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Intelligent Lighting

An expert guide to smart lighting



An intelligent lighting scheme will work with you – and your smart home – to ensure each area of your home is perfectly lit, at exactly the right time and with absolutely no exertion from you. Melanie Griffiths explains.

There are multiple benefits to be enjoyed by incorporating intelligent lighting in your home. The right setup will not only show off your property's design scheme in its best possible 'light', but will also set the mood, make day-to-day life easier and even complement your home security and entertainment systems.

You may already have an idea of what smart lighting is, but if that idea relates to 'putting the lights on a timer', then think again — today's systems are a world away. At the touch of a button – from a central control pad that commands the whole house – you can choose the ideal lighting scene for each room or zone (with the best possible mood and activity-based lighting programmed with a lighting designer on installation). With systems such as Crestron's, ambient light sensors will actually detect and respond to the current light level, gradually ensuring the same level of brightness is maintained — although areas away from the windows can stay at a constant level. Some systems can also be integrated with your curtains and blinds to open and close them, morning and night. Integrate the lights with your gates and on your return home in the dark, the garden and hallway lights can be activated to greet your arrival.

If security is your concern, Crestron and Lutron's systems mimic the last two weeks of lighting activity while you are away. Motion detectors can create events such as flashing external lights to complement an alarm system.

Real technophiles can even integrate their lights with their media room. Single-room solutions such as the Crestron iLux or the Lutron GRAFIK Eye can be linked with a DVD server (such as Kaleidescape's) to dim lights upon pressing 'play' and light up again when finished.

Of course, that may all sound great, but isn't it just the preserve of the wealthy? Not according to custom install expert Dave Chester from CustomControls (www.customcontrols.co.uk): "A few years ago lighting control was an option to add if funds allowed. Not anymore. Having realised the benefits in terms of convenience, security, energy efficiency and aesthetics, people are now specifying whole-house lighting and are getting more expectations of having a well-designed intelligent lighting system in their homes — and it will add value."

And as to cost? "You can expect to pay around £1,000 for a one-room

system, which will include six channels of lighting — i.e. six scenes with different activities,” says Chester, “but the sky really is the limit. We’ve fitted whole-house setups for up to £70,000 with 150 channels. But getting involved early is key. Otherwise you will have to disturb the fabric of the house installing wiring.”

However, if a wired system isn’t an option for you, then a wireless (RF or IR) system is worth considering, indeed there are several on the market catering to retrofitters: “You can have all the same functionality — but it’s just not quite as reliable,” comments Chester.



ABOVE: For mood lighting on a budget, Philips’ recently launched LivingColors LED lamp can display 16 million colours to reflect whatever mood you’re in. £119.99. www.philips.com

MAIN IMAGE: Cleverly used lighting can highlight architectural details, as well as providing taskbased lighting. Scheme by Lutron. www.lutron.co.uk

THE BEST SYSTEMS

Crestron

The crème de la crème of custom lighting solutions. Sensors detect light level and will mimic your lighting use whilst away. Integrate with a whole-house

setup for the best result. www.crestron.com

Lutron Homeworks

Will mimic your lighting pattern for security and can open and close blinds to precise levels. Retrofit with RF devices. www.lutron.co.uk

Lutron GRAFIK Eye QS

As well as the ability to control blinds and curtains, daylight sensing and corresponding energy savings can be built into the system.

Rako RASOFT

Wireless system; set scenes and fade rates; link to alarm system.

www.rakocontrols.com

GET

Budget wireless system; four mood lighting settings; can illuminate house on approach. www.getplc.com

Author



Melanie Griffiths

Issue date:

October 2008

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