

Light up your life

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Lighting can transform a room at the flick of a switch. Here are a few bright ideas.

Setting the tone

The best lighting scheme is one that offers versatility. In a lounge, for example, you may need maximum brightness for everyday tasks such as ironing, sewing or reading, but subdued lighting for watching television. The answer could be as simple as a dimmer switch, though it is much more exciting to provide different layers of illumination from lamps or wall lights to a central pendant and downlighters.

For extra drama, consider spotlights to accentuate paintings or ornaments. When planning a scheme, remember darkness and shadow are just as essential as light for adding texture, contrast and shading.

In the mood

Modern lighting techniques mean we can now create the effect of natural light or an ambient mood at the flick of a switch. Yet choosing the correct style of lighting for each individual room depends on the effect you want to create. A romantic bedroom requires dim, subtle hues while more functional areas need specific task lighting for cooking or reading.

For centuries, the most elegant, pendant ceiling light has been the chandelier and although we don't all have grand enough properties for those antique works of art, there are simpler, modern versions that can look good in even the smallest apartments.

A single central pendant is unlikely to be very inspiring in most cases, however, unless accompanied by an imaginative shade, but it is best to be able to control levels of brightness to suit a number of different purposes.

Fresh and bright

Natural light is a welcome and environmentally friendly way to brighten rooms while large picture windows or glass patio doors also help to make the most of garden views or city panoramas.

Yet too much sun can make a house stuffy and warm, so the amount of natural light flooding in must be carefully balanced with how much it increases the overall room temperature. Shutters, curtains, tinted windows and blinds are popular and easy ways to control light and heat.

Full beam ahead

The home office needs to be particularly well lit as this is where tasks such as reading, studying and working on the computer will be carried out.

The desk in the office area may require a study lamp where the beam can be focused directly towards books or notepads. Though, the best option is to be able to work in fresh natural light that flows into the room.

Splashes of light

Downlighters, especially low voltage ones, are a subtle way of lighting rooms. Recessed halogen lamps are especially suitable for bathrooms or kitchens where safety is essential in damp conditions and the light can be strategically positioned over sinks or showers. In contrast, uplighters installed at floor level are useful for adding interesting shadows through foliage or sculptures, while mirror areas require brighter illumination for shaving or applying make-up.

Bright ideas

A new and very modern range of illuminated furniture can now light up your life in ways you never thought possible. Desert River, the Dubai distributor of funky European lifestyle products, has recently introduced Slide illuminated objects from Italy. Suitable for indoors or out, there is everything from glowing armchairs and illuminated planters to lit cubes that can serve as seats or coffee tables. Perfect for parties or everyday elegant living, these contemporary designs are available for rent as well as to buy (www.desertriver.com).

Cooking up a storm

Track lighting is a useful choice in a kitchen where the halogen lamps cast their beams to spotlight worktops or the hob. Contemporary kitchen designs often incorporate downlighters under wall cupboards or cooker hoods for this purpose while units with a glossy surface will aid reflection. Pendant lights that can be raised and lowered on a spring are useful for illuminating dining tables, although there is nothing better than candlelight to create a more intimate setting.

Light the way

Saving energy is as good for the planet as it is for your bank balance and can be as easy as plugging in a Compact Fluorescent Lightbulb (CFL). Energy-efficient bulbs such as CFLs use considerably less electricity than normal incandescent ones and last much longer. So although they are more expensive to buy initially, they cut down electricity bills in the long run. As CFLs also reduce greenhouse gas emissions, they are kinder to the environment, too.

The drawbacks used to be that energy-efficient options were larger and took longer to light up, but now modern designs are hard to tell apart from traditional bulbs and give off a warmer glow than they once did too. CFLs do contain small amounts of mercury which can pose a slight health risk when the bulbs are broken. If that happens, wear plastic gloves when clearing up the glass fragments and dispose of CFLs in a sealed container at your nearest recycling centre.

Getting technical

Due to the technical nature of electricity, it is advisable to plan lighting schemes at an early stage as new wiring, power points, down-lighters or dimmer switches may need to be installed before you decorate.

You may also want to consider solar power for the house or garden which can use renewable energy to provide light or water heating.

(Gulf News)