

# Let there be lighting: Systems are the bright new trend

By ELIZABETH BERNSTEIN  
The Wall Street Journal

The overhead lights slowly dim, a pinspot illuminates the table at center and soft light washes over the painting on the back wall. A Broadway set at curtain time? Nope, the preset "dinner party" lighting in Rea Laccone's dining room.

"The last thing I do before company arrives is yell, 'Hit the lights!'" said the Los Angeles fashion executive.

Call it the age of enlightenment. Thanks to everything from improving technology to baby boomers' aging eyes (spotlight, please), an increasing number of homeowners are putting in fancy lighting systems. Sales of this new gadgetry — which lets people pre-program "scenes" or control the lights from their computer or even Palm — have climbed 40 percent in the last five years, makers say.

Once an extravagance, a lighting-control system is now becoming "like central air," said Todd Rosencrans, a high-end New York electrical contractor.

Not that these are necessarily cheap. While some of the new systems can cost as little as \$250 a room, Americans now spend an average of about \$4,000 per new home on lighting controls. That's up 3 percent from 2001, even as prices for much of this equipment

have fallen. One of the biggest makers, Lutron, says the cost for some systems has dropped 50 percent in the past five years, boosting the trend. Another factor: The ever-growing American house, which can make for a lengthy trek from the bedroom down to the kitchen just to turn out the lights.

Just ask Douglas Kaffenberger, whose new 8,000-square-foot house in Louisville, Ky., came with one of the high-tech systems. Now he can control every light in the place from a control panel in the master bedroom and impress his guests with his home-theater lights, which dim slowly when the film starts — just like in the cineplex.

"It's definitely a wow factor," said the 47-year-old radiologist. The best part: If he sees the lights on in his kids' bedrooms past bedtime, he can turn them off without even having to walk down the hall.

To be sure, dimmer switches aren't new. They first appeared in the early '60s, and for decades stayed in the dining room to provide a dose of faux candlelight for fancy dinners. Then, in the late '80s, makers started linking up dimmers, which let people create lighting "moods" by connecting fixtures around the house.

Now they've taken the technology even further, using whole-house wireless systems that can communicate via radio waves.

That means people no longer need to rewire their houses to install them. Makers say that homeowners can even take a system along when they move.

Of course, it's not quite that easy. Setting up a whole-house system usually requires a lighting designer and a programmer to create the various scenes: Common choices include "welcome home," "entertaining" and — bad news, kids — "homework time." And once all the switches are programmed, if you decide you want to set the kitchen lights a little brighter for the "clean up" scene, good luck. The instructions can run to 40 pages and changing settings requires the skills of an engineer — or at least a teenager.

"There's no question that your kids will know more about your lighting controls than you do," said Dan Blitzer, a continuing-education instructor for the American Lighting Association.

New York University humanities professor Richard Brown knows what he means. His own system fades his lights at a precise two seconds, works from a single remote control (called a master) and can toggle between reading and work scenes at the flip of a switch. But the whole thing was so intimidating he recently had to have a special tutorial from his lighting designer on how to work it.

"I grew up in a hardware store,

but it's very challenging," he said.

Despite all the technical difficulties, the \$3.6 billion lighting industry keeps rolling out more whiz-bang products. Lutron's RadioRa, for instance, comes with a car-visor control: Just hit a pre-programmed switch as you turn into the driveway and the lights all over the house come on. Lightolier's MultiSet Pro lets you program in as many as 13 fade rates — the time it takes a light to dim to black — ranging from one second to an hour. And, in a high-tech update on those old timer-controlled lights, a number of makers now offer systems that can memorize your lighting patterns. When you're away from home, just hit the "vacation" mode and the lights will act as though you're still around.

Carol Goodman says she'd be happy if the lights just stayed on. The Jupiter, Fla., homeowner put in one of the outdoor systems in her yard last year. The 25 lights are supposed to turn on automatically at preset times to illuminate the garden landscaping and six sculptures. But, she says, after weekly visits from the electrician, the lights work only part of the time — and seemingly at random. (She has been told the frequent thunder-and-lightning storms in the area may be to blame.)

"One minute the tree is lit up, the next it's off," said Mrs. Goodman. "I've stopped checking."

## How to remove a broken light bulb

By JAMES AND MORRIS CAREY  
The Associated Press

Among things that frustrate: a light bulb that has broken off in the socket of your favorite reading night light. Getting one out that's broken off at the base doesn't have to be a big production.

A natural instinct is to use force, but that approach usually does more harm than good. That's because the base of the bulb and the socket are both made of the same material — brass. And brass is soft. Granted, the brass socket is slightly thicker — and therefore slightly stronger — than the bulb base, but not much.

First things first: Before attempting to remove the bulb base, unplug the lamp.

The potato trick is the one we like the best. Cut a potato in half and press it down over the socket. A slight amount of pressure is needed to cause the potato to inch its way into the inside of the socket and the bulb base. While applying downward pressure on the spud, turn it counterclockwise to unscrew the bulb base. An apple works as well, as does a green pear.

On rare occasions you might find that our potato trick won't do the job. When that happens, open your tool box. You'll need one, two or all of three tools:

- regular pliers
- needle-nose pliers
- screwdriver

You can use the regular pair of pliers to create friction on the inside to the bulb base. Simply insert the jaws of the pliers into the socket and open them by spreading the handles apart. At the same time, turn the pliers counterclockwise to loosen the base.

Needle-nose pliers come in handy when the base still has entrails. The narrow jaws can easily be fitted into the base and around the glass nodule that sits in the middle. Often, a slight counterclockwise nudge is all that it takes to loosen the base.

If all else fails, try the screwdriver. Here is where you could cause damage to your lamp if you aren't careful and gentle. Use a medium-sized screwdriver blade to slightly pry the base away from the socket. Do this slowly. You don't want to bend the socket excessively. All you need is enough room to get one of the jaws of the needle-nose pliers between the socket and base. An eighth- to a quarter-inch bite is all you should need. Hold the pliers tightly and turn counterclockwise.

Make sure that changing bulbs next time doesn't become the major production that we've just described. Use a little steel wool to make sure that everything works smoothly.

Using a ball of steel wool, rub the inside of the lamp socket to eliminate dirt, oxidation, corrosion and any small burrs. The prepared socket should be clean, shiny and free of burrs, bumps or tears. Do the same to the bulb base. Be sure that it is clean and free of dirt and debris. Skin oil is transferred to objects by simply touching them. So, clean the base of the bulb and screw it into the lamp socket without touching either.

Tip: Always wipe down the bulbs we install with a soft, clean cloth. This ensures that oil from our skin is not left on the bulb's glass envelope. Believe it or not, skin oil on an incandescent bulb can cause it to prematurely fail. On projects where you are changing many bulbs it is useful to wear cotton gloves.

## How to lighten up during winter months

By CAROL McGARVEY  
The Associated Press

The Scandinavians have the right idea. In a land darkened by winter, they revere white for its ability to reflect and enhance the waning sunlight. You can do the same in your home.

Snuggle in, and make the most of it. Few things are more serene than frosty windows and softly falling snow. Instead of fighting it or grousing about it, make the most of it.

Use filmy sheers to keep the light coming in, even on gray days. Use creamy white upholstered pieces in a cozy seating arrangement. Make sure there is texture in the fabric or in the nearby accessories to warm up the scene.

Here are a variety of other suggestions to warm up your surroundings in a chilly season:

■ Don't over-neutralize when you go with a neutral color scheme, such as a white-on-white look. First, use not just one color but many shades of the same color. Second, emphasize surface textures, shapes, and dimension. Last, use a few dark contrasts to give the neutral colors a solid footing.

■ With short days and long nights, you'll have the perfect opportunity for illuminating your home with candles and lighting, giving a close-to-the-fire ambiance.

■ Use paints and wallpapers with a classic, no-color look that can adapt to seasonal changes. Basic whites with small amounts of black or other neutrals, such as in a subtle stripe, work well for cozying up a winter look, but also for a fresh spring and summer look.

■ Warm up the look of your home with accessories that tell stories. Pieces from the past help add a warm glow to your central gathering spot.

■ Build yourself a "nest" for sleeping or reading. Provide a good light, books for perusing, and comforters and throws for keeping warm.

■ Make the most of your bathroom, and turn it into a home spa. Light votive candles, add some aromatherapy, and indulge by pretending you're in the snowy woods.

■ When you entertain — or just for a simple family meal — add candlelight. It raises the room's emotional temperature in an easy, relaxed way.

## Bright lights, big systems

Sales of some lighting-control systems are up as much as 40 percent over the last five years. Below are what some makers offer:

■ **Product/Price:** Grafik Eye; Lutron Electronics; www.lutron.com; \$850

**What It Does:** One-room system with multiple lighting scenes  
**Comments:** For those not ready to do the whole house; one of Lutron's most popular systems, with sales up 20 percent this year.

■ **Product/Price:** Toscana controller; Leviton Manufacturing; www.leviton.com; \$2,000-plus

**What It Does:** System recognizes the time of day and automatically adjusts lights to preset levels

**Comments:** You can hook your appliances, like your coffee maker, up to this device, too.

■ **Product/Price:** Compose PLC; Lightolier Controls; www.lol-controls.com; \$2,000-plus

**What It Does:** Whole-house system doesn't require additional wiring

**Comments:** Allows you to preset up to 13 lighting scenes; fade rate can be set as slow as one hour.

■ **Product/Price:** Small remote control; Vantage Controls; www.vantagecontrols.com; \$38

**What It Does:** Can control up to eight lighting scenes in each room

**Comments:** No need to get off the couch, but only works with Vantage systems.

■ **Product/Price:** HomeTouch; LiteTouch; www.home-touch.com; \$2,400 for 10-switch house

**What It Does:** Keypads replace existing switches and dimmers; can be used on one floor or entire house

**Comments:** Company sells custom-engraved buttons, like "pool," "BBQ," and "driveway"; timer module has a vacation mode.

■ **Product/Price:** Web-Link II; Home Automation; www.homeauto.com; \$300

**What It Does:** System dims, brightens and controls lights using a PDA or any computer with Internet access.

**Comments:** User-friendly icons make this system easy to use online, but works only with maker's systems.

## Lighting choices comes in the spotlight

The Associated Press

When people visit a friend's home, they probably first notice new furniture or artwork. Not Scott Plemmons. The first thing he looks for are lights. Or more precisely, how lighting is used.

"When you walk into a home where the use of light is planned, you see layered light and the right bulbs in the right fixtures," said Plemmons of the Lowe's home chain. "For lots of people, light is the crowning touch to a room because it's the last thing you do."

Plemmons said attitudes toward illumination have come light years from a decade ago.

"Now they light for mood, to create warmth, accent a room or just to make reading that much more comfortable," said Plemmons.

And consumers, once reluctant to experiment with light, are now willing to change lights and lighting schemes as readily as they repaint walls.

"The effects you create with light help everything else in the room: artwork, furniture, wall colors, fabrics, you name it. Light enhances all those other elements," said Plemmons.

In part, the switch to light was driven by a furniture industry wanting more focus on fabrics and designs. High-end fixture manufacturers such as Kichler introduced lamps and accessories to a

home store lighting market previously dominated by department stores and showrooms.

Consumer demand has expanded from perfunctory table lamps to a wide range of purpose-specific fixtures including track lights, recessed canisters, chandeliers and touchier lights. The notion of layered lighting — the use of various fixtures, bulbs and accents in a single room is now a standard interior design practice. Even venerable fluorescent bulbs have seen the bright light of attention.

"In the old days, people associated fluorescent bulbs with casting a green pallor on everything in a workshop," said Plemmons, "but now you choose bulbs that mimic sunlight in table lamps as well as different levels of color, including warm and cool tones."

Still, the public needs education to use the right bulb in the right place. Instead of a soft-white bulb in every socket, homeowners find success with spotlights to accent paintings and flood lamps to wash a wall with light. The lighting industry uses the Color Rendition Index (CRI) to recommend lights to retain true color on any given object.

"The biggest thing is that homeowners are willing to take risks with light these days," said Plemmons. "When they repaint a room, add carpet or place new furniture, light isn't the afterthought it was even a few years ago."

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