

# Versatile sconces put you in the best light

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Indoor sconces can perform many smart tricks. Just as theater sconces shunt light to the ceiling and floor to prevent glare and allow guests' safe movement, lighting fixtures in the home can work similar magic.

The right wall sconces can bring comfort with warm, ambient light, can illuminate details with bright, radiant light or can stand alone as works of art.

Think of sconces as part of an overall lighting scheme, experts say. Layers of light, including overhead, table, task (say, over a kitchen counter) and sconces, blend comfort and practicality.

"Sconces are like a fireplace because they add warmth," says Bobby Wilson of Wilson Lighting in Overland Park, Kan. "They have a magical draw."

As an ambient light source, sconces can be especially effective when overhead lights are absent, dimmed or shut off.

"Light leaks from sconces," says Shirley Allen, who owns the Light Shop in the Waldo neighborhood of Kansas City, Mo. "A sconce pushes light up and out so it's flattering and intimate."

And the aesthetic effects of the soft, muted light from sconces should not be underestimated, particularly in powder rooms and family rooms.

"Wall lighting has a nice feel because it makes us look more appealing," says Terri Mott of Rensen House of Lights in Overland Park, Kan. Because sconces light from the walls and not overhead, they eliminate shadows from our faces,

Mott notes.

On the other end of the spectrum, sconces can be useful for bright light. Whereas ambient light softens a powder room or a family room, radiant sconces can brighten the bathroom where homeowners groom, help visitors navigate a stairwell, or provide proper reading light in bed.

Apart from the light they emit, the fixtures themselves can take many forms. Sconces have been around for centuries, first illuminated by candles. Their evolution has culminated with style in many sizes, from almost undetectably small lights at the foot of stairwells and hallways to wall hangings that are as much about art as they are lighting.

Styles and materials also vary considerably, from stately crystal to fixtures with fabric-covered shades to artsy, contemporary free-form glass or metal.

"Lighting is a decorating tool that allows a homeowner to share personal tastes so that visitors get a sense of who you are," Wilson says.

Sconces can influence the overall decorating theme, too. They can be fashioned to coordinate with pendant lights or chandeliers, and custom-made fixtures can match railings and door pulls.

Artisans can tie the pieces of a home together, says Jon Cale of Green Light in Overland Park. Plus, making the pieces to fit the homeowner's style eliminates the hunt for the right fixtures, Cale says.

## BATHROOMS

In areas where homeowners apply makeup or shave, sconces are best when they are roughly eye level. Lighting

above mirrors casts shadows under the eyes and chin, while sconces at eye level brightly show every hair and pore, Allen says.

In the master bathroom of Rick and Mindy McDermott's Fairway, Kan., home, Allen placed Estiluz sconces designed by Leonardo Marelli — perfect for grooming.

In a powder room, however, choose a sconce (or a set) that emits a relaxing low light. An Oval Reed sconce from Hubbardton Forge creates a soft feel.

## STAIRWELLS AND HALLWAYS

A large Leucos Selis fixture in Rick and Mindy McDermott's Fairway stairwell emits radiant light and has the added benefit of illuminating wall art.

For a hallway, wall torch sconces from Hubbardton Forge accomplish an overall decor and are punctuated with a matching chandelier over the staircase.

## BEDROOMS

Sconces that frame beds and couches can be great sources of reading light.

Two bowed swing-arm sconces by Hubbardton Forge provide convenience. The drum-shaped shade is a popular trend in sconces and can be replaced to match a change in decor. Stand-alone art

Jon Cale of Green Light is a sculptor whose craft includes lighting for retail and residential clients. Some of his custom work involves fashioning iron railings in a stairwell with matching door pulls, chandeliers and sconces. Cale

equips his sconces with LEDs, which he says can last up to 50,000 hours.

Recycled, stacked glass produces diffused, ambient lighting. Cale cut and fused scraps from a discarded window, and to the natural green of the glass, he added blue and black.

Cale also fashions lighting from almost every kind of metal, including bronze, iron, aluminum, copper and steel. Cale recommends this raw steel sconce for flanking a fireplace.

## CONSIDERING SCONCES?

Is the wall pre-wired? Check with an electrician.

How many should you use? Often sconces work best in pairs, flanking a fireplace, bed, sofa, window or mirror. Multiple sconces work well for lengthy hallways or home theaters. Try an artsy single sconce in a small passageway or nook.

How high should sconces be placed? Sconces flanking mirrors in the master bathroom should be about 5 feet from the floor (eye level) and no farther than 36 inches apart.

If the sconce is bowl-shaped, you might want it higher, about 6 feet from the floor, so that the bare bulb and internal parts of the sconce are never in view.

If your ceiling is very high, some experts recommend placing the sconce halfway between the ceiling and the floor.

## RESOURCES

American Lighting Association, [www.americanlightingasoc.com](http://www.americanlightingasoc.com)

# Landscaping with retaining walls adds curb appeal, usability to your home

The best investment you can make in your home - both for your pocketbook and your personal enjoyment - is in landscaping. Real estate experts agree that every dollar you put into your yard eventually will return one to two dollars when you sell. And at a time when home values are sagging, that's something to consider.

"With an increasing number of homeowners staying put rather than selling and moving up, we're seeing a growing trend of people adapting their homes to their lifestyle," says Dave Johnson, manager of Patio Town, a leading Minnesota landscape supplies retailer. "That often means investing in landscaping to make better use of what they already own."

Versatile segmental retaining wall systems enable today's homeowner to bring plenty of curb appeal to their landscape while maximizing the use of their outdoor environment. Construction of everything from raised-bed gardens and tiered walls to stairs, columns and free-

standing seatwalls is possible with systems such as Versa-Lok.

What's nice about these systems is that they appeal to both the do-it-yourselfer and the professional landscaper, says Johnson.

"You can add some amazing features to your yard with a modest amount of skill and labor," Johnson explains. "Fire pits with paver patios, retaining walls, columns, sidewalks and driveways all are within the capabilities of most do-it-yourselfers. Or, you can bring your ideas to a professional landscaper and leave the design and installation to them, no matter how complex."

In recent years, segmental retaining walls have become one of the most important tools in the hands of landscapers.

"Your imagination is your only limitation when working with these systems," says Kelly O'Donahue, landscape designer with Villa Landscapes in Oakdale, Minn. "I've transformed virtually unusable back yards into stunning

outdoor environments using Versa-Lok. Homeowners love it because it's readily available in consistent colors and styles that are easily matched with existing exteriors or other landscape elements."

It is a favorite among hardscape installers as well. "The Versa-Lok system is especially design-friendly because it uses solid units that can be easily cut or split to fit any application," explains Austin Keay, owner of AKeay Landscaping in North Branch, Minn. "They're like the building blocks of landscaping. You can do almost anything with them, whether you're installing an outdoor kitchen from scratch or putting a new face on an older home with a front-entry makeover."

Segmental retaining wall systems lend themselves to phased landscaping projects built over a period of years, says O'Donahue. That's a trend landscape designers are seeing more of as homeowners have become more cost-conscious.

"Some of our customers have a grand

idea of what they ultimately want, but may not be able to afford all at once. So we work up a master plan for them, they start out with one phase, perhaps a circular paver patio with seatwalls and a firepit in the back yard. And that evolves over a period of years to a full-blown entertainment area, maybe an outdoor kitchen or bar, along with other features such as gardens or gazebos."

Sustainable, or "green," landscaping, also rapidly gaining in popularity, can add value to your home in other ways.

Low-rise retaining walls can be used in such features as rain gardens to significantly reduce storm water and pollutant runoff from surface areas. Plantable retaining walls, like Versa-Lok's Versa-Green system, provide earth stabilization while softening the appearance of a traditional retaining wall with vegetation. For information on Versa-Lok Retaining Wall Systems, visit [versa-lok.com](http://versa-lok.com) or call (800) 770-4525.

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