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## **Effective Lighting for Residential Interiors**

Residential lighting design is often the afterthought in a decorating project due to the budget constraints or a lack of understanding of its powerful contribution to the overall effect on the room. A well executed lighting plan can enhance any interior from both a functional and an esthetic perspective. Light is a tremendous factor in the final effect of the design plan. It is the one element that integrates the color, texture and form of the design. Light has four specific duties: to provide decorative, accent, task and ambient illumination. There is not a single light source that can perform all these functions. Various light fixtures must be used to create a layered effect.

Decorative lights such as chandeliers add sparkle to a room, but they are inadequate as the sole source of light. When you turn up the brightness of a chandelier, its glare overpowers the art, the wall color and the carpeting. This bright source of light is designed only to create a soft localized pool of light. Adding shades or using frosted bulbs will decrease the glare.

Accent lighting highlights objects in a space. It cannot be the only source of illumination in a room because only the art will be in the light while the people sit in darkness! Use subtlety with accent lighting for the most powerful effect. For example, shine an accent light on a floral arrangement. Guests will notice the flowers, not the light fixture. Accent lighting is very effective for adding depth and dimension to a space. It is an excellent way to add interest to a room, which is devoid of any interesting architectural features.

Task light provides illumination for work-related activities. For ease of reading tabletop lamps and fluorescent fixtures mounted under shelves should be placed so the light falls between your head and your shoulders at an angle. If you're depending on a bright ceiling fixture for task lighting, the glare from the light bouncing off the work surface will be directed into your eyes, causing eye fatigue. (This is why you often have to tip the shiny page of a magazine to read it if you're outdoors in bright sunlight.)

Ambient light which is used to soften the shadows of the room is best when it comes from sconces or floodlights that bounce the light off the ceiling and walls. This type of lighting will not be effective if the room has a dark or wood ceiling, which just absorbs the light. Putting the ambient lighting on one dimmer and the accent lighting on another provides the most flexibility for illuminating a space.



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Track or recessed lighting should be unobtrusive and not the first thing someone notices when they enter the room. Larger track lighting fixtures can be retrofitted with smaller cans. Likewise, recessed lighting with silver or black interior trims can be retrofitted with a trim that eliminates the “Swiss cheese” look for your ceiling.

A well executed lighting plan can transform even the most mundane space into an exciting room with different atmospheres: dramatic, functional or restful. With dimmer switches the mood of same space can be altered to fit the situation. An experienced designer and electrician can work as a team to provide you with the layout that’s best for your home.

**Contact Jean Cary Interiors at 650-593-9622**