

THE ART OF ILLUMINATION

Sophisticated, high-tech lighting reveals good design and creates harmonious, visually stimulating surroundings

WRITTEN BY Eliza Cross

Call it the 'wind beneath the wings' of good architecture, the seemingly secondary factor that makes all the difference between an ordinary building and one that is stunning. Brilliant, professionally designed lighting brings a space to life, highlighting the physical structure and creating warm ambience and highly functional living areas.

"Good lighting lets you see the architecture," says Gregg Mackell, an award-winning designer and the owner of 186 Lighting Design Group in Golden, Colorado. With a degree in architectural engineering from the University of Colorado and an impressive resume of professional accreditations, Mackell is passionate about creating beautifully illuminated spaces. "Lighting is a composition of elements," he says. "We pull all the pieces together to ensure that the space feels the way the homeowner wants it to feel, while at the same time balancing color, form, shadow and texture."

Good lighting design starts during the schematic stage of planning, and Mackell's firm works closely with architects and interior designers to incorporate lighting considerations before the plans are even drawn. Designers from 186 Lighting work with detailed CAD drawings and construction documents to ensure that the myriad details of wiring, placement and accessibility are considered. Because there are so many high-tech options available, lighting professionals also custom design and program sophisticated electronic control systems, fine tuning the fixtures on site.

A home with professionally designed lighting often highlights specific structural features, and designers work hard to perfectly position each light to

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best illuminate other important details like artwork, furnishings and outdoor landscaping. Individual fixtures' bulb types and beam spreads are meticulously adjusted, and lenses or louvers may be added to achieve the perfect effect. Indirect lighting may be utilized to 'wash' an area with light, and dimmers further enable a full range of light gradations. "By using adjustable sources we can create different scenes within the space," Mackell says.

On his projects, Mackell sometimes incorporates color kinetic lighting as an aesthetic accent; the LED lights provide almost magical effects, and homeowners can choose from a palette of colors to suit their moods and preferences — and even program the lights to change throughout an event. "Moderation is the key with col-

Below: A huge stone slab countertop mounted to the powder room's side walls appears to float due to the backlighting from a linear light strip. Sconces flanking the mirror are placed at eye level to eliminate shadows, and frosted glass globes soften the light. **Opposite, clockwise from top:** Varying layers and levels of light highlight different aspects of the space, from the overhead light grazing down the texture of the stone wall to the color changing LED light aimed at the interior sculpture. | An LED color changing light strip gleams beneath the cantilevered staircase in this Aspen home. The low wattage makes the installation safe for children, and it serves an additional function as a night light for guests staying in the upstairs rooms. | Mackell placed a lens color changing LED light strip in the boxy living room shelves to create a "unique, memorable detail" in this spec home. | Tiny star lights covering a bedroom ceiling let the homeowners feel like they're extending their nighttime view from the room's abundant windows. | Overhead lights illuminate work areas in the kitchen while low-voltage strip lighting highlights the cabinets. The warm, amber tones of the cabinetry contrast with the cool blue LED lighting accenting the stairs.



ored lighting,” Mackell says, adding that while a single carefully placed kinetic system can make a strong statement in a space, more than one can be too much of a good thing.

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lighting design is of paramount importance in the ultimate success of how a space works. “The beauty is in the details, and Gregg’s team works well with us in both the artistic sense and the technical sense,” says Geoffrey Lester, Senior Project Architect at Charles Cunniffe Architects in Aspen. “Beyond basic functionality, lighting design can transform a flat, static volume into a dynamic three-dimensional experience. By accentuating building planes, forms and details — often by minimally visible light sources — one can be guided into a space by a tapestry of light, directed to particular objects and shown a

much greater appreciation of architecture as art.”

“The lighting designer and I try to thoughtfully provide one-of-a-kind details to each custom residential or commercial project,” he says. One such collaboration was a cantilevered staircase in a residence Lester designed that Mackell illuminated from underneath with colored lighting, creating a dramatic focal point and exquisite patterns and effects. Lester describes the process and outcome as “a lot of fun.”

“Lighting can make or break a space,” he adds. “You can definitely tell the difference between a building that has professional lighting and one that doesn’t, and having design intelligence at that level is what really makes a structure distinctive.”

WA&A Senior Contributing Editor *Eliza Cross* writes about design, cuisine, business and environmental topics for numerous publications including *EcoStructure*, *Natural Home*, *Mountain Living* and *Environmental Design & Construction*. She is the author of three books, including the award-winning *Family Home of the New West* (Northland Publishing). ■

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