

## reports

## HOME IMPROVEMENT

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By A|L Staff

'People are staying in their homes and remodeling them instead of buying the next bigger house,' said lighting designer Randall Whitehead of Randall Whitehead Lighting. 'It's a major trend that we're seeing, which started in the '80s and has since grown progressively evident. People are using the equity line in their homes to create cash to improve the spaces that they're in.' Such was the case with a project recently completed by Whitehead in the Potrero Hill neighborhood of San Francisco. The home, occupying two stories in a five-story rowhouse, was expanded 1,200 sq. ft. by transforming two levels of large decks into new interior living spaces. To effect this conversion, Whitehead worked closely with the architect and interior designer to bring more light into the center of the house, while minimizing disruption to the homeowners who had decided to stay in the home during the renovation.

'A good 85 percent of our first-time remodel clients decide that they want to live in the house during the remodel,' said Whitehead, for whom the clients' decision to stay was 'the biggest constraint.' 'People can get very edgy when living in two inches of plaster dust. We had to be very cleanliness-oriented, but also use fixtures made specifically for remodel or just replace fixtures where they already existed. If there was going to be any major breaking into walls or ceilings, we did not do it.' Also complicating the design challenge were the low ceiling heights, which ranged from 7' to 8 ft. and prevented the use of pendant fixtures and cove lighting for ambient illumination. The small size of the rooms demanded sconces with relatively shallow projections. 'We relied on a variety of decorative fixtures, uplighting and accent lighting to create as much visual height as possible,' said Whitehead. 'The low furniture really helped too.'

In addition to enhancing the illusion of height, the low furnishings reflect the Asian style introduced by the interior design. This in turn directed Whitehead to select decorative fixtures that would complement the eastern theme. For example, to light the main hallway, a sconce originally sporting late Art Deco appeal is 'made over' with a bronze finish and orange glass diffuser, resulting in a fixture appropriate to the feel of the interiors. In the living room, a woven wood fixture from Indonesia, which appears to be the sole source of light, is supplemented by recessed, adjustable low-voltage accentlights that highlight artwork, plants and various surfaces.

'The use of low-voltage fixtures enabled us to create pools of illumination for the art objects, while being unobtrusive and energy-efficient,' said Whitehead. 'Employing the same trim throughout, whether it be for downlighting, wall-washing or accent lighting, kept the openings in the ceiling consistent, which helped draw attention away from the light source and toward the objects being illuminated.' To accommodate the high mobility of the artwork on display in the house, the accent lighting is very flexible with a 358-degree turning radius and a 45-degree aiming angle. For added ease in the living and dining areas, different light levels and effects are programmed into a four-scene preset system. Whitehead normally recommends four scenes to his clients: day-to-day, 'pass-through' for negotiating through spaces, entertaining and 'clean-up, which is when all the lights come to full brightness.'

A highlight of the renovation is the addition of a 24-x-16-ft. glass wall in the back of the house. While allowing sunlight to penetrate the home, the glass also affords the clients a generous view of the backyard and the San Francisco skyline. To ensure that the nighttime garden viewing experience is equally enjoyable, 50W MR16 directional accentlights are mounted above the windows to counteract the black mirror effect after dark. 'You have to balance the light inside and out,' said Whitehead. 'By having sufficient light out there, people can see beyond the windows.' The fixtures are equipped with daylight blue filters to prevent the plants from yellowing, which can result from using an incandescent source. Articulating the greenery, compact fluorescent uplights, ground-mounted near the base of the trees, provide further drama at night. Noted Whitehead, 'The cool color of the fluorescents-4100K-keeps the foliage looking fresh and healthy.'

According to Whitehead, 'The look and feel of a room or an entire home can be transformed with good lighting and dramatic uses of color.' Also key to the success of this and other residential projects is a team approach to design. He said, 'Having an architect, lighting designer, interior designer and contractor who share ideas and soak up each other's information can produce a finished design that has great flow and flexibility.' -

Alice Liao






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