

Reflections of Bathroom Lighting

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In recent years I've had the opportunity to travel through many parts of the United States and Europe. I've stayed in a wide variety of hotels and motels, ranging from the starkly simple to the highly elegant. From my perspective as a lighting consultant, however, nearly all of these accommodations, whether budget or deluxe, seem to share a discouraging shortcoming. Taken as a group, the lighting of their bathrooms ranged from merely bad to downright wretched.

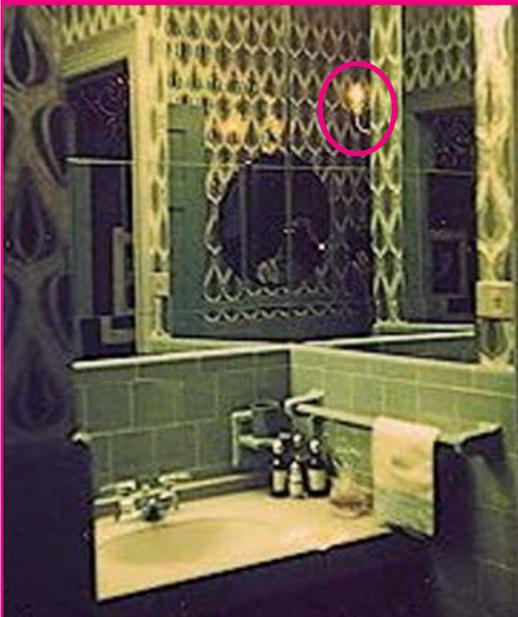
That's all the more surprising since the bathroom quite obviously presents a setting where good lighting is of paramount importance. After all, you must be able to see clearly to put on makeup, to comb your hair, to shave – or just simply to see what you are going to look like as others will see you.

Some of the problem can be attributed to the lack of really good ready-made bathroom lighting fixtures. Too often manufacturers are caught up with the appearance of the fixtures themselves; they design the fixtures to “look pretty” so as to appeal to customers visiting showrooms or looking at catalogs. But as is usually the case with good lighting, the cardinal rule should be that form follows function. It is not the fixture but the light produced that is important. What we want is good light falling naturally to provide optimum visibility. And while I'm referring mainly to public accommodations here, the same goals and requirements of good bathroom lighting apply to the bathrooms in your home as well.

If you've ever been backstage in a theater dressing room, you've seen the rows of bare light bulbs that run up one

side then across the top and down the other side of a mirror, an arrangements that allows an actor to see all sides of his/her face. The one drawback of this traditional solution is that all those incandescent bulbs produce an awful lot of glare. Employing contemporary technology, we can overcome this theatrical excess by eliminating those side bulb rows and substituting overhead fluorescent lighting that is extended as far as practicable to both sides of the mirror, allowing light to fall naturally on both sides and from above. Where space does not allow for good extension of the light source, the use of end-wall mirrors or of adjustable, hinged mirrors can solve our problem, giving us an endless horizon effect with multi-viewing angles. In a pinch, even the use of a mirror on the inside of a bathroom door opposite the

Counter Lit from Soffitt Above
with End Reflecting Mirrors



Overhead Light Soffitt,
Mirrors and Counter



main sink mirror can be a simple, yet flexible, solution.

For an optimum bathroom lighting configuration, I'd recommend the use of triphosphor fluorescent lighting with a high-quality white lens; when this is built into the ceiling or below the ceiling, a natural soffit results. And if you've read our previous article on [triphosphor fluorescents](#), you'd know why I'm so high on them as a light source: they give off the exact equivalent of sunlight with no color discrepancy, better contrast and less glare. Through the proper placement of light and mirrors, we should be on our way toward producing a good light environment that is

both natural and economical. Now what could be more optimum than that? ■

About the Author

Bill Joel received his B.A. from Brown University with creative design courses at the Rhode Island School of Design. He did further studies in interior and lighting design at the New York School of Design and Pratt Institute.

A professional member of AID-ASID from 1963 to 1993, Bill received a Fellowship from ASID in 1978. In 1992, he became one of the first Certified Interior Designers of the Commonwealth of Virginia. His work experience includes

residential, commercial and institutional remodeling and new structures, as well as a number of feasibility studies, all with an emphasis on effective, energy-conscious, quality-lit environments. For more details, consult *Marquis Who's Who in America*. Bill has also served as a member of the FIDER Board of Visitors and Accreditation Committee, Foundation for Interior Design Education and Research; set and lighting designer for the Richmond Forum and Barksdale Theatre; and guest speaker on various radio and TV spots. Bill may be reached at Rich@RichArtCo.com.