

the **right** light

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LIGHTING ESSENTIALS FOR THE HOME

LISA SKOLNIK NORA RICHTER GREER

CRAFT PROJECTS BY LIVIA MCCREE

Dedication

To Caroline, Sasha, Anastasia and Theodora, who fill my life with light.

-Lisa Skolnik

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This book would not be possible without the collaboration of Nora Greer, my co-author and project manager; Debbie Needleman, our photo researcher; and a great deal of help from many others.

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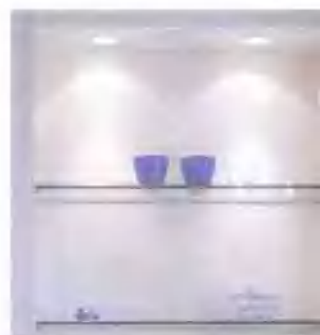
-Lisa Skolnik

My gratitude to those who brought me closer to *The Right Light*, especially Lisa, Martha, and Jay. Thanks to Kristy for all her help. And, as always, to William.

-N.R.G.

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Introduction

Lighting is one of the most routine features of our homes—so routine, in fact, that we usually take it for granted. Most of us live without second thoughts with the standard-issue, built-in lighting that comes with our abodes. Of course, we supplement the overhead lighting in each room with lamps and fixtures of every ilk, yet we often don't choose these sources of light for the right reasons. They may look good, or solve an immediate problem by providing the illumination that is needed for a specific task, but are they really the right light?

Just as we carefully weigh the style of furniture or the palette of colors we use in our homes, we must carefully weigh the way we light them. Lighting does far more than merely illuminate a room; it also sets the stage for every act that takes place in it. Besides emphasizing areas of importance or activity, or

left

Uplights placed behind the bench reflect off the marble wall.

highlighting prized possessions, light can create the right ambience for a space, be it prosaic or dramatic. A beautiful room can fall flat if it is outfitted with inadequate lighting. The same is true of beautiful fixtures or lamps; they are worthless as light sources if unsuited to the tasks at hand.

The environment and ambience we establish in a space by lighting it a certain way also has a profound effect on many aspects of our psyche. Take efficiency and performance. We are more likely to be alert, energetic, and ready to work on a sunny day, which causes bright highlights and crisp shadows in a room. The opposite holds true on a drab day, when there is no contrast and that same room assumes a monotonous tone that lulls its occupants into lethargy. In essence, the difference between these two days is due to variations in the quality of natural light. Fortunately, artificial illumination can create contrasts in a room to simulate natural light, if necessary, and provide a stimulating environment.

Light does far more than provide the illumination we need for efficiency. It also affects our psychological well-being through the moods it creates; we feel calm and serene, industrious and alert, lively and enthusiastic, or romantic and relaxed. And it isn't just natural light that produces this effect. Making a significant impact with lighting is an intricate undertaking that calls for a careful balance of both natural and artificial light.

Yet lighting has long been underutilized as a home design tool for a number of reasons. For starters, it requires more planning than many

other decorating tools. It is easier to settle for an overhead fixture and a few plug-in lamps than to implement more effective lighting treatments that require special wiring or structural changes. Also, lighting doesn't offer any obvious type of gratification; it is a subtle element that must be appreciated at the time of day or night when it is at work. Finally, lighting has not received the attention it deserves and requires simply because many homeowners are unaware of the impact it makes in a space and feel inadequate using it as a decorating tool. Instead of tackling the subject themselves—which can require some technical reading—or calling in a pro, homeowners ignore the challenge altogether.

While the generic options suggested above—simply adding ceiling fixtures and a smattering of lamps—have long been the default lighting solution in many rooms, these options are no longer a given. Savvy architects, designers, and do-it-yourselfers are finally considering lighting as a critical component of good home design. As well it should be; successfully balancing the functional and aesthetic aspects of lighting takes consideration, planning, and careful implementation on a room-by-room basis. Lighting should, and will, vary greatly between rooms, depending on its function in each and the homeowner's design goals. In this book, we discuss the basics of lighting—why we need it, how it should work in every part of a home, and how to set and achieve your design goals.

HANDCRAFTED LAMPS by Livia McRee

A creative way to decorate your home with personal, custom lighting is to make your own. The craft projects in this book will inspire you to do just that, and produce the perfect light for any place in your home.



Getting the Light Right

We take the meaning of the phrase “let there be light” for granted; illuminating a home in just the right way can be a far from heavenly task. In fact, lighting is such an important feature of our everyday lives that it should be considered when a room is being furnished or, ideally, still in the midst of design and construction. But few of us have the opportunity to build a space from the ground up, or even to consider lighting before putting anything else in a room. So we play catch-up, installing lights where we think they should be or where we find we desperately need them.

Regardless of whether we are starting from scratch or backtracking to address inadequacies in the way a space is illuminated, it is critical to develop a lighting plan for each room that addresses both substance and style. The lighting should fulfill the utilitarian objectives of everyday life and at the same time complement a specific decorating style. In addition, a good lighting plan relies on a combination of natural and artificial lighting. It takes into account the available natural light, balancing it with the function, architectural components, and decorative features of a room or space.

Left

In this bedroom designed by architect Nico Rensch, individual task lights placed at each side of the bed's headboard supplement the general overhead lighting. A translucent pull-up shade controls glare during the day and offers privacy at night.

START WITH NATURAL LIGHT Thanks to contemporary zoning laws, all the rooms in a home are required to receive some natural light from one or multiple windows, but this does not guarantee that the light is adequate by itself. The quantity and quality of natural light varies greatly from house to house and between individual rooms for several reasons. The way a room—or the house—is oriented, its size and shape, its dimensions and number of windows, and what it is situated next to, all affect its natural lighting.



above

In an attic-turned bedroom, lighting symmetry is achieved day and night with skylights and task lamps set at each side of the bed's headboard.

right

Natural light streaming through a window reflects off the mirror and makes the warmly appointed room even cozier. For less light, the shutters can be easily closed against the sun. At night, the small lamp in the corner provides ambient light for reading.









Orientation refers to the direction a room faces and is a critical component of lighting. In general, in the northern hemisphere, light from the north is cooler, whiter, and less intense than light from the south, which is why north-facing rooms are favored by artists for their studios (the reverse is true in the southern hemisphere). The cool northern light renders colors more accurately than does the light from the south, which burnishes warm tones. And from the north, intensity is more even and provides steady levels of illumination, as opposed to sharp contrasts of brightness and shadow.

left

During the day, enough natural light filters into the dining area to provide adequate lighting levels. Downlights provide supplement lighting. A fish aquarium built into the wall casts a blue tone.

A room's size and shape also have an impact on lighting. It is easy to assume that a small room needs less lighting than a large one, but that is not always the case, as the direction the room faces, its shape, and the size and positioning of its windows also affect lighting needs. A rectangular room with windows along a short width may need more lighting than a room with windows along its length. A room with a clear view receives more light than one blocked by a building, fence, or tree.

The natural light in a room or space is the starting point for making lighting plans. Although you can't alter the orientation of a home or space, you can compensate for its deficits with artificial lighting.

right

A room can be aesthetically improved with the inclusion of several different artificial lighting sources. Here a floor lamp provides general illumination and also functions as a reading light; a spot highlights the mantel's art; and a task light adds a touch of sparkle.

