



The Lighting Designer

"Everyone understands what an orchid is, or a peony, or a rose. People don't know what good lighting looks like."

BENTLEY MEEKER

Lighting is getting more attention as a decorative element, but often it's an afterthought. Why? Lighting is so esoteric. Not many people know how to utilize it effectively; they think of it as just lights. It's shadow that creates mood. You walk into a room and certain things are magnificent; others are mundane, if not ugly. Lighting is the transformative element. Everything else is merely augmentative.

How expensive can this get? We've done jobs for as little as \$3,000 and as much as half a million.

What are the initial conversations like? It starts with what your taste statement is, with a philosophy about the project. While

you may be able to pick the colors, I can make choices about texture, angles, what stays in light and what goes in shadow. We go over-the-top all the time—and you can really go hog wild—but my personal taste is that less is more.

Do couples see the finished product beforehand or just the day of?

This is the tricky thing: We can show examples but no [mock-up], which is why you have to make sure the designer you're working with gets you.

What are some problems that great lighting solves? You can create a bed of light so that everybody looks magnificent. Blue, green, purple, yellow, red: These are colors that people *do not* look good in.

TIPS FROM THE TRADE

Projecting a monogram onto a dance floor is now commonplace, if corny, but you shouldn't rule out **decorative light** altogether. Meeker suggests skipping more-literal imagery (say, your engagement photo projected onto a loft wall) in favor of original textures and abstract patterns, like those he created from pictures of **rococo-period friezes** for one wedding. To get inspired, peruse Taschen's *The World of Ornament*, a 528-page tome containing history's most beautiful patterns (\$200).

They look better in muted ones: honey, amber, pink. Angle is very important, too. You don't want light in people's eyes.

Can you make a traditional space look modern with lighting tricks? In the old bank spaces, we light the column crowns, ceiling, moldings, and walls. We mist up the room, creating a texture in the air, and have tight, symmetrical beams of light, which create a modern architectural element in the center of the room.

Can you make a small room look bigger and vice versa? Contrast makes a small space look larger because it creates depth; what makes a space feel cavernous is not knowing where it ends. It requires a fair amount of lighting, but when you can see the corners of a room and how high the ceiling is, the space becomes more intimate by virtue of your understanding it. So if your reception site is Capitale, light the whole thing; allow your guests to walk in and instantly see everything.

Which venues are you partial to? I can't do a bad job at Gotham Hall, it's just so freaking gorgeous. And the Metropolitan Club is magnificent: incredible frescoes, carved-wood walls and ceilings. Another beautiful one is the United Nations; the room itself is kind of austere, but it has sweeping views through a whole wall of windows. But the most amazing place I've ever been for an event is the National Museum of the American Indian.

How do you feel about candlelight?

You have to be careful; candles put off more light than you think. At night, outside, you can do whatever you want, but inside a white room is a different story. Once a client asked us to create this magnificent blue environment, and then the decorator lit twenty candles on each of the 50 tables. Blue is a very fragile color, and the candlelight just wiped it out.

How do you light the ceremony? The ceremony is not about flash. It's about something that really matters, which is a solemn vow.

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