

December 8, 2008

Great Outdoor Lighting Brightens the Season for Holiday Guests

From twinkling candles glimpsed through a window to trees and shrubs decked in brightly colored strands, light can be the warmest welcome for your guests during the holidays. And if you've been thinking about enhancing the lighting above and around your front porch or door, the holidays are a great time to put that thought into action.

"People spend more time than ever before in the outdoor spaces of their homes," says Rick Seidman, president and chief executive officer of Quoizel Inc. of Goose Creek, S.C. "The front and back entry areas have become living spaces frequented by friends and family. This has led to consumers wanting to decorate and light these areas with the same importance as the inside of their home."

Attractive exterior lighting not only enhances your enjoyment of your home, it adds curb appeal and value, and can welcome guests with a feeling of warmth and security all year round. Good lighting is especially important during the holidays, when more guests will be coming to your door, the experts agree.

Homeowners thinking about upgrading their exterior lighting should keep some basics in mind, including scale, style, visibility and planning.

"Frequently, you see homes with outdoor lanterns that aren't large enough for the home or the area it's lighting," says Rick Wiedemer, Jr., certified lighting consultant and president of Hinkley Lighting in Cleveland. "When choosing a lantern to hang above your door, consider viewing your home's entry from the curb or coming up the driveway as a guest would."

A good rule of thumb for choosing a right-sized lantern is to pick one that is at least a third the size of the door, says Mark Rottner, president of Artistic Lighting and Designs in Norcross, Ga. "That means if your door is 7 feet high, your lantern should be 27 to 30 inches long," he says. "If you decide to go with a lantern on either side of the door, then each should be about 25 percent of the door's height."

Appropriately sized lanterns not only provide ample illumination for the area you're trying to light, they also impart elegance to a facade, says Joe Rey-Barreau, education consultant for the American Lighting Association (ALA) and an associate professor at the University of Kentucky's School of Interior Design. "They really are a show of confidence."

The style of the lighting is also important, the experts agree. The style of your outdoor lighting should match both the design of your home's exterior and the lighting design inside the house.

"Lighting should be selected to accentuate the architecture, not detract from the beauty of the structure," says Jeffrey R. Dross, senior product manager with Kichler Lighting in Cleveland. What's more, he adds, "it's important the entryway lighting has a relation with driveway lights, landscape lighting, deck lighting and the rest of the lighting on your home. You want to avoid the 'flea market' approach where all the pieces are different."

If your home is colonial, Victorian, traditional, craftsman or contemporary, be sure to look for lighting that pairs well with the architectural style. For example, if the exterior color palette is warm, then brown or bronze light fixtures may be more appropriate, Dross points out.

Don't be afraid to incorporate some trends into your exterior lighting design. Some hot exterior lighting trends include the addition of crystals to different style fixtures, and - for upscale homes - natural gas lanterns in copper or brass. Layering several types of lighting at an entry is also popular, Wiedemer says. For example, if your door has an overhang, you may place recessed lighting in the overhang, paired with decorative lanterns on either side of the door and path lighting leading up to the door, he says.

"There's more variety than ever in outdoor lighting," Rey-Barreau says. "Pluralism is the trend."

Homeowners looking to temporarily enhance their outdoor lighting for the holidays have a host of options as well. Rottner likes the idea of putting exterior lights on a dimmer to create a warm, comforting mood. Wiedemer recommends adding low-voltage landscape lighting, which is easy to install and can be moved or added on to in the future.

Attractive outdoor lighting can be a great way to welcome your guests at the holidays, the experts agree. "A warm glow by your front door indicates your personality, and the personality of your home," Rottner says. To discuss your lighting or landscape needs, please contact us at your earliest convenience!

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