothing can beat a candlelight dinner or an evening in front of the fireplace. "Without the spark," there is no light," says former film and television lighting technician and Livingston resident John Zumpano. No doubt Ra, the Egyptian Sun God and his counterpart, Helios the Greek would be honored (or should we say, turned on) to know that after thousands of years, they're still a major influence on Earth. ■

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