

Light Layering, the secret sauce



There is no one light fixture that can give you everything you need to illuminate a room properly. The trick is using a variety of light sources to create a flexible, inviting space. This is what is referred to as *light layering*. Light performs four functions. Here is a list of what they are and what it is that they do:

Task- Lighting by which you do work; such as the under cabinet lighting in the kitchen, lighting in the closet or a reading lamp.

Accent - Lighting used to highlight objects in a space. This adds depth and dimension to an environment. Recessed adjustable fixtures, track lights, portable uplights and directional landscape lights all fall into this category.

Ambient- This is the gentle fill light for a room. It softens shadows on people's faces and fills the volume of the space with a warm glow, as if the room were being filled with the light of a roaring fire. Ambient light comes from illumination that is bounced off the ceiling. Such sources as opaque wall sconces, torchieres, pendant hung indirect fixtures, and cove lighting can be used to create the ambient light.

Decorative- These are what I like to call *architectural jewelry*. Their main purpose is to look pretty. They help add sparkle to a space. Chandeliers and candlestick-type wall sconces fall into this category. They should not be used as the work horses for lighting a room. When they are too bright they can visually overpower the other elements of the design.

The Bottom Line- By layering these four functions of light together you can create an environment that welcomes visitors into the space, while providing usable light for day-to-day activities. Getting a feel for these terminologies will get you on the right path to understanding how light can work for you.