



10 Ways Architects and Lighting Designers Can Bring Their Visions to Light



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The construction industry is becoming more and more specialized every year. It's not commonplace for specialists like lighting designers to work side-by-side with design architects to help enhance the design's shapes and colors and improve the overall functionality of the space. This collaboration provides a new dimension of expertise throughout both new construction and remodeling projects. While the lighting designer and architect each bring their own vision to every project, it's when these visions come together that the magic truly begins. There are many ways for lighting designers and architects to create an optimal working relationship. Below are just a few. By keeping these simple tips in mind, you can ensure that what you build is much more than a structure.

1. Join forces early and often

The most successful project collaborations occur when both lighting designers and architects are involved and on the same page from the initial RFI process through the final walk-through. It's important that any lighting considerations be addressed in the early stages of the project, when they can inform the architectural design strategies and vice versa. Once the project design team is in place, an initial meeting with the client is recommended to understand the vision that will help inform and inspire both lighting and design ideas. Because weather, supply issues, permits and approvals and other situations that are beyond anyone's control may affect the job, regular status updates and ongoing communication are crucial. Whenever possible, meetings with the entire team should take place in person. If this can't be arranged for any reason, video conferences may achieve similar results. At the very least, status reports should be generated and sent electronically to all team members. Real-time communication ensures that the entire project design team have the most current information regarding architectural plans, specs, timing and any design changes—so there are no surprises and the project can proceed on-time, on budget and true to its original vision.



2. Create an experience, not a space

Lighting has amazing power beyond its lumens. The right lighting can provide ambience, increase appetites, attract customers, sell products and increase energy and productivity. That's why in addition to focusing your design on the aesthetic look and feel of a space, it's equally important to understand its functions. Who will use this space? How will they use it? Will it be used mainly during the daytime or at night? Will people sit down or walk through? Understanding the functions of the space you are working with upfront can go a long way in making your client's vision—and yours—come to life. Create a list of questions that you can ask during your initial meeting with the client. If something is unclear, get clarification. Remember, it doesn't matter how good the finished product looks, if it doesn't serve its intended purpose.

3. Establish clear-cut roles

Understanding the responsibilities of each team member will enhance accountability and teamwork and allow design teams to keep projects on-schedule and on-budget. This is especially true if it is a new working-relationship. One system often used in the construction industry is a scope diagram, which provides a clear breakdown of design efforts among various team members. Gantt charts may also be used. Whatever your process or software, it's imperative that everyone on the team understand their roles and their dependencies. For instance: lighting designers typically initiate rough sketches that include the type, quantity, placement and function of lights. Once this is complete, it is handed off to the architect who will add details on how these fixtures will be supported and determine their effect on any of the other design elements. From there, the electrical engineer will add notes about the wiring and circuits. In this example, you can see how each step is dependent upon the one before it. That's why it's crucial that each person understand his/her role and how it effects the entire process.



4. Do your homework

A survey of the current building or space that is being remodeled or retrofitted will help to determine what's currently working and what's not—and inform ways that the look and functionality of the site can be enhanced with the right design and lighting. For new construction projects, an analysis of the construction site will help uncover any variables that may have an impact on the overall design and lighting recommendations. For example, the presence of natural light can play a key role in the design of windows and doors, as well as the quantity, style and placement of lights. Since light transcends beyond walls to the outside world, it can help inform the exterior size, shape and style of the building—as well as its role in the landscape or skyline. The more information architects and lighting designers can gather upfront, the more they can use the environment to optimize the overall design and functionality of the space.

5. Remember that balance is key

Masterful design is a blend of art and science. To achieve this perfect balance, it's important to follow the philosophy that sometimes less is more—especially when it comes to lighting. Over-lighting may not only increase energy costs, but also overpower other design elements that were meant to be highlighted and, conversely, bring attention to areas that are meant to be downplayed. While using a foot-candle approach to determine the appropriate amount of light for a specific area, it's important that lighting designers also factor in the functionality of the space. A corporate office where people rely on consistent light to see their work will require a different amount and type of light than an art gallery that is aiming to highlight specific pieces of art. This is one area where having a lighting designer and design architect working together, results in a final product that is exponentially better than either could have achieved alone.

6. Establish goals/develop a plan

It's best that overall project design goals are agreed upon upfront in order to guide the entire process. While the individual day-to-day goals of lighting designers and architects may be different, both are working towards overall goals that are usually dictated by the client, the environment and



the desired function of the space. Goals may include things like reduce energy consumption and costs, create more sustainable solutions, create an environment that is conducive to learning or productivity. Whatever the goals of the project construction or remodel are, it's important to capture them in writing and have the client sign off on them before any work is started, as these are the metrics by which the success of your project will be measured.

7. Draw, sketch, render

Many clients have trouble visualizing what something will look like with descriptions and words alone. Drawings, models and renderings often help

sell your concepts to your clients and get them excited about them. The best approach shows both the overall architectural design and how lighting components are integrated into this design. This will ensure that the two complement each other (proof of concept) before sharing with the client and provide him/her with a greater sense of what they can expect for their finished project. The more you can get buy-in along the way, the smoother and more successful your project will be.

8. Find a lighting manufacturer that will make your design shine

Not all lighting manufacturers are created equal. The best ones work with you every step of the way

from initial design vision through final construction and installation—offering design support and guidance as well as comprehensive products and solutions. Design-and-manufacture-type lighting companies often carry the broadest range of innovative and energy-efficient product lines and accessories—such as color tuning options and intelligent lighting—giving you the advantage of limitless design possibilities. Working with a lighting manufacturer that understands your budget and timing objectives without sacrificing the integrity of your design can be key as they may provide additional benefits such as unit pricing and quick delivery. The bottom line is, companies that sell lights are a dime a dozen, but ones that provide the resources you need to show your vision in the best light are worth searching for.

9. Set sustainability goals

If LEED certification is important to your project, sourcing a lighting manufacturer that specializes in LEED-worthy products early is a great place to start. They will help you select the proper LED lights and peripherals for LEED certification, including pre-programmed lights that dim or shut off automatically and sensors that enhance access to daylight. Including energy-efficient LED lighting throughout your design can help you achieve the required certification levels quickly and easily—without compromising on the aesthetics of your lighting or architectural design. Remember, LEED requirements must be validated during the construction documents phase of the project.



10. See your vision through to the end

Regular site visits by the lighting designer and architect during construction are a good idea to ensure that everything is going as planned and that there are no changes that will have an impact down the line. A punch list will capture any changes that need to be made by the contractor. During the final walk-through and on-site inspection, all members of the design team should be present to make sure the purpose, vision and integrity of the project was upheld. Before the final walk-through with the client, the lighting designer may change the angle and aim of the lights and set dimmers to ensure that the effect that was intended is achieved.

When lighting designers and architects work together, the possibilities are limitless. Design is inspired by light and light is inspired by design. It's really the perfect relationship.

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