

# THE ILLUMINATING FACTOR

Proper planning maximizes this often-overlooked element of home design

by Dina Mishev

A little less than 125 years ago, Thomas Edison's carbon filament lamp illuminated his lab in Menlo Park, New Jersey, without a lick of fire. Thousands of people turned out to witness the impossible event—the first public display of Edison's invention—ooohing and aahing in wonder at the unbelievable sight.

Today undecorated and glaring bulbs such as Edison's would engender a very different response: disdain. A mere four generations removed from the birth of artificial illumination, lights now enhance a room's texture and mood—and act like works of art.

For example, modern lights can be remotely controlled over the telephone, and computers can record "journals" of who in the house likes what sort of light levels. Lights create "scenes" for different occasions and activities, and turn on as soon as a car turns into the driveway. "Really, there is no end to it," says Ben Pierce, a lighting consultant and manager of Jackson Moore Lighting. Edison himself said, "Genius is one percent inspiration and ninety-nine percent perspiration." Those following in his footsteps have been sweaty indeed.

It's hard to see much of the high-tech gadgetry controlling lights these days. But the fixtures themselves stand out—rang-



ing from elk antler chandeliers to hand-detailed mica and copper sconces. "Lighting has become the single most important piece of a room," says Sharon Moore, a member of the American Society of Interior Designers and co-owner of Jackson Moore Lighting. "It is the catalyst that brings everything together. Light brings out texture, scale and spatial relationships. Even more important is that it makes a space functional. No matter how much time a designer spends on a room, if they haven't worked in good lighting, making the space useable for its intended purpose, the room won't work."

Rick Ortega, a lighting consultant and co-owner of The Lighting Studio in Colorado, agrees. "There is nothing that can help or hurt a home faster than lighting," he says. "You can have the finest of everything in your home, but if you don't have good lighting, it won't show well." The Lighting Studio, with three locations, offers one of the largest selections of lighting options in the region and serves clients across the country.

Despite its obvious purpose, lighting remains a dim thought during the initial phases of building and interior design, according to both Moore and Ortega. "I've seen so many people take whatever money is left at the end of their construction and buy a few lamps," Moore says. "They don't understand the disservice they're doing their home, and themselves."

Anyone who has spent a winter here knows lighting does more than make a room beautiful (although no one will dispute that side effect). "Light affects our health in so many ways," says Mariana Figueiro, program director at the Lighting Research Center at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in New

Lighting options are nearly limitless, but they share common purpose: to make a home functional and comfortable, day or night. Proper lighting causes minimal glare, casts no shadows and allows for easy reading in designated areas. It has been proven to help homeowners relax as well, according to studies done by the Lighting Research Center at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. Thoughtfully placed lighting can also draw out rich wood tones, highlight art and subtly direct a viewer's gaze to a room's intended focal point, such as a fireplace.

Carl Cesaroni photo (upper left) courtesy Jackson Moore Ltd. Other photos by Greg Hurley, courtesy Gretchen Dyrna Architects

York. "Most importantly for those living in areas such as northwest Wyoming and eastern Idaho, where winter can have as little as eight hours of daylight and the season can stretch on for months, are the mental and physical benefits it brings."

Lighting Research Center studies indicate that well-planned interior lighting can make the difference between a season spent depressed and one full of enjoyment of the area. "Cooler tones of light, especially on the bluer end of the spectrum, of the right intensity, applied at the right timing and for the right duration, can mitigate the effects of Seasonal Affective Disorder," Figueiro says. In addition, such lighting has been scientifically proven to help homeowners relax and allow elderly residents to live more safely at home. In fact, proper lighting can even improve the quality of sleep of older homeowners, including Alzheimer's patients. "For something so many people consider as inconsequential, it really is amazing what light can do," Figueiro says.

"Good" and "proper" lighting is defined by the degree to which it helps a room

minates any stairs or changes in elevation within and outside a house, allows for easy reading in areas designated for such and casts no shadows (the latter being especially important in working kitchens). "Functionality and safety are key. If the needs of a homeowner's lifestyle and environment are being met, the lighting is successful," Moore says. "When it does all of that and also looks great, then it's phenomenal."

Because the importance of lighting has been slow in, well, coming to light, many older homes must undergo remodeling to update fixtures and systems. One Wilson home offered just this challenge to Moore. Owned by habitual remodelers, the beautifully refurbished home still harbored a lackluster kitchen, one of the few rooms in the house that had gone untouched since the couple purchased it in 1995. "It needed it so bad though," the owner says. "It was adequate, but ugly." Because a lighting remodel requires new wiring in walls and ceilings, the couple decided to redo the entire room. "If we're going to tear things up, we might as well go all the way."

**"Functionality and safety are key. If the needs of a homeowner's lifestyle and environment are being met, the lighting is successful. When it does all of that and also looks great, then it's phenomenal."  
—Sharon Moore**

function. "If you want to spend time in a space and it serves the purpose it was made for, then it has good lighting," Ortega says. Different rooms in a house therefore have different requirements. "A kitchen requires very different lighting from a living room or library," says Moore, who opened Jackson Moore Lighting three years ago after seeing "woefully inadequate" lighting in many of Jackson Hole's most beautiful homes.

From the medical standpoint, good lighting puts off little or no glare, illu-

A huge fireplace and a barbecue pit were torn out, allowing more natural light to enter from the existing picture windows. Moore directed the installation of lights under shelves, cabinets and counters. Ceiling lights were directed onto countertops, and panels of dimmer switches were installed. "Before, I had to run all over the place to turn lights on and off and now I don't," the owner explains. "Because we wanted more control over the feeling of the space, we went for dimmer switches on everything too."

A hand-forged six-light iron and Italian Murano glass chandelier replaced an elk antler chandelier above the kitchen table, brightening the room and changing its aesthetic appeal. A matching fixture was installed over one of the granite counters a few feet away. Shelves and cabinets built into the wall opposite the stove house antique Royal Doulton Dickensware, which had long been in storage for lack of show space. Unobtrusive recessed lighting in the ceiling showcases the pieces.

Because the homeowners enjoy reading while sitting at the head of the table, another ceiling light—no bigger than three inches across—was angled to perfectly light up any newspaper or novel being read there. "It seemed a small thing, this pinpoint light, but that one little touch added so much to the owners' quality of life," Moore says. "We were able to do this because the owners knew what they wanted. The more the owners know about what they want and what they do in a room, the easier it is to design a lighting system that will work for them." This project turned out "perfect" according to the owners. "Now we're done with remodeling."

The job was successful primarily because the homeowners not only knew how they used their house, but because they began thinking about lighting while the remodel was still in the blueprint stage. "I can't stress the importance of bringing in a lighting consultant as early in the building process as possible," Ortega says. Jackson Moore Lighting's Pierce agrees. "If you were to walk into our store with your blueprints and say 'I want to address lighting now,' you'd be a very, very wise individual."

While it is possible to alter lighting after a home has been built, it costs more. "When we go in to remodel, we'll find there aren't outlets where we want to put floor lamps, or there isn't wiring in the area they hang their art

collection," Moore says. "It makes things a little more difficult."

Early meetings with a lighting consultant can do more than save money. "Lighting can accentuate and compliment architectural features," Ortega says. "Light can bring out a unique ceiling, window or wall texture that would have gone unnoticed otherwise," adds Lisa Carranza-Habib, an associate architect at Stephen Dynia Architects in Jackson.

A Bar-B-Bar home recently finished after 25 months of construction uses interior lighting to accentuate everything from rusted iron wallpaper (as Moore defines it) to granite counters, and hand-built cabinetry and shelving. Strips of small lights hidden high in the great room accent massive strawberry-blonde wood beams. Similar strips beneath kitchen cabinets and in the butler's pantry make forest green granite counters glow. The home's most unique architectural feature—an octagonal second-floor tower with take-your-breath-away views of the Teton and Gros Ventres—is almost entirely windows, which let in an extraordinary amount of natural light during the day. But Moore says it's important not to let that distract from proper planning when creating a lighting design. "We always tell our clients to light a room as if it's dark," she explains. "If you don't, you may not be able to enjoy the room after the sun sets."

All the Bar-B-Bar home's lights seem nearly as intelligent as Stephen Hawking. Light placement was determined using complex scientific equations with variables such as bulb wattage, window quantity and size, and sun intensity. Finished cooking in the kitchen? Hit a conveniently placed switch and a "dining" scene will come on, dimming the brighter lights that cooking requires for safety. A magnetic movement sensor at the end of the driveway (magnetic so the elk frequenting the area can't activate it) triggers a system that can turn on everything from exterior walkway lights to

every light in the house, depending on how it is programmed. The lights could probably do taxes and cure cancer if only programmed for such.

This type of convenience doesn't come easily, though. Thousands of miles of wire run underneath the 8,000-square-foot home. The entirety of the organized mess converges in four massive fuse panels—each about 4 feet tall and just under 2 feet wide—in a basement room that serves as the home's mission control. "If you take the architecture and interior design fields as a whole, the progress the lighting industry has made within it exceeds that of any other area," Pierce says. "What can be achieved now is phenomenally different than even what was available 10 years ago."

The owner of the Bar-B-Bar home sought to take advantage of lighting's techno-boom. "I had two objectives," this electrical engineer and self-professed technology junkie says. "Convenience and accenting the architecture." Although the light system sounds more complex than the federal budget, it's wonderfully manageable. "You can do as much or as little with it as you want to," the owner says. Of course, he pushes the system to its limit. "But you could turn off all the fancy scenes, remote switching and sensors if you wanted to," he says, trying not to wince at the thought of this apparatus sitting idle.

While it might not be possible to install as advanced a system in an existing residence, remodelers shouldn't overlook the advantage of knowing how their house functions. "The owners of the Wilson house would have had no idea they needed an additional reading light in the kitchen if they hadn't lived in the house beforehand," Moore says. "Despite the hassles of a remodel, clients are the first to say the end result is worth it. It sounds silly, but the joy of being able to see and do what you want to in your own home cannot be underestimated."

Edison would surely agree. ♦