

Denise Wenacur Principal

DW DESIGN & DÉCOR LLC, Croton-on-Hudson

"LIGHTING IS SUCH AN IMPORTANT DESIGN ELEMENT—IT'S NOT JUST functional or task-oriented, as something to read by, but it's an aesthetic, supporting the mood you are trying to achieve and providing a beautiful glow," says Denise Wenacur, an allied member of the American Society of Interior Designers (ASID) and associate member of IIDA (International Interior Design Association). A graduate of the New York School of Interior Design, who brings more than 25 years of experience to her work in the design business, Wenacur says that this is a very exciting time for lighting design, with more options in more styles, price points, and materials than ever before.

One trend she has noticed is the increased use of color in the lighting itself—and its customization at a moment's notice. "The color of the light doesn't have to be permanent any more," she notes. "It's not like you're buying a yellow or pink bulb."

Wenacur gives as an example, a Kohler bathtub with built-in mood lighting. "It's another spa-like option, like whirlpool jets. You can press a button and change the color of the light, depending on how you feel." The kitchen is the newest room in the home to embrace color in lighting, she adds, mentioning the Philips under-cabinet light strips (they're marketed as "friends of hue"), whose colors one can change for holidays or different moods via an iPhone app.

BRIGHT IDEA

"With a custom-beaded shade of patterned fabric or silk, a floor lamp in a corner can be as important a design element as a beautiful chair," says Wenacur.

"We're also seeing lighting built in to places in a very sophisticated manner we haven't see it before," Wenacur notes. An example she gives is a new construction project she worked on in which the client wanted huge surface-mounted medicine cabinets with the lighting embedded directly in the glass; one switch turns everything on. "In addition to having the vanity lighting above," she says, "it became another option to light the room, to give a glow, and by which to put on makeup."

With regard to lighting fixtures themselves, Wenacur says drum shades remain hugely popular, although she's tweaked the concept to stunning effect by placing a metal and crystal chandelier within gold silk casing. "The shade is slightly transparent," she says, "so it softens the glow and changes the feeling of the lighting, giving it a soft moodiness."

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Top Hats

Custom silk mini shades and French beads update an old chandelier.

Beautiful lighting as a focal point of a room becomes much like a piece of artwork, says Wenacur, and, as such, it might be something one already owns. In another instance, the designer "woke up" an ordinary chandelier a client already owned with the addition of custom silk shades with French beads, and faux-painted the canopy from which it was suspended in silver and gold leaf. The effect was totally transformative.