

Light

Your Home's Primary Design Element

Light has always been critical to the habitats of mankind. Whether a rough fire in the middle of a prehistoric cave or a subtle pinlight focused on a rare piece of art, lighting within the living space provides an essential dimension to lifestyle. From that early cave fire to kerosene lanterns and gaslights, we moved into electric lighting about a century ago. As remarkable as that discovery was, it usually took the form of a glaring overhead light in the center of a room's ceiling.

Today homeowners expect a lot more. Designing a beautifully lighted home these days involves three basic types of light, according to Eric Strandberg of Northwest Lighting's 2000 Lighting Design Lab:

Ambient lighting—a general overall light that fills in shadows, reduces contrast and illuminates vertical surfaces, giving space a brighter feel.

Accent lighting—gives space a third dimension, often focused on artwork, architectural details and display areas.

Task lighting—bright, shadowless light to illuminate specific tasks and their areas, such as reading, wet bars, hobby or game tables.

Strandberg frequently uses a favorite phrase of lighting designers—layering. For example, he says, "Good kitchen lighting, from an aesthetic and functional standpoint, incorporates both types of light," a layering ambient and task lighting.

"The greatest thing I've noticed recently is a new awareness of lighting," says Chip Israel, principal of Lighting Design Alliance. His Long Beach, California, company designs lights for a wide variety of structures, including roughly a dozen residential projects a year. "Today's homeowner realizes lighting is more than a light fixture at the top of the stairs and the one that hangs over the dining room table," he says.

Approaching the lighting design for a new home, Israel's group of designers consider illuminating functions or objects within the space rather than lighting the space itself. "We might orient lights so that one or two illuminate artwork over the fireplace, one or two provide general lighting and another provides a pinspot over the coffee table—cre-



Lighting designers become quite poetic in describing their use of light. A spokesperson for Lighting Integration Technology, Inc. says his company uses illumination as a building material, helping to realize or enhance the architectural objectives of a living or working space. "We combine technological understanding with creative vision, giving each project a lighting system ideally suited to its actual use," he says.