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'Green' Lighting

By Amy Vitale

On almost all lighting design projects, the issue of being 'green' comes up in some form. Some owners just want to save money on electricity. Others don't want lighting that requires a lot of maintenance. Sometimes the purchase of certain types of lighting offers rebates.

Regardless of the reason, before considering a lighting source because it is 'green,' it is important to know how it will make a space feel, whether and how it can be dimmed, the color quality of the light source (whether reds look red and blues look blue) and the cost.

At a 'green' building practices seminar last year, the basic idea of the lighting section was that incandescent and halogen sources

The Cost Question

A question we get all the time is: 'How much will the house cost per square foot?' The perception (or presumption) is that if you want to add or subtract a few square feet for whatever reason, you can simply add or subtract that amount per foot from the price or cost of the house.

However, in our business it just doesn't work that way. For us, it's an impossible question to answer without a lot more information and detail, and the answer can only be derived once the house specifications are finished and all costs have been accounted for. It's akin to asking, 'How much does a vacation cost?' without first knowing where you plan to go, how long you intend to stay, and how you're going to get there, among other considerations.

The fact is, the details of every house are different, and therefore the cost is entirely up to you, not your builder. Only you know how much you can afford and what you want in your new home. It's our job to apply our expertise and experience to finely detail your wants and needs and then build a home that meets (or ideally exceeds) those expectations while remaining within your budget.

That's why it is so important to determine and share your budget with us from the first moment you select us to build your home. Budget information should precede any talk of contracts or actual construction. Using the vacation analogy, we are like a travel agent working with you to plan a trip.

Still, the square-foot cost question persists. So it might be helpful to understand what goes into or affects the cost (or ultimate price) of a new home to gain a better perspective.

First, the costs of similarly sized homes can vary considerably due

are bad, LED is bad because it is too expensive, and the answer is compact fluorescent lighting (yes, those hideous curlicue light bulbs that some people have sticking out of their ceilings).

The true answer is much more complex. Incandescent and halogen sources are quite viable for residential projects, and by using dimmers or control systems and some common sense, they can still be somewhat green. Dimming the lights just 10% will save 10% on energy costs and double the life of the bulb. Dim more and you'll save even more energy and the bulbs will last longer. And, of course, turn off lights when you leave a room.

Compact fluorescent lighting can be a good solution for lamps with translucent shades and for closets or storage areas. LED is a new technology that is changing daily. When considering LED, check if it can be dimmed, know the costs, and most importantly see a sample.

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to their specifications, the type and complexity of the foundation and roof, and many other construction and design characteristics that are not directly related to the square footage of the house.

In addition, costs including development impact fees and permits or state- and municipality-mandated code requirements can add anywhere from a few thousands to tens of thousands of dollars to the ultimate cost of a new home, regardless of size. Labor and material costs can also vary based upon the time of year, availability and demand for building materials and workers, weather conditions, and the complexity of the project.

The list of variables goes on, and we're happy to discuss them with you and explain how they might impact the cost of your new home. But in our view, asking us up-front what our homes cost per square foot and basing one of the most important decisions of your life on that metric alone would be short-sighted.

We think it's better to have a full understanding of our process and expertise and marry our skills with what you can afford, want and need in a new home to achieve your goals.

Warm Regards,

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