

# How to... light your practice

**Gary Bettis** explains why illuminating your practice in the right way is so important and how to achieve the right effects



Good lighting stems from an understanding of the balance between light and shade: in simple terms, lighting is the presentation of space, and if used skilfully, provides the final touches to your design. Architectural light thrown onto the surfaces of a room from different heights and angles will change its apparent dimensions: it can emphasise height, structure and materials. It's one of those things that's invisible – if it's done well. You only notice the lighting of a room if it's too bright or too dim, not if it's just right.

As with any built environment, good lighting plays an important part in optimising working conditions, affecting emotions, moods, perception and performance. It should never be compromised.

## Light categories

**Visual task:** Task lighting, or directional lighting, is aimed at a specific task. Desk lamps and dental lights are all good examples of task lighting fixtures.

The most important task light for a dentist is their dental light. Dental lights with improper contrast or bright spots can impair your ability to clearly see tooth surfaces. This can cause eye fatigue and decrease your productivity. Your dental light supplier will carefully work out the best location of your dental light, whether it is chair, ceiling or wall mounted.

**Visual interest or decorative lighting:** This type of lighting adds a touch of magic, or something to stimulate our senses. Light strips, pendants, chandeliers, and wall lights are all examples of light fixtures that draw attention to themselves and add character to the room being lit.

**Accent lighting:** Accent lighting is also a sort of a directional lighting that adds drama to a room by creating visual interest. As part of a decorating scheme, it is used to spotlight paintings, plants and sculptures or to highlight the texture of a wall or fabric, or outdoor landscaping. Accent lighting requires at least three times as much light on the focal point as the general lighting around it. This usually is provided by suspended, recessed or wall-mounted fixtures.



Gary Bettis is architectural director of DesignClinic. Since its formation in 1970, it has accumulated an extensive portfolio of work ranging from squat NHS dental practices to high-end private clinics. Visit [www.designclinic.uk.com](http://www.designclinic.uk.com) for further information.

**General lighting:** General lighting provides an area with overall illumination. Also known as ambient lighting, general lighting radiates a comfortable level of brightness, enabling one to see and walk about safely. General lighting is typically seen as the starting point for lighting a space or a room and usually supplies the bulk of the light. It can be provided by a variety of fittings: either recessed or surface mounted, pendant-type fixtures, down lights or chandeliers etc. The general decor and aspect of the room will affect the amount of general lighting required. In certain applications, general lighting can be the sum of accent, decorative and task lighting. Dimmers or separate switches can be used to control light levels independently, particularly in spaces with multiple uses.

## Lighting specific areas

**Exterior lighting:** Whether your goal is to enhance the beauty of your practice or provide additional security, you have numerous lighting options to light up your practice's exterior. Decorative fixtures may be used along pathways or on walls and posts. The design of these fixtures should complement the look and feel of your practice and landscape while providing sufficient lighting for safety, security and functionality.

Hidden lights can be strategically positioned around the property to selectively illuminate plant material and architecture. Use landscape lighting, deck lighting and step lighting to not only bring out the beauty of your practice at night, but also to add extra security and safety.

**Reception area, entrance hall and stairway:** The lobby and reception area convey the first impression of a practice's interior. The choice of fitting will be subject to the existing or new architectural style of the premises and the overall design concept. Remember that stairways and halls must have good general lighting for safety. To prevent accidents, stairs should be lit from top to bottom with switches in both places.

**Waiting area:** The look and feel of your waiting area is an important part of the patient experience. Good lighting can dramatise wall textures, accent artwork, or just provide general illumination. Your designer may choose a combination of fittings, eg, concealed to provide general or overall lighting, task for reading and decorative pieces to add interest. Freestanding lamps are a good way of softening a waiting area – enhancing the overall ambience and making certain areas feel more intimate.

**Staff areas:** Sufficient and adequate lighting is a must for your staff's needs, whether that is making a cup of tea or heating up a meal.

Your designer may use cost-efficient fluorescent under-cabinet lighting to help prevent shadows on the counters while adding critical light to the workspace.

**Treatment rooms:** Fluorescent ceiling lighting has been traditionally used to provide general purpose lighting to treatment areas. However, there are issues with colour matching and although colour-corrected tubes help mitigate this, polarised light is perhaps by far the most effective way to provide optimum lighting conditions. It directly improves health and safety, visual acuity, productivity and reduces eyestrain. It also benefits sufferers of seasonal affective disorder.

**Decontamination rooms:** Decontamination rooms must be well lit with enclosed, intact easy-to-clean lighting that is flush mounted or recessed. For best practice, inspection lamps must be installed.

**WC:** WC lighting is often overlooked: mirrors go unlit and often one ceiling fixture is used to light up the whole room. Colour-corrected fluorescent lamps should be used when fluorescent fixtures are preferable. Your designer will choose the most appropriate fittings to suit the design. The priority for disabled WCs is good overall lighting, but other WCs may benefit from a more dynamic approach.

## The environment and building control

Any new fixed internal or external lighting is subject building control regulations. Your designer will make sure that your new lighting conforms to these requirements.

As part of these regulations, you will be expected to introduce a proportion of low-energy lighting. If your dental practice makes use of halogen or incandescent lighting, replacing the lamps with compact fluorescents (CFL) or LEDs is a great way to reduce your energy usage. Initially expensive to purchase, LEDs significantly reduce your electricity bills, and they are also environmentally friendly.

## Final words

Lighting design itself is a vast topic. The key to creating a successful practice interior is to make sure that all elements of the design scheme including lighting harmonise.

This can be best achieved by employing the services of an interior designer, who will consider lighting from the early stages of design development, making sure that it integrates and enhances the overall look and feel of your practice. If they have taken proper care during planning of the structure, they will also harness the most important light source of all, natural light.

The combined efforts of incorporating as much natural light as possible along with modern artificial light will help you achieve a more stress-free, healthy working environment benefitting your patients and staff. PD



## designclinic

stunning interiors • Compliant designs

- site surveys
- ConCept design
- 3d Visuals
- statutory approvals
- Construction drawings
- interior design
- furniture sourcing
- Graphics & Branding
- tendering
- Contract administration
- HTM Compliant

Walsingham house  
1331 high road  
London  
N20 9HR

t: +44(020) 8446 9946  
www.designclinic.uk.com




Proud sponsor of

