



Winter is long gone and Christmas is only on the minds of the very, very keen, so why am I writing an article about lighting?

Luminaires, lamps, sconces and candelabras are not solely relevant to the winter months, in fact, it is now, when the light is good and the weather is fine that it is best to think about lighting needs. This is because it is now that you are more likely to be having building work done – the extension, the attic conversion, the entire renovation - and it is at this stage, not when the work is complete, that you really should be thinking about lighting schemes. Just what needs to be lit, where and how?

Lighting is a fundamental part of our homes and our lives. We now know all about SAD syndrome and the effects of shorter, darker days - it makes us grey and gloomy, like the weather, and to reverse this, we must seek light. It is a fact that a human will instinctively be attracted to the lightest part of a room, we are happy there and this has been the advice for centuries. "Live in rooms full of light," said Aulus Cornelius Celsus, the Roman physician in around 30BC.

However, simply making a room bright all over is not the answer. Two rows of down-lighters will wash your room out in a flood of light, which will

mean giving everyone, even the well rested and youthful, bags under their eyes. It will also mean no focal points and therefore no areas of interest to the room.

Interest is created by combining light and by layering light. A pendant dangling from the ceiling will provide a certain amount of atmosphere (especially if it comes in the form of a stunning chandelier) but it will sparkle all the more brightly with spotlights set either side to highlight the crystals. Try Life @ Nettlebed for vintage Italian and French chandeliers, wall lights and shell spheres (www.lifetimeettlebed.co.uk).

Spotlights or down-lighters are ideal for highlighting details. Try installing them close to the windows so they can pick out the fabric details of the (rather expensive, let's face it) curtains as well as the pieces of art and sculpture, which are obviously worthy of attention. The floor too, is increasingly being lit - a gentle wash to pick out the parquet or the stunning stonework adds a low layer of interest and will help draw your eye around the room.

Architraves, niches and stairways can also be made to look their best by using light. A lit archway will guide people in that direction and an up-lit column will emphasise the architectural styling of the house. This needn't be blatant though; a ▶

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backlit pair of bay trees at the front door can look as stylish as the traditional lantern lit porch.

In the kitchen, illumination is key. There are jobs being carried out here that will not benefit from poor lighting. However, there is also a certain degree of decorative lighting that has to be incorporated here too, especially if the kitchen is in view from the dining room. Lighting can distract from what is no longer needed (the dishes waiting for the dishwasher) and can be re-directed towards the more attractive flowers on the central island which looks like it is floating thanks to some clever floor lighting.

There is, without doubt, an awful lot to think about - general lighting, task lighting, accent lighting, decorative lighting. Everything can be lit and made to look beautiful but just when you thought you had the knack of it, someone reminds you, that now might be the time for 'less is more'.

Contrast is a vital part of lighting design, as shadows can be decorative and sometimes darkness creates intrigue. It might be worthwhile therefore, talking to an interior designer and getting a professional touch. For lighting specialists go to

Light IQ in Chiswick or John Cullen in Fulham.

Bathrooms are a favourite room for lighting designers. This is a room with two personalities - one of brisk efficiency and the other of sensuous relaxation - and both have needs that must be met. A generous display of light is required to apply flawless make-up in the morning, yet at the end of a day, we want a softer illumination for that relaxing soak. Candles might well be perfect for this but have you thought about a strip of light for under the bath or one that fits inside the coffer above the tub?

Lighting in the bathroom is, undeniably, subject to serious regulatory scrutiny and even if you are fully conversant in the 16th edition of the IEE wiring regulations, you still need to consult a qualified electrician. However, you will be pleased to hear that lighting companies are working along side these guidelines and creating some beautiful wall lamps that were previously unavailable for this room. Go to www.vaughandesigns.com for the latest in bathroom wall lamps. They have a stunning range of both classical and modern designs.

The ultimate in lighting, however, has to be the home lighting systems. These are panels that control the circuits, dimming or brightening them individually and which can be programmed to a range of settings. At the push of a button the room will be transformed from 'casual day time' to a 'romantic evening for two' or a 'dinner party' setting. Dimmers can be programmed to gradually change the light over the period of an hour, so there is no sudden shift in ambience (something used in restaurants but why not in the home too?). Blind motors can be programmed to open and close at appropriate times of the day or as a security measure, the system can record a fortnight's worth of use and then replay it whilst you are away on holiday. Lutron are the market leaders in the lighting system field but other suppliers include Mode Lighting.

"We no longer light the decoration, now we decorate with light," says Joanna Wood, who has designed and decorated some of the most impressive homes in the UK and abroad, a sure sign that lighting is fast becoming the greatest tool of the interior designer. ■

clockwise from below: stylish outdoor lighting at Babington House Spa, little and large anglepoise lamps offer great directional lighting as seen at Soho House New York, lighting as part of a home entertainment install by Bang & Olufsen (see also Audio Venue), some of the fantastic selection of lighting from Life @ Nettlebed, subdued wetroom lighting at Babington House Spa.

