

By Celeste Jackson

We often are inclined to take light for granted yet it is everywhere around us shaping our lives, enabling us to see and providing us with energy to feel and function well. Scientific studies show that we need at least two hours of warm light exposure per day to function normally. Doesn't everyone feel better on a sunny day? Since winter months decrease the amount of warm light we experience opposed to other seasons our interior lighting becomes more important. Yet, with growing concerns for the future of our environment we are torn on how to light our homes for the well being of our health and the environment. Here are some guidelines on how to best use light sources so you can do both.

Natural light is always the best way to light our homes even on a cloudy day. Whenever you are in a room utilize the light available from windows. Closing shades or draperies when you are not occupying the space will help to control the amount of energy being used to heat or cool the room.

Traditional incandescent bulbs have the highest color rendering index along with halogen making them the closest to natural daylight than other light sources. That is why we feel good when our homes are properly lit with incandescent light. The downside is that these bulbs have the shortest life span and require more energy. Congress has ruled to start phasing out

Lighting for the Well Being of Our Health and the Environment

these bulbs starting with the 100 watt and leaving us with only the 60 watt and lower along with the 3-way by the year 2014. If this is still your preference I suggest that you install dimmers wherever possible. Dimming your lights to 75% will double the life and decrease the amount of energy required.

Halogen is also a form of incandescent light however they last much longer than traditional bulbs. The downside is that they operate at the highest temperature than any other light so they require the most energy. I have found by using a dimmer that halogen bulbs have lasted for years. In fact by using dimmers we just recently replaced our first recessed halogen flood light in our kitchen since we remodeled in 2002.

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Compact fluorescent light known as CFL have become popular over the last few years but there are many downsides. First they have the lowest color rendering index so they create a cooler light that does not help us function at our best. I recommend using them only in a fixture that has a warm colored glass shade. These lights also contain mercury which is toxic to our health. If you break a CFL you should immediately leave the premises and take any other family members and pets out of the home for at least twenty minutes. Discarding of these lights is also a concern because of the mercury. How will that affect our environment in the future? Although CFL do last longer and operate at a lower temperature, requiring less

energy I question whether those benefits will outweigh the other concerns in the long run. If you do choose to use CFL you should look into properly recycling them through Fluorecycle, Inc.815-363-4422.

Light emitting diodes known as LED are on the rise and improving quickly. Although the color rendering index is not as high as incandescent at this time it is fairly close. LED bulbs are also quite costly. On the bright side of LED is they have the longest life span; 50,000 hours as compared to CFL 12,000, halogen 3,000 and traditional incandescent 2,000 hours. LED also operate at the lowest temperature requiring the least amount of energy. They are the only source of light that are 100% recyclable.

All of these sources of light still have their place in our homes but using them to their best potential is important. Be sure that you have a variety of light sources in each room providing general, task, ambient and accent light for the most effective interior environment.

Celeste Jackson, owner of Celeste Jackson Interiors, Ltd. located in Barrington, IL, provides quality residential designs for projects in a variety of sizes; from single room makeovers to new constructions from the ground up. ■

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