

Lighting in houses is no longer limited to bulbs and tubelights. Nirmala Rasawamy lists the exciting options

The inner glow

GONE are the days when people thought of lights in the house as electric bulbs of different wattage hanging in different rooms. At the turn of the last century, people were grateful to Thomas Edison for his wonderful invention of electric bulbs because before that, they had depended only on candles and oil and kerosene lamps for illuminating their homes.

Even fifty years ago, a light fitting consisted of a length of exposed wire covered with dust and grime hanging in the centre of the room. Lampshades of milky white glass with frilly edges were a common sight. The royalty and aristocracy had huge chandeliers, sometimes with candles burning in them, in their spacious halls and stairways. But the majority had just ordinary electric bulbs. Later, when fluorescent lights came into use, the common man was absolutely thrilled because these threw up more light and they were cost effective, too.

We have come a long way from all that.

Now, lighting interiors has become a specialized art and it is studied like a science, whether it is for homes, offices or commercial premises. The homemaker has to concentrate on the lighting from the wiring stage onwards because the wiring is concealed and the light points have to be decided well in advance, before plastering the walls even. More so if recessed areas have to be provided for. If a professional is engaged, he will plan and design according to the house owner's wishes but the problem arises when a person is designing his house on his own.

While deciding on lighting the interiors, various factors have to be kept in mind like utility, durability and beauty. There are certain objectives to be remembered, like task lighting, accent lighting and ambient



lighting because various effects can be created with the help of lights.

Different trends influence the way we light up our houses. People are aware of different types of lighting and the quality of lighting in terms of design, variety and the quality of the product itself. We do not think of just one kind of light in a given space. There are layers of lighting; there are different kinds of lights in a single room, each one providing a layer of lighting serving a different purpose. By having various layers, one can adapt the lighting to multiple tasks and needs. Good lighting makes a lot of difference to any interior space.

Let us start from the kitchen. This is the most important area in a home where lighting makes a huge difference. What a change from the old days when lighting was very poor and dust and grime coating the kitchen light was a common sight. A well-lit kitchen makes work comparatively easy and the general comfort level in the area goes up. This is the place where the food for the entire family is prepared and hence hygiene and health come into the picture. Dump and

untid dark corners help insects and pests to breed, so a bright kitchen is an absolute must. As members of the family tend to just pick up a plate and eat in the kitchen, the kitchen mostly serves as the dining area too.

Modern kitchens have a lot of



cabinets which tend to obstruct the path of light and cast their shadows on the working area below. So the second layer of light, besides the one light fixture hanging in the centre of the room or on the wall, has to focus on the counter. For this purpose, recessed lighting is used under or in between cabinets. When the source of light is recessed wholly or partially into the ceiling or comes from the ceiling above, the light falls directly on the surface below and brightens up the counter and work area. In addi-

tion to this, some prefer to have decorative lighting also. The use of beautiful wall fittings, scones and oven chandeliers are becoming the latest trend. Most importantly, natural light and fresh air during the day are absolutely essential for the kitchen, otherwise the cooking smells will linger.

In spaces where we entertain our friends and spend time with the family, a different type of light is required. This room is the living room or the drawing room. The light here should be subdued and its intensity should be adjustable according to the need of the hour. Table lamps and pedestal lamps offer this facility and so they have become very popular.

Of course, for general purposes, a light in the centre of the hall is still a must. But this has to be supplemented with other task-oriented lights. For example, a pedestal lamp near the sofa can throw a bright light for reading; this should be an adjustable light. A light behind the TV or a pedestal light next to it is good



which may be a bronze Nataraj or a laughing Buddha or a wall mural. Since the ceiling reflects so light, it is usually painted in light or some light pastel shades. Before buying the fixtures, you should be able to visualise the effect you want to create. Spot lighting is used extensively in shop windows and art exhibitions where the light has to fall on a particular display.

Fluorescent lamps, which are used in our kitchens and bathrooms, are cost effective but not so aesthetically very pleasing. The area that needs attention is the bathroom, especially near the mirror and wash basin. Natural light hardly ever seeps into the bathroom in apartments these days so invest in good lights above the mirror. Mirrors can enhance the beauty of a dark corner if they are properly placed at the correct angle to the light source. But remember,

they can cause glare if they are wrongly placed.

The bedroom does not require very bright lights but a reading light near the bed is a must. Table lamps are ideal for reading. Even in the study area a table lamp is essential. The wardrobe area has to be well lit from the front to enable one to choose outfits and jewellery.

There are such a wide variety of light fixtures available now to choose from and the craftsmanship, quality and finish have improved tremendously. Polished brass, copper, chromium, nickel, pewter, marble and wood are used in making basic brackets, lamp bases and pedestals. Imported glass, alabaster, crystal, metal, and synthetic materials, handmade paper, and natural fibres are used in making lampshades. Since these have to last for a long time it is better to invest in



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durable ones, even if they are on the expensive side. The quality of the fitting matters because it is responsible for the safety of the user and consumers. Choose the fittings carefully and use the correct wattage specified. Higher wattage may damage the material used.

Halogen lamps are popular today as are fibre optics. Fibre optics emits light through

minute crystal-like bulbs, which can be in hundreds, but the source of energy is one. Energy is transferred through glass or plastic fibres from the source.

Lighting can transform any given space and the ambience of a house depends on the lighting, so make sure you make the right choice.