

# Lighting your home

## Part 2 by Clare Winchester

For design purposes light is measured in Lumens, which are units of visible light rather than of power emitted. Designers use a formula to calculate how many lumens are required to light a particular room; they then usually draw up a lighting plan and work in consultation with a really “switched-on” electrician!

A simpler way is to start with the task and ambient lighting (the basic bare minimum) and then add other lights until the room looks right.

Different rooms require different levels of illumination, for example a corridor can be dimly lit, with down-lights creating dramatic pools of light, whereas a bathroom needs a variable combination of bright ambient and task lighting with subdued mood-lighting.

Most rooms benefit from multiple “layers” of lighting, and levels of light that can be varied: dimmer switches are essential. They must not be used with compact fluorescent energy saving lamps (light-bulbs), but are fine to use with energy saving mains voltage halogen. There are even special types of dimmer available for use with fixtures that have built-in transformers: your electrician will advise you.

All of the different lighting in your home can be controlled from a single keypad, or even from an i-phone, using a system such as Lutron. An electrician can give advice on these systems.

Recent EU directives have meant that many traditional incandescent types of light-bulb are being phased out, including GLS (General Light Service), candle and golf-ball shapes. Non-clear (pearl) lamps are already effectively banned, replaced by CFLs (Compact Fluorescents).

There’s no doubt that these are not pretty, and the light they give has a flattening, or dulling effect on colours. However their light can be much improved if they are used in table-lamps with soft fabric shades, particularly coloured shades, or in ceiling pendants that have diffusers fitted to the bottom of the shade.

Manufacturers of lamp-shades are becoming more imaginative to meet the challenge of low energy: lining their shades with colour, or gold leaf, and using a whole plethora of coloured silks. However, when choosing coloured shades it’s important to consider them as part of your room’s overall design scheme: a red lamp-shade that’s not lined with opaque foil will turn a green wall the colour of mud.

CFLs are definitely not suited for “open” light fittings, such as chandeliers. A better alternative for these has arrived in the form of new “Energy Saver” versions of traditional light-bulb shapes. These are clear, and contain a small halogen capsule, which makes the crystal of a chandelier sparkle in the same way as a clear incandescent bulb.

Other types of low energy, long-lasting lights have also become more widely used, such as LEDs (light-emitting diodes), which look very effective near floor level on staircases, set into the risers, for example, or in kitchen baseboards. They can be used outdoors, and can even be set into your bath! As LED technology continues to improve, so will the quality of the light they emit.

Fibre optic technology has been around a long time, but is set to be used more and more in commercial and residential lighting situations. Kits are available (to be professionally fitted) that can turn your ceiling into an array of tiny, twinkly points of light. They can also be used in floors and outdoors.

Lighting is such an important part of interior design. Getting it right will reward you with a home where you feel comfortable, relaxed and maybe even joyful!

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