

Are you in the dark about lighting up your rec room?

By Tara Marion

If you're in the dark about how to light your basement rec room and make it look attractive, three local professionals have some bright ideas to help.

"People used to hang a florescent shop light from a couple of chains," said Tom Oldfield, manager at Hodgson Light and Log Patio, 250 Mall Drive. "But now they're staying in their homes longer and creating home theatres and putting pool tables and ping-pong tables in their rec rooms."

As people are more likely to use their basement as family living space these days, they have found out that "the old cold florescent light, although it is more efficient to operate, doesn't create any atmosphere," said Oldfield.

Chuck Puckett, owner of Chuck's Electrical Service Inc., 5015 E. Q Ave., identified another problem with florescent light. "A pink carpet may be purple with the florescent, but halogen or quartz will show the natural daylight or natural color," he said.

Agreed Oldfield, "Florescent light, that we're so familiar with back from the '50s and '60s, is great in the grocery store, but the colors are not correct."

Windows are the best way to light your basement, according to Lauren Kristen, owner of Lauren Kristen Interiors, in Vicksburg.

If you have natural light in your basement from small windows, you can maximize it by decorating with light colors Oldfield said. "Light colors are going to create a brighter, warmer atmosphere."

If your basement lacks windows, Kristen suggested adding a bigger window—even though it might require tearing out a wall, pushing the dirt away from basement walls and relandscaping. "To me," she said, "natural light is the best, so you should add more if at all possible."

Natural daylight is also important, said Puckett, because of building codes and regulations. Living areas, he said, must have a source of 10 percent daylight per square foot. For example, he said, "If you're going to do a room that's 12-by-20 feet, you need to have 24-square feet of natural daylight,"

If you're remodeling your basement and want further facts on related building codes, Puckett said, "For accuracy, I would advise calling an electrician."

If you already have windows but still need more light, Puckett recommends "high-intensity, low-voltage light. Halogen light is probably the best way to go if you've got natural light already, because it's the nearest thing to daylight as you can get," he said.

Oldfield said that he also prefers the look of halogen, because "it gives the most natural above-ground daylight-type light." Because they produce a white, crisp, warm friendly light, basement halogen lights are usually recessed.

Recessed lighting, or "light that comes from an invisible source," is the best lighting scheme for a basement rec room, said Oldfield.

Because lights are recessed approximately 10 inches, "you need to make sure that you have the clearance in the ceiling to do that," Kristen said.

However, added Puckett, "Because recessed lighting goes into the ceiling, different situations many interfere with it." For example, he said, "When installing recessed lighting, a person needs to stay away from heat ducts and cold air returns."

When recessed light is impossible to install, Oldfield said track lighting is an "easier means to the spotlight effect of recessed lighting."

With track lighting, "you can change the position of the cans along the rack and angle them any which way you want." Kristen said, but added that her preference is for recessed lighting.

Agreed Oldfield, "The only drawback with track lighting is that it hangs down from the ceiling or sticks out from the wall and consumes space."

Kristen also suggested cove lighting, which requires varying the ceiling heights. By doing this, "you create a little light valance, which is a cove. People used to use cove lighting when they had valences in the living room and dining rooms. They have florescent bulbs hidden up in the valences over the windows," she said. "It's basically the same idea."

Before you decide how to light up your basement, you need to know the purpose or function of the space, said Kristen and Puckett. "It's up to the individual what you want to do with the light—what you want to highlight," Puckett said.

"When using recessed lighting it's important to concentrate on highlighting the different activity areas," Kristen said. If there's a computer in the basement, it should have general light, plus task lighting for greater visibility.

Although accent areas should be highlighted, a person needs to make sure the areas are luminated in a general sense as well," she said.

Kristen also advised using lots of floor and table lamps, along with ceiling lights, to bring the light down to eye level and lower. "When you have recessed or track lighting in the ceiling and you're hovering over a task, you're covering the light source," she said. "Your head is blocking the light making your task difficult."

A fireplace is another way to add light at eye level and "give the room some character," Kristen concluded.