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It's hard to beat an uplifting lighting scheme for really pushing a new development into the spotlight. **Linda Clayton** looks at the latest ideas in lighting and reveals a bright future for Britain's homes.



Light show

THIS IMAGE Italian furniture brand Natuzzi presents its first foray into pendant lighting with its Arroba pendant – a circular steel structure, available in two dimensions



Getting buyers in the mood to make the biggest purchase of their lives can be seriously enhanced with the right lighting in place.

Choosing in-vogue lighting is no longer as simple as specifying a chrome switch plate – there's now a much greater emphasis on lighting affects and their ability to make or break a sale. Clever developers are now using accent lighting to highlight key features, leaving not so exciting areas in the shadows, while the truly adventurous are embracing coloured lighting, LEDs, dimmers and advanced lighting circuits for show homes that dazzle – even in a dimming economy.

"Lighting is no longer a secondary interior feature. It is now appreciated that lighting is an important factor, which can create the moods and ambiances potential buyers are looking for in a home," agrees George Bond, regional director of the British Interior Design Association.

LIGHT YEARS AHEAD

It's all very well to bang on about the importance of installing the right lighting, but the truth is that the right lighting is changing at, well, the speed of light.

In one example, standard tungsten incandescent bulbs are fast being ousted by compact fluorescents. Initially, there was a conflict between installing these energy efficient bulbs and the desired aesthetical results, not least because their rather ungainly shape made a mockery of any light fitting that couldn't hide their bulk.

Fortunately, the original ugly design of compact fluorescent bulbs is being improved by the day, and it is now possible to buy energy efficient light bulbs that look almost identical to a traditional tungsten bulb – therefore allowing the provision of really efficient lighting schemes that don't offend the eye.

The next bid to make homes more energy efficient saw the wholesale embrace of LEDs, still the darling of energy efficiency advocates today.

However, both LEDs and compact fluorescent bulbs have enemies amongst those seeking warmer colour rendition – the essential ingredient in creating cosy, inviting interiors.

In fact, many lighting designers, who choose not to be named, argue that tungsten is still the best light source for creating a show home that entices the soul.

"The colour rendition of different lamps can dramatically affect the desired results. Luckily, lighting technology is changing by the second and it won't be long before we achieve the right balance of warm colour and energy efficiency.

"Housebuilders and developers definitely need to keep on their toes if they want to be sure that they are specifying the latest equipment. By the time this article goes to press, a new development could have changed which light source is considered the 'best'," says Ian Stanton, director of iGuzzini UK.



It pays to do your homework when it comes to installation – a good electrical engineer might appreciate that angling downlights onto a snazzy sink will put it in the spotlight, but will they know the angle that will show it in the best light?

ABOVE NDA Private Clients utilised the full impact of a sparkly modern glass chandelier within the show house of Trent Park Development's River Crescent scheme in Nottingham

ENERGY-SAVING ILLUMINATION

Regardless of whether eco-friendly lighting provides the best colour rendition, it's undoubtedly the way forward, particularly for developers seeking to achieve impressive Code for Sustainable Homes standards. The installation of light management systems aimed at automatically reducing energy consumption is a growing trend, particularly amongst the upper end of the market.

"These systems sense movement in a room and dim the lights when there is a set period of inactivity. As well as being a good way to save electricity you don't have to double check you have remembered to turn the lights off when you go out as each light will eventually go out on its own accord. Each room and even each light can be individually programmed to function precisely as required. These systems are very effective and practical, while being economically friendly and economic," explains Andrew Murray, founder of Morpheus Developments, who also points out that leaving a dozen traditional downlighters on at the same time uses the equivalent energy consumption of a constantly boiling kettle.

Harnessing nature's free light source – the

sun – is prominent in environmentally sound developments, and the importance of natural daylight shouldn't be ignored when planning any lighting scheme. At Morpheus' latest project in South Kensington, three new neo-Georgian townhouses, the company has installed a large skylight at the top of the stairwell, which allows natural light to filter down throughout the house. "Other ways to open up a property to natural light is to build large windows and sliding doors into the garden," adds Murray.

FLOOD LIT HOMES

While the conflict between warm lighting versus eco lighting still rages, there is another conflict brewing that sheer technological advances cannot solve – namely, the growing trend to light every nook and cranny so that each room is bursting with more bulbs than your average Christmas tree.

Replacing the single lone ceiling pendant with a plethora of back-lit alcoves, glowing plinths and flush fitting floor lights is currently big news in interior design. "Try to incorporate lighting into the architectural features of a property where possible. This can include discreet lighting within staircases, alcoves, low-level marker lights in skirting boards, back lighting plasma screens, artwork and mirrors," advises Samantha Morgan, director of Concept Group. Taking the 'more is more' approach to lighting design undoubtedly creates enough drama to rival Hollywood Boulevard, but it's important to balance ►

eye-popping design with a responsible attitude. And not just because Part L of the building regulations stipulates that 25 per cent of a property's lighting must be energy efficient! This is where LEDs are really packing a punch.

Reportedly lasting 100,000 hours per bulb, Light Emitting Diodes produce a surprising amount of light for their size, and are now available in clusters that allow a 7w LED downlight to emit the same light levels as a 65w tungsten bulb.

"As designs improve it is becoming easier to introduce energy efficient fittings, such as LEDs and fluorescent fittings, into lighting schemes. Developers need to be aware that with the use of energy efficient fittings and lighting control systems the power consumption of a property can be greatly reduced," adds Morgan.

"In open-plan kitchen and reception rooms, one would expect both areas to be lit separately so that the space can be used as one or individually. We use down-lighters only in the kitchen areas so that you can have a backdrop of lighting when the kitchen is not in use"

FOCUSING ATTENTION

Obviously carefully designed lighting can be used to enhance the whole home, but those designers looking to produce dramatic results on a budget will do well to focus their lighting efforts on just the kitchen and bathroom.

In particular, the trend for open-plan living has greatly increased demand for split-circuit lighting that is intelligently designed in order to allow this multifunctional space to progress smoothly from day to night.

"Home owners expect a lot more today from a property's standard specification," says Bernadette Cunningham, director of the Thornsett Group.

"In open-plan kitchen and reception rooms, one would expect both areas to be lit separately so that the space can be used as one or individually. We use down-lighters only in the kitchen areas so that you can have an interesting backdrop of lighting when the kitchen is not in use, as well as clear and practical lighting for when preparing food. We then install pendant lights above dining areas which allow the property owners to be creative with lampshades or chandeliers."

Again, it pays to do your homework when it comes to installation – a good electrical engineer might appreciate that angling downlights onto an especially snazzy sink will put it in the spotlight but will they know the precise angle that will show it in the best light?

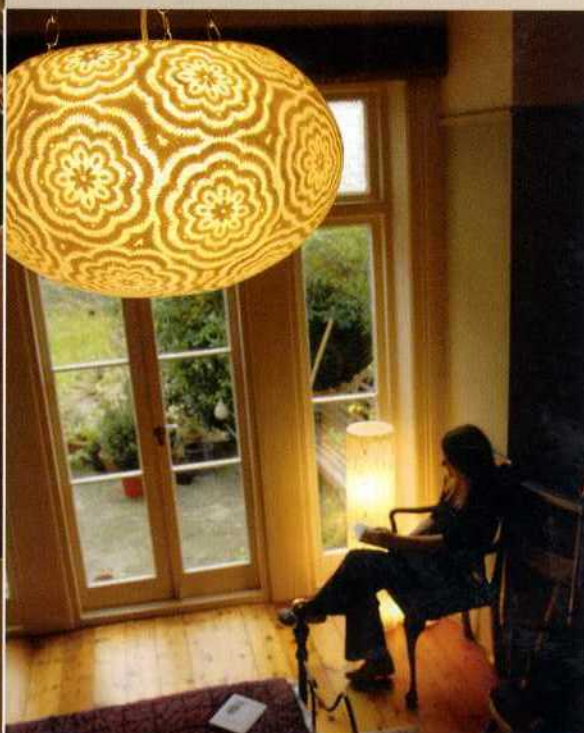
Ian Stanton at iGuzzini believes that angling light at ten degrees will have a very different effect compared to angling it at 36 degrees, and this is where employing the services of a specialist lighting designer can pay dividends. However, life is made just a little easier in the bathroom thanks to the introduction of products with lighting pre-installed.

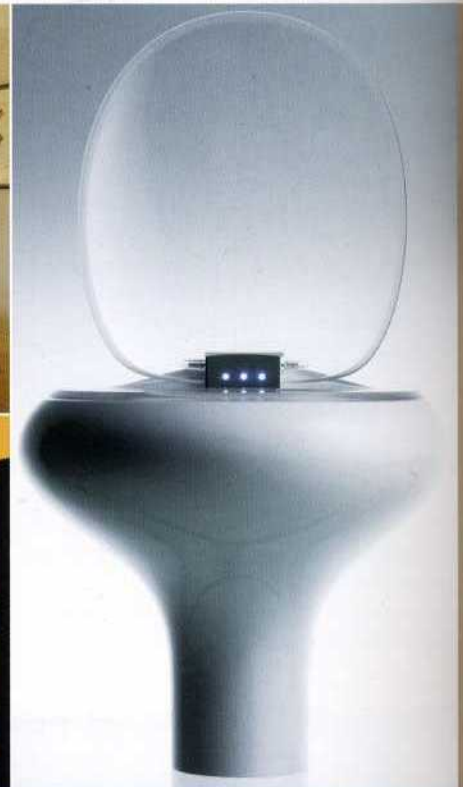
Shades Bathrooms offers a wide array of mirrors with infra-red controlled lights built-in, as well as vanity units with ▶



ABOVE Demonstrating how colour changing lights can be used to dramatic effect, Chris Dewar-Dixon from design group Four IV created this acrylic pendant for fashion brand GAS's flagship store in Hong Kong

RIGHT Embrace the current trend for surface pattern with Tay Lighting's handmade pendant lights, which are created from layers of fibre glass that are handpainted between each layer to provide a bespoke effect





ABOVE LEFT This modern bathroom is decorated with indirect lighting cornice moulding C352 from Orac's Myline modern collection **ABOVE CENTRE** This Designs used simple but stylish bedside lamps to ramp up the romance factor in the bedrooms of St George's Battersea Reach development **ABOVE RIGHT** Ross Lovegrove's Istanbul collection for Vitra includes this innovative WC pan with LED colour lighting that is activated by motion sensor **LEFT** Realising the potential of its Charterhouse the Sq development of 174 luxury apartments in Clerkenwell, London, Thornsett Group has specified lighting on three circuits in the open-plan kitchens – ceiling spotlights, under-cabinet spotlights and a glamorous chandelier over the dining table

back-lit shelving and overhead lights as standard, while Duravit's E-mood furniture range offers a complete system of LED lit components with 'plug and play' installation. Vitra has even added LEDs to a WC – providing practical lighting by night that's especially beneficial to those with young children.

Although these types of products are making installation of ambient lighting ever easier, it's important not to get carried away. Leading interior designer Joanna Wood warns of the dangers of over-doing the lighting, and says that too many lights will turn the most inviting home into a space that resembles the harsh lighting you might find in an office.

"A property with spotlights everywhere will be too bright and can depreciate its value. The ambience needs to be moody, cosy with decorative light affects that don't make the owner feel like they are living in a department store," says Wood.

THE FUTURE'S BRIGHT

Besides yet more reductions in energy consumption, the future of domestic lighting is set to be all about controllability, with intelligent new systems bringing precise lighting controls that are sensor monitored to achieve individually tailored lighting for each room.

"People are becoming more tuned in to

what is available, and as such, are increasingly looking for more sophisticated lighting control solutions over and above the traditional light switch," says John Niebel, sales director of residential systems at Lutron. "Home owners are wanting their lighting to do more, and are opting for control solutions that allow them to create and manage lighting scenes."

In terms of the actual physical design of lighting products, it seems that decorative shades will continue to impress in 2009, with more and more exotic chandeliers and crystal fittings helping to catch the eye of potential property buyers.

"Lighting is an area that housebuilders can afford to play with, as it can be changed much easier than a wall colour, so buyers won't tend to be put off if they don't like the design choice. Black shades always look more expensive and a bit more interesting than white or cream and create a really warm boutique hotel type light in the evening," comments Karen Howes, director of This Designs.

"The new miniature compact fluorescent lamps that can now dim like a tungsten lamp will make a big difference in the next year or so and simple lighting control, such as PIR's in toilets, bathrooms and utility spaces are also starting to become commonplace," adds Mark Hensman, Managing Director of GIA Equation. **sh**

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