

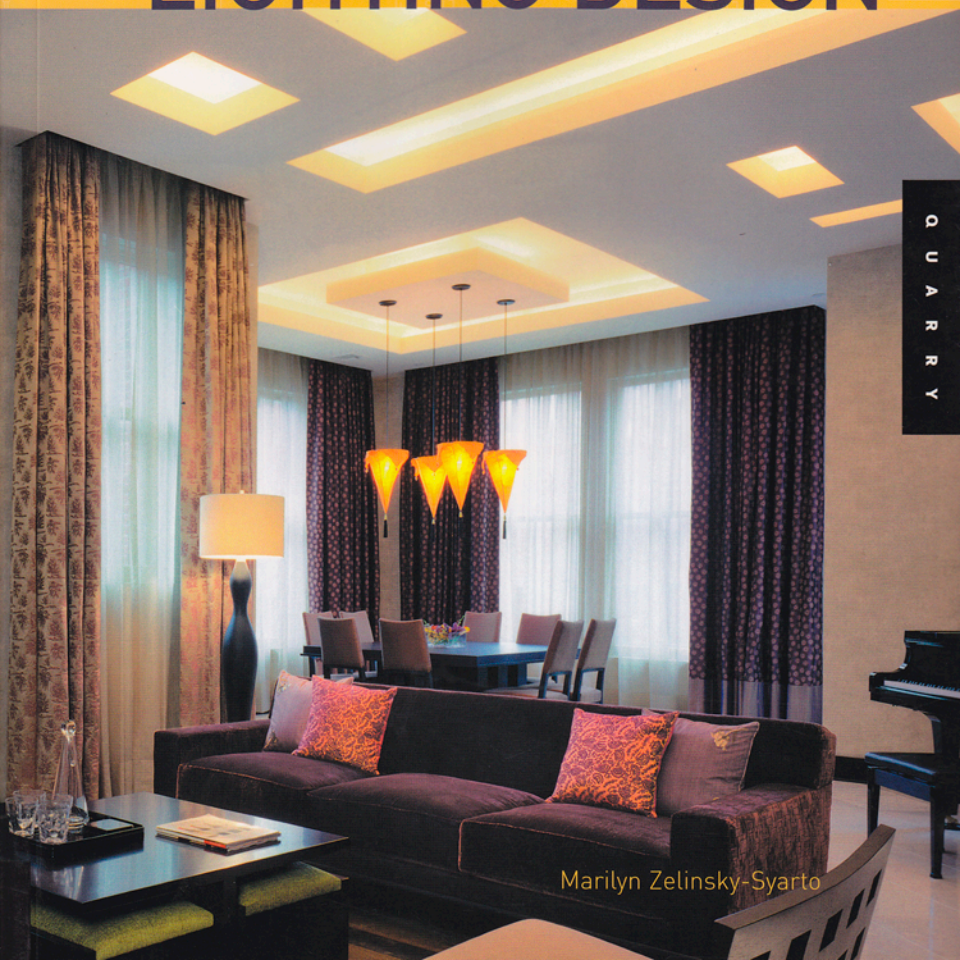
A Practical Design Guide to
Perfect Lighting

COMPLETE

LIGHTING DESIGN

Q
U
A
R
R
Y

Marilyn Zelinsky-Syarto



STRETCHING SPACE WITH LIGHT

by Abigail Shachat, AJS Design

"It takes a lot of downlights to create a well-lit room," says Abigail Shachat, principal and architect of AJS Design in New York City. "Most people underlight a home, overemphasize parts of a space with poorly placed lighting, or place too few downlights too far apart, which create arcs of light on the wall." Though it took a lot of downlights to illuminate this West Village loft, Shachat used each fixture as part of an architectural strategy to stretch the space.

The loft Shachat designed was typical of many urban lofts: it was long and narrow and all the windows were at one end of the space. A wall down the middle of the space made things worse by creating a 30-foot (9.1 m)-long bowling-alley effect. Though there's much that architectural renovating can achieve to fix the space, Shachat knew that lighting could enhance the feeling that the space was wider than it actually was.

The concept is to use lighting to carry the eye from one room to another. "This way, the lines of the space were extended. In a New York City apartment, often you only get light from one direction, so you need to bring light in from other directions," Shachat says as she explains how she allows the light from one room to "inform" an adjacent space to create a greater sense of depth. "In this loft, for instance, when the homeowner switches on lights at the same time in the living and master bedroom, the living room actually feels wider since the two lit up rooms are connected," she says.

One way to work with lighting is to use layers of recessed fixtures (as Shachat did here using products from Cooper Industries) with various lamp types to create different effects throughout the loft. Shachat used a combination of A-lamps for a softer wall washing effect, PAR lamps for stronger downlights, such as those over the dining table, and MR-16 lamps for accent lighting. Her layered approach bolsters the architecture rather than overwhelms it. "Many designers overdramatize space allowing lighting to emphasize too much at the same level of illumination," she says. "I like to use lighting in more of a supporting role. When lighting is done well you should not really notice it, you should just notice the space."

But it's not always an easy fix to use recessed lighting in urban dwellings. "The biggest problem in most apartments is that there are constraints imposed by the limits of a building, such as concrete slab ceilings, that prevent the use of recessed lighting," says Shachat. Luckily, this loft already had drywall ceilings so she had many choices in the types of fixtures she used and where they could be placed.

CORNER LIGHT

To illuminate the corner of the wall that separates the entry from the kitchen, Shachat designed a type of built-in vertical lamp. She designed the light using acrylic Light Blocks covering a PAR lamp used inside the corner. "This light takes the place of an entry table lamp," says Shachat. "Integrally tinted plaster in dark blue frames the light to create a focal point of architectural interest as soon as the homeowners enter the loft."

DINING ROOM LIGHTING

Shachat didn't use a pendant over the dining table because she did not want to create an extra visual layer between the kitchen and dining room. "It wasn't necessary to anchor the dining area with a pendant, and it would have been too visually active," she says. Instead, she used one of her favorite lighting techniques to illuminate the dining area. To best light a dining room table, Shachat prefers to use three points of light, as she did here. For an average 6-foot (1.8 meter) -long table, Shachat likes to put a recessed spot in the center that can be turned on before and after dinner. Two other downlights flank the side of the center spot, and they are meant to be turned on while serving and eating dinner.







ABOVE: A walnut wall divider in the main living area frames a desk and storage wall. "No one wants to go back into a vacuum to do work," says Shachat. The desk here became part of the main space, and the floating ceiling above the desk anchors and defines the area by creating a second ceiling. Two recessed lights in the floating ceiling give general illumination over the desk.

LEFT: An entire back wall of storage could easily overwhelm a space if the right lighting was not used. Here, the line of recessed ceiling lighting is meant to create a sense of flow down the long corridor while it frames the light coming from the window. The slot of light at the top of the bookcase reinforces the idea of the ceiling as a floating plane that the storage units recede behind. Shachat placed a strip of halogen lights from Ardee into the slot to emphasize this effect.

Shachat had a four-prong plan to light the loft. First, she lit the perimeter of the apartment with wall washers for an overall glow. Then, she created "lit zones," which accented specific areas with downlighting, such as the dining and living spaces. Within the zones, Shachat added accent lighting to focus on features, such as the walnut room divider and its perforated sliding stainless steel door, the fireplace in the living room, and the other distinctive materials used in the loft. Finally, floor and table lamps were added to create intimacy by bringing the light down to a human scale.



ISLAND PENDANTS

The mercury glass pendants from Ameico are incandescent R-lamps. "The fixtures push the light down instead of out," explains Shachat. She placed them low enough over the island so the lamp is hidden, but high enough so they don't hit the client's head. "There's no real rule of thumb about how high to hang pendants," she says. "I'm always adjusting the height of the fixtures in the field."

BACK SPLASH LIGHTING

Stainless steel back splashes are difficult to light well, says Shachat. "Because they are so reflective the surface becomes extremely active once lit," she says. The halogen lighting used under the cabinet reflects off the stainless steel back splash. "The under-cabinet fixtures are halogen. Under-cabinet fixtures that face away from the back splash make the cavity come alive," says Shachat. "If the fixtures faced toward the back splash, the surface would look even more active."

"You can create a variety of lighting experiences with recessed downlighting and not have the fixtures look so evident," says Shachat. Although many downlights may all look alike, Shachat points out that the internal engineering of various fixtures produced by different manufacturers allow for distinctive effects. "Outwardly all the fixtures will look the same but internally they will be engineered to produce different results," she explains. In addition, the more expensive fixtures create a simple, more unified look, because, for instance, a fixture can be flangeless to create a cleaner ceiling plane.

Lighting this loft with recessed lighting kept the vertical planes clean and the horizontal surfaces simple. "Lighting can make or break a job," says Shachat. "If lighting is well done, you don't notice the lighting—all you really notice is how good the room feels."

Lighting a television wall is easier than most people think. "When a TV wall has other elements on it, such as a fireplace, I always put a light over the television on a separate switch," says Shachat.

