

4

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Light My Way

Today's task lighting—either inconspicuously integrated or ornately decorative—must illuminate whatever task is at hand so the job can get done

By Danine Alati

"Good lighting is like a good driver," explains Emily Monato, principal of Renee Cooley Lighting Design in New York. "If you comment on the car ride, then it was probably pretty bumpy, but if it's a nice, smooth ride then you don't even think about it. Similarly, if the lighting source is integrated well enough, it just does its job and you don't even notice it."

Monato's driving analogy perfectly illustrates the purpose of task lighting. Whether the source is portable, table-top mounted, wall mounted, or hanging from the ceiling, its purpose is straightforward: Just get the job done. Monato feels that the designer should plan ahead to integrate the task lighting into the project so that a person can hardly notice the lighting source.

As defined by Linda Cummings, principal of LC Lighting Consultants in Houston, task lighting is "a separate light source that provides direct illumination onto a specific task." Going a step further, she says, "Lights have to be integrated totally into the architecture, or they must be very attractive and decorative." If lighting sources are visible, designers feel that they should be aesthetically pleasing. "People are spending too much money on constructing and decorating environments," Cummings elaborates, "so that they are not going to allow unattractive lighting to ruin everything."

Although the function of task lighting would seem to outweigh the desire for aesthetic appeal, Chris Bowsher, principal of Chris Bowsher Architectural Lighting in Hermosa Beach, Calif., insists, "Aesthetics is at the top of the list of criteria for task lighting, especially for table lamps." Obviously, a table lamp chosen for function does not have to be ugly. Functional lighting that is also decorative lets people personalize an otherwise anonymous space, such as the typical office environment. The most popular type of office task lighting right now, however, is mounted underneath shelving or cabinets as part of the furniture system.

Thus, the term "task lighting" encompasses a broad range of lighting sources that vary with the specific task. Lighting fixtures



JOLT Lighting, Inc. has created the Stanza adjustable task light with a parabolic louver built into the head to diffuse the light, direct it onto the work surface and reduce glare. The two 9-watt compact fluorescent bulbs each with a 10,000-hour-life, three-position lamp switch and tension adjustable spring-arm allow the user maximum control over the light.

Circle No. 209



The new May Day Collection by FLOS USA may be used as a searchlight, portable table lamp, hanging lamp or UP light, with a white polycarbonate shade, waterproof on/off switch, and handle available in black, blue, orange or green.

Circle No. 210



This new Slite T2 subminiature linear fluorescent lamp introduced by ALCKO has received rave reviews from lighting designers. The high-performance bulb with cool operating temperature and energy-efficient, computer enhanced reflector system provides shadow-free, 120-degree light distribution.

Circle No. 211



Architecturally designed portable lighting by Peter Shelton, AIA, and Lee F. Mindel, AIA, for Nessen Lighting was inspired by late Modernist architect Mies Van Der Rohe. This McCormick table lamp employs an integral full-range dimmer switch to control the incandescent "A" lamps in either 75- or 150-watts.

Circle No. 212

This multi-award-winning Heron task light was created by Isao Hosoe exclusively for Luxo Corporation. The infinitely adjustable balance mechanism that is concealed from view allows the Heron to be positioned into a variety of movements allowing the user to direct light to specific task areas, and the head of the unit avoids light "spillover" and glare.

Circle No. 213



used to illuminate a jewelry store counter display will differ drastically from those used by a make-up artist, and the lighting in a factory where workers assemble cans is different than the bulbs used to brighten an accountant's desk. Depending on the task, designers prioritize different criteria when specifying task lights. But the one thing that remains constant is the want and need for control.

People want to be able to adjust and control their lighting source. "Adjustability" refers to such factors as the level of lighting or illuminance, measured in foot-candles, and the flexibility to reposition the source or angle of reflection depending on the particular task. If the user cannot adjust the lighting source, the light may shine outside the desired area and cause glare that tires the eye. Shielding acts as a means to control the light, redressing this ergonomics concern. A louver or a glass or plastic lens can help direct the light and reduce reflection.

Bowsher voices the concern of many lighting designers in maintaining that manufacturers of task lighting fixtures should do more to address the concerns of light reflection and glare. He says, "You can shield it, but then you get less light. So sometimes the only way around the glare issue is to reposition the source." Lately, manufacturers are heeding such suggestions and creating products to better suit end-users' needs. For example, many people shun fluorescent lighting because they stereotype "fluorescent" to mean "bright" and "harsh," so manufacturers are improving fluorescent lights by making them smaller and more compact. Some fluorescent bulbs even mimic the soft glow created by an incandescent light while using less energy and expending less heat than an incandescent source.

Since incandescent lamps remain a favorite among consumers, Monato cites an example of an improved bulb called a #16 IR tech (meaning infrared technology). Because this bulb is incandescent, it produces heat, but the #16 redirects this heat back to the bulb, recycles the energy and converts it back into light. Several companies are working on developing this product, which Monato expects will take several years to perfect.

Market forces will encourage task lighting to be made more attractive, more compact and more efficient. Yet designers will always have to strike a balance between ambient and task lighting because reliance solely on one or the other will not always provide adequate illumination. Cummings advocates use of even ambient lighting so that the task lighting does not create too much contrast, which tires the eyes, while Bowsher likes the idea of using task lighting to lower the need for ambient lighting, which "enables the designer to bring in more drama to the space."

Whether the task lighting makes a glowing statement of drama or simply supplements the ambient lighting, beams out from a decorative source, or shimmers discretely from beneath a shelf, the main issue is that it illuminates the task at hand. And newer products with increased options, versatility and adjustability will provide customers a well-lit path ahead. ♦

Renown artist/designer Kevin Walz has designed a lighting collection for Baldinger that "spoke poetically and practically about illumination." Appropriate for many task lighting applications from office or hotel hallways, to workstations, to dining or conference rooms, the Four Arc table lamp, with a DuPont Corian® translucent, durable thermoformable diffuser, is available with incandescent or compact fluorescent bulbs.

Circle No. 214



Known for its high-end designs, McGuire has introduced table lamps suitable for all hospitality applications using exotic materials and sleek new designs, including the Arabesque, to offer aesthetic appeal in addition to providing adequate, soft, incandescent lighting

Circle No. 215

