

LED by the light

Aneeta Sundararaj
is enlightened on
the benefits of
LED bulbs

WHEN you renovate your living space, what is the first thing that comes to mind? Is it the colour of the walls, the kind of furniture to buy or where to shop for quality storage cupboards?

"Lighting is hardly ever mentioned. Only 10 per cent of my clients will think about it," says Ramesh Seshan, architect and founder of Seshan Design.

Things are changing, though. "In the last couple of years, clients are getting more savvy. I mention lighting and they'll go to the Internet and do research," says Ramesh at a recent roundtable discussion with three other experts in lighting and design.

Vennila Rajamanickam, general manager of Philips Lighting Malaysia, confirms this when he says that, today, a person will consider three elements when choosing lighting solutions: ambience, style and finally, how lighting solutions enhance a particular space.

The experts then explain how you can apply these elements, in theory, when designing your living space. Begin by installing background lighting to create the appropriate ambience. Then, to match your style, focus on what interior lighting to use.

"We'll put spotlights to highlight special areas, such as above a painting," says Ramesh.

Last of all, consider task lighting for work areas. "Nowadays, there's no need for the kitchen light to have just one bulb in the ceiling. We can put 'under mount' lights to light up a particular area in the kitchen and you only turn on that light if you want to work in that area," he adds.

There is one further important step, says Sherlyna Pang, design director of



Design Spirits: "We must find a link between capturing ambience and functionality. Style is subjective. It can be tropical, simple, contemporary, modern or heritage. Say, the client wants a tropical style... we can always use warm lights but these create shadows and visibility is not great."

It is not going to make sense to use such lighting solutions in a study or reading room.

Nick Hor, interior designer at Chang Weng Interior Furnishing & Renovation, agrees with Pang. He says it is of paramount importance to plan exactly where each light fixture goes. He warns: "If you don't think about lighting before you start building or renovating a place, you'll end up creating more holes in the ceiling than necessary."

Today, he adds, many people are creating feature walls. These include the use of wallpaper or creating texture so that there is a 3-D effect on these walls. When the lighting solution



Warm lighting is great but **not suitable** when used in a **study or reading room**

tions are not up to par or placed in the right place, all these efforts are wasted.

With all the theory in place, the experts then discuss the practical aspects of lighting solutions. Ramesh begins by explaining what he sees as lighting solutions of the past: Incandescent and fluorescent bulbs. While incandescent light bulbs remain cheap, they consume a lot of energy. Still, they can be dimmed to create a cosy ambience. The same cannot be said for compact fluorescent bulbs. The benefit of using fluorescent bulbs, though, is that they do not emit much energy or heat.

Today, all experts promote the use of LED (Light Emitting Diode) bulbs as these solve all the problems caused by conventional bulbs. LED bulbs consume less energy, can be dimmed and do not emit heat. Furthermore, with LED bulbs, you can swap between white light and warm light to change the mood of a room.

"Nowadays," says Ramesh, "you can connect your lighting systems to your iPad and iPhone. This way, you can control the ambience of a room

with these devices."

This explains the growing popularity of LED bulbs among the younger generation. To demonstrate the flexibility of these bulbs even further, Ramesh tells the story of how a person's sleep is disturbed when another switches on the light to go to the toilet. "Now, we can install systems where you don't have to switch on the overhead light. You just need to light up the path to the bathroom. Like (emergency lights) in an airplane."

Vennila adds that there are also night-lights that you can carry around like a torchlight. LED bulbs reduce the strain on the eyes as there is no glare. "With conventional bulbs, there is a flicker. This doesn't happen with LED bulbs as there is a constant light. You won't experience fatigue."

The biggest benefit of LED bulbs is longevity. Conventional bulbs last, on average, between three and five years. On average, LED bulbs have a typical lifetime of between 20,000 and 25,000 hours (approximately 20-25 years).

The problem though, is the cost

factor. Philips myVision LED 9.5 watt bulb sells at RM80. It emits light equivalent to a 60w incandescent bulb that costs RM2.50.

To dismiss LED bulbs on its price alone is a grave mistake, warns Ramesh who insists: "Although it depends on other variables, most of my clients have reported that their electricity consumption has been cut by half. You will actually gain in the savings you make. The cost of electricity now is cheap but, in the next few years, this may go up. If you spend the money now, you'll end up making bigger savings later."

He has no doubt that in the next five years, LED bulbs will dominate the market, particularly since they do not contain lead or mercury, making them environmentally friendly.

Expanding on the issue of costs, all experts agree that the actual cost of lighting solutions tends to be no more than between five and eight per cent of the overall remodelling or building costs.

In the end, lighting, more than any other factor in your home, will reflect your sense of values, style and taste, thereby, making it unique.



A fun option