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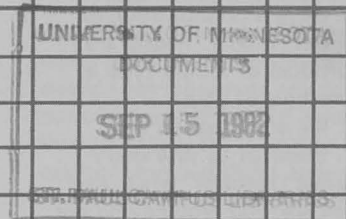
Agricultural Extension Service
University of Minnesota

Extension Folder 644-1982



Inexpensive & Creative

IDEAS



Lighting, Accessories, and Storage

Harold H. Alexander

Lighting, Accessories, and Storage

Often the smaller furnishings of a home give it its character and atmosphere.

Residential lighting can be very versatile and can create different moods for different times and activities in your interiors. While most everyone accepts the "electric light" as normal, the different effects and levels of illumination that can be achieved is broad and varied.

Until electricity became the energy source, lighting fixtures had to contain the fuel bowls and tanks of oil, candles, etc.—each depending on size for length of use. With the invention of the electric light bulb, this is no longer true. A slender, flexible wire provides the illumination energy. Although Edison invented the tungsten bulb 100 years ago, we have only touched the surface of possible ways to "light" a space. Notice how many of our electric lamps and fixtures still rely on forms that go back to other energy sources. Most of our table lamps have vase forms as bases, for example.

"Accessorizing" an interior can be a challenge or it can be a fun experience. There are really no rules except those that govern any design selection. Accessories should reflect your personal interests and activities—your own life. And by adding, changing or shifting decorative objects and accessories, a new "look" can be readily achieved.

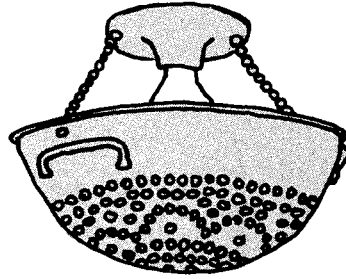
And what can be used as accessories? Anything! Actual monetary value is really of little importance. What looks good together, what forms, textures, colors? What sentimental value? The desired personal, individual look is often only achieved through the accessories in a room. Nothing is so sad or uninteresting than a home where there is no indication of the kind of people who live there. Even "model" houses are often furnished with a specific individual or family type in mind. Don't let your home reflect nothing of you.

Storage is where you find it. We are all savers and hoarders to one degree or another. Some of us save everything—others pride themselves on being "ruthless" when discarding. Regardless of what type you are, you probably do not have enough storage space. Look around and find unused areas—you may be surprised how many cubic feet of efficient storage you can create.

Lighting—hanging

All hanging electrical fixtures consist of the basics: a wire with a socket and a light bulb on one end. Almost without exception, lighting fixtures one might make or buy, incorporate incandescent bulbs in the design rather than fluorescent tubes. Consequently, always consider that heat will be produced, ventilation is required, and any material that is in any way flammable should be avoided. In addition, there must be adequate insulation to prevent metals and other electricity-conducting materials from coming in contact with live wires. The electricity should be turned off throughout the system before any installations are attempted.

Inexpensive paper lanterns and folded or cut paper shades can be very effective and quite handsome, either in original installations or over existing ceiling fixtures. Be extremely careful that safety measures are taken. The paper should not touch or be near enough to the hot bulb to catch



fire. Air must always be allowed to circulate between the bulb and the paper shade.

A stunning lighting fixture consists of several new wire whisks, normally used for beating egg whites. The whisks are hung at different levels with a socket and a clear, long, show-case bulb within each. The wires are rather thick, rubber-covered wire. The whole unit is attached to the ceiling and wired to a dimmer switch. It looks expensive, but is relatively inexpensive.

All manner of shades, above and below the bulb, can be used. Another kitchen utensil, the colander, can be a good solution. The pattern of holes creates interesting designs on the ceiling or below on the table.

The collapsible wire fish trap, which comes in several sizes, can also be converted to new uses. Whether wired to contain a single or several bulbs, with or without coverings, depends on the designer. Whether left shiny or sprayed black or another color will also affect appearance. Perhaps it could be combined with plants for another effect.

A long tube of cloth (part of an old sheet would work well) could enclose a light bulb or two for a light column in a room corner or a series of these lights could serve as a divider from one space to another. With plywood circles stapled to the top and bottom (to give shape and to hold bulbs away from the cloth) and some weight such as a brick in the bottom (to stretch it tautly), a clean cylindrical form can be achieved.

A string of tiny white Christmas tree lights can be used in a variety of ways. Try wrapping lights around a yarn winder and suspending it from the ceiling. Stretch lights around the perimeter of the room. Hang a decorative branch from the ceiling and drape a set of lights over it—it makes a rather exotic chandelier. Stretch a length of flexible clothes dryer vent tubing from the ceiling and let a set of lights glow through the white plastic. This can also be curled on the floor or on a table for an inexpensive, but effective version of an Italian light currently on the market. Use a dimmer switch for different light levels.

Drill a hole in a fruit jar lid, insert socket and bulb and hang these on a cord from the ceiling. Screw a large fruit jar over the bulb. Caution, don't use too large a bulb as heat build-up might be a problem. This could be done in multiples to hang over a rustic kitchen counter or table.

Try hanging a large panel of white cloth vertically with a light behind it. A 3- or 4-foot square of sheet, hung 6 or 8 inches from the wall with the light behind the sheet could give a soft glow to a room, or an alcove. A weighted hem would keep the panel flat if desired.

Lighting—sitting

Lamps for tables and floors should be weighted so that they will not topple. Most lamps on the commercial market are little different from those of the past: a base that could hold a liquid (oil) and a source of light above that, shielded with a shade. But this concept should not limit creativity.

The base of the lamp is probably more important from a design viewpoint than almost anything else, with the exception of quality and quantity of illumination. Items such as vases, bottles, urns, cylinders, rectangular boxes, can all be acceptable lamp bases. Pieces of sculpture can be less successful, especially when representing heads of humans and animals. There is something ridiculous about having a light bulb protruding from the cranium of a human head, or the back of a cat for that matter, then topping the whole with a lampshade.

Agricultural drainage tiles make handsome lamp bases. Tiles can be left plain, trimmed with bands of leather, wrapped rope or twine, varnished or left natural. Usually they are filled with plaster to weight them and to secure the pipe and socket in one end. A bit of felt glued on the bottom will protect the table top.

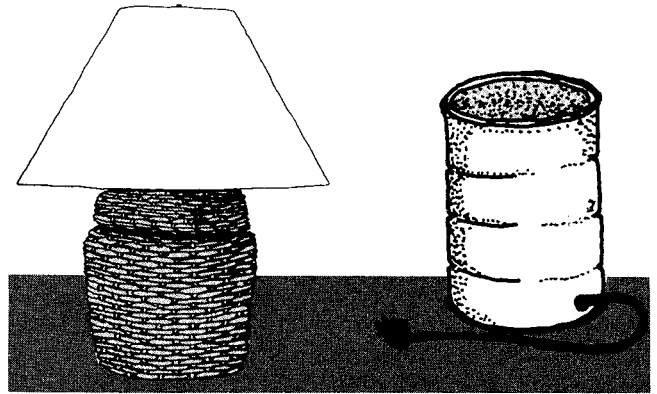
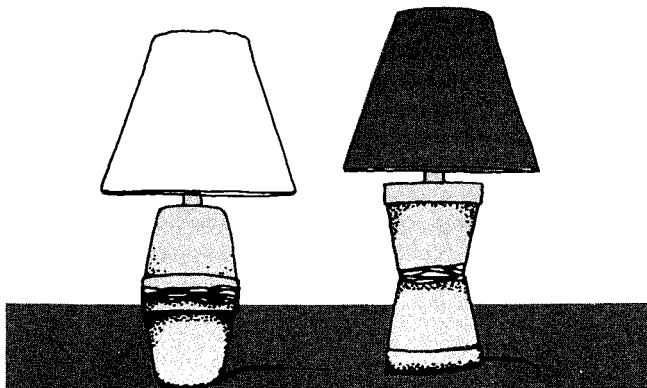
Two flower pots epoxied together, either rim to rim or bottom to bottom also make a handsome lamp base. Again, they can be left plain or the surface wrapped between the rims with twine to give a textured look. Anything made of natural clay is usually of good terra cotta color.

Driftwood can make a beautiful lamp base. Select a piece with enough visual weight to support the shade. Refrain from elaborate finishing. Just give it a good brushing and a judicious coat of wax. Heavy coats of varnish or shellac can destroy the subtle gradations of tone and color.

Lamp bases with simple geometric shapes are usually best. Search out interesting and unusual forms in auto supply stores, plumbing departments, housewares departments, and junkyards. A popular lamp sold commercially a few years ago was fabricated from copper floats made for the water tank of toilets—few people recognized the origin of the beautiful copper balls.

Boxes, probably wooden or plastic would be better than cardboard, can be weighted and covered with a wide variety of materials for lamp bases. Various kinds of textured cloth, leather, foil, and paper are possibilities.

Lampshades can be made or refurbished in many ways. If the shade has a complete wire frame, that is if it consists of more than two wire circles with paper or plastic between, it can often be re-covered. Several years ago a popular instructional program in extension was re-covering lamp shades, so some of you may know how. But paper can also be used: smooth paper, pleated paper, plain or patterned paper, textured paper or collages of favorite pictures (remember if light comes through you will see what is on the underside of the picture).



A very handsome shade can be made by adhering stretched transparent plastic wrap over the wire frame. Secure it with artist's acrylic medium. Layer several thicknesses of the wrap on the frame, coating each layer with acrylic medium. Trim off the excess when all is dry and glue gimp or braid around the edges if desired. Then paint, stain, attach tissue paper designs, as desired. The tissue paper will probably fade eventually. Go over the shade again with several coats of medium. The effect will be remarkably like a colored glass shade, especially if you design it as such. These shades are very sturdy, yet flexible and will last indefinitely. They are virtually indestructible, and if torn or cut, slap on another layer of the plastic wrap and some more acrylic medium.

There is another shade that is on the market today, but with care and some precision, it can be easily constructed. Cut a quantity of 1-inch thick rings, the circumference needed, from corrugated cardboard and glue one on another, each getting slightly smaller, tapering toward the top. The light filters through the corrugations and a very nice look is achieved.

And, if the noncloth shade is in good condition, but stained or darkened with age, why not paint it? A coat of white paint on the inside and white or another color on the outside can rejuvenate any shade. The shade becomes opaque, but often the amount of light that is reflected by the white interior offsets the light that did filter through the shade in its original aged condition. Several coats may be required before complete opaqueness is achieved.

Accessories

What can't be used as accessories in a room? Very little, if anything! Include your favorite things, such as your hobbies and collections. Rocks and shells are favorites today. Display objects together, combining similar shapes, types, and colors into interesting groupings. Highlight them under table lamps, frame them together on walls, display them on shelves. Change them periodically, if only to refresh their arrangement, to keep them clean, or to protect and preserve them. Accessories are one of the best ways to let your rooms express you and your family. One of the major omissions of interior design students (and professional interior designers, too) is to leave out or minimize accessories. The rooms look bare, un-lived in, and impersonal.

If your hobby is collecting small objects, clustering them together gives them visual weight and importance. It is also easier to control them. For example, single thimbles sitting all over the house would not have the visual impact of a collection of thimbles arranged on a set of small plexiglass shelves near a desk or chair for close viewing.



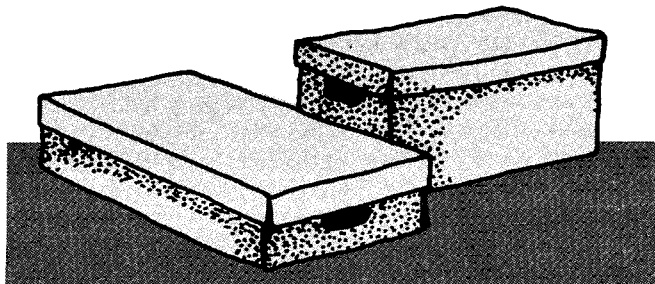
Plants are wonderful accessories in any room. In addition to the plant itself, the plant holder can also be of major importance. A large brass pot might become even more dominant than the plant growing from it. Remember, plants have environmental needs. They may thrive in one location and not in another. However, this should not prevent temporarily changing their location—from a sunny to a less sunny setting, for example. When we think of “house plants” we often think just of green leaves, but many plants that will grow indoors also bloom, adding color to the interior.

Frank Lloyd Wright, one of America’s great architects, was a master at arranging accessories. His philosophy is a good one to remember. He believed that whatever the object, display it as if it were a work of art. Even a piece of driftwood, or a rock from the beach can become an exceedingly handsome addition to a room. It is not the cost, but the form, texture, color, line of the object and how it relates to the surroundings.

Storage

One of the major problems that everyone faces is, “Where do we put things?” This is increasingly a problem as houses become smaller, yet possessions increase. There may be many valuable cubic feet of potential storage wasted because it is ignored. Houses not designed to use the enclosed space to its maximum will frequently have doors a foot or two from a corner, closets that do not function well, a few cubic feet of unused, yet valuable space, here and there. Adapt your storage needs to these spaces.

Storage is essentially in boxes or on surfaces or both places. Find boxes and surfaces for needed storage. Stack



sturdy boxes of the same size from floor to ceiling behind a door or in a part of a closet. Install shelves to hold storage boxes for easy removal.

Closets are notorious for wasting space. In a walk-in closet only two-thirds—or even half—of the cubic space can be used for storage. You must also walk in the space. Storage walls are much more efficient as you stand in the room, not in the closet. Analyze where and how you hang your clothes. Many individual items of clothing are not long, but only half the length from rod to floor. Cluster lengths, the dresses, slacks, and coats together and put a set of shelves under the blouses, shirts, and jackets. Perhaps more shelves, spaced closer together above the rod, will hold more boxes and make them easier to remove.

Shelves are just horizontal surfaces held apart in some manner. Our old friends, planks and bricks (what student has not had a bookcase made of boards and bricks) are only one source. Use concrete blocks, wooden blocks, empty bottles, stacked books, almost anything to space the boards.

Hang shelves from the ceiling with chains or ropes. Hanging shelves sometimes need a little stabilizing or they may swing.

“Out of sight, out of mind” is not necessarily true with storage. A much neglected storage area in some households is the space under the bed. No, this does not condone kicking the dirty clothes under the bed, but does suggest that organized storage in covered, dust free boxes be devised for the space between the bottom of the springs and the floor. Seasonal clothing, blankets, and shoes are three storage items that might find a convenient location under the bed. (And, house-cleaning is simplified in the bargain!)

Retail stores often discard display racks and other types of storage equipment. These can usually be adapted for use in the home. Don’t be limited by the original use, but analyze the discarded equipment and determine what kind of storage it can provide. For example, a metal rack with rows of protruding rods which once hung packages of switches, receptacles, and other electrical components, now is a most handy and convenient workshop storage unit holding small moldings and other leftover strips of wood and metal, rolls of various wires, and chain.

One of the prime sources of storage units has all but disappeared—the marvelous wooden orange crate. However, plastic or wire milk bottle containers may be almost as versatile. Although they are not discarded after the original use, as were orange crates, they are discarded regularly by milk companies and are relatively inexpensive when purchased. They provide a high tech look to storage and the square shape can be stacked in many ways.

Other publications in this series of *Inexpensive and Creative Ideas* include: Extension Folder 642, *Furniture and Interiors*; Extension Folder 643, *Chairs, Sofas, and Tables*; and Extension Folder 645, *Walls, Windows, and Floors*.

Harold H. Alexander is an extension specialist in interior design, Agricultural Extension Service, University of Minnesota.