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LIGHTING DESIGN & ILLUMINATION OF FINE ART

IN THE NEWS

The New York Times,
Consumers World

From Kitchens to Bedrooms, Lighting Designers to the Rescue

By Terry Trucco

Most homeowners have little difficulty choosing lamps for the living room and bedroom. The problems tend to come with the more demanding settings or displays: the kitchen, the bathroom, art collections, even backyard birch trees.

While an architect or an interior designer can often do the job, an alternative is a lighting designer, trained in the esthetics, technology and conservation of lighting.

Typically, a lighting designer studies the space, considers its function and comes up with a plan covering everything from fixtures and bulbs to the lighting's overall effect. "When a room is used for a party, where to mingle, where to find the buffet."

Some designers are willing just to provide the grace notes - customized strip lighting for bookcases or strategic places in a room to emphasize, say, the shape of a staircase. But most will design and execute fixtures.

For a large dining room, the lighting designer will draw up plans for an Art Nouveau style hanging fixture. The plans called for hiding in its elegant alabaster bowl a low voltage spotlight (like the ones used in slide projectors) to make the crystal and flatware sparkle. Above the spotlight, but also hidden,

would be two standard bulbs to provide general light so that guests wouldn't look ghoulish in the shadows created by the spotlight.

Until fairly recently, most designers worked almost exclusively on commercial projects, like hotels, museums and office buildings. But a growing number accept residential jobs as well, particularly when an intriguing challenge is involved.

A Neon Rainbow

Properly used, neon can provide effective indirect light, said Thomas P. Richmond, a lighting designer based in White Plains. For the solarium in a large house in New Jersey, he recently used two rows of neon blue and orchid, hidden by a case at the top of a wall. "Neon is dimmable," he said. "And you can bend the tubes to fit the architecture."

To light bookcases, he installs a long, one-inch deep metal channel directly under the shelf to accommodate tiny lights. The metal can be painted or given a faux wood grain to blend with the shelf. And unlike conventional bookcase lights encased in plastic tubes, the individual lights can be easily removed when they burn out. ■

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