

Track Lighting

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In conversations with my lighting clients over the years, I've noticed that certain questions recur time and again. This has been true regardless of whether the job involves a corporate headquarters or a living room at home. Now I'd like to talk about some of these topics in hopes of spurring your thinking about your own living or working space. If you wish to pursue any of these topics more thoroughly than space will allow here, please feel free to [e-mail me \(Rich@RichArtCo.com\)](mailto:Rich@RichArtCo.com), fax or even "snail-mail" a note to me, and I'll do my best to give you an answer that's practical and up-to-date.

On the Right Track with Track Lighting

Let's talk about the track lighting, a popular lighting system noted for its simplicity and flexibility. Track lighting allows us to put a series of fixtures along a line power source (the track itself) from which we can aim those light fixtures in almost any direction. Both the track and the fixtures come in a range of sizes, and an oddity is that smaller track-light components often can cost more than larger ones. But large or small, installed track lights will be seen as an integral part of the room itself, in contrast to a floor lamp, say, that just happens to be in that room.

Case Study

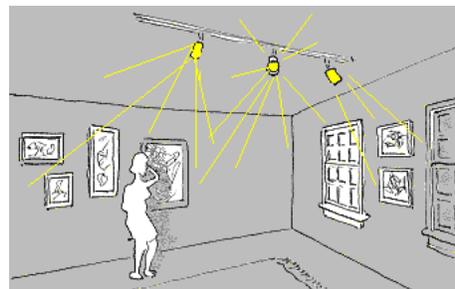
Now let's set up a hypothetical case. Suppose you were to install track lighting in a room that is 12' x 9' and 7' high. You have pictures on parts of two walls and wish to light them. Where should you put the track?

Since every piece of track carries a price tag, the most economical option is to

put a single track down the middle of the room and aim the fixtures in every direction. But the least expensive solution may not necessarily be the best answer. Good lighting should accent the objects that you wish to illuminate, but the source of the light should not blind the occupants of the room.

Bad Track Lighting

We all know that vaguely uncomfortable feeling of being "on stage". An important rule of track lighting is to place the track in a position relative to the object to be lit so that no one will walk into the light and be blinded by the brightness or cast a shadow onto the object.

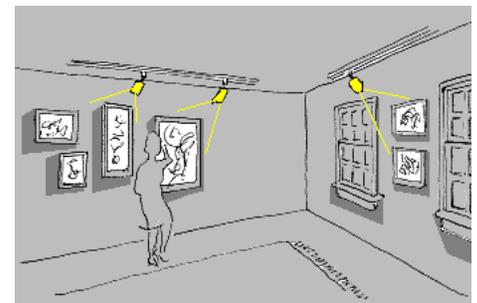


After determining the placement of the track, you must decide what kind of fixtures and bulbs to use. Fixtures are available in a variety of shapes, sizes and finishes. Some fixtures affect the "throw of the light" – *photometrics*, this is called. Most, however, do not. For the most part, fixtures are designed mainly with an eye to their visual appeal. For that reason, the "best" choice here is often just a matter of personal preference.

Good Track Lighting

Beginners sometimes think only of "lighting up" an object or space, resulting

in a kind of Sahara-at-Noon effect that you see at an average supermarket or drug store. This probably is not what you have in mind for your home or office. To achieve the effect you want, you might try a technique that I call "painting with light." In this method, handheld lights are shone on the objects (again, in this instance, the pictures on the two walls) from varying directions and distances to find the most effective combination of lamp, bulb and placement.



Remember, consistency is an important part of good lighting. And so is making the lighting look nature. Sunlight falling through the branches and leaves of a tree, for example, creates light, shadow and sparkle. And with a little forethought and experimentation, you will find that you can create Nature – even with artificial lights indoors.

We've only touched on the subject of track lighting and much more, of course, can be said. I'd like to return to this topic again on a future occasion.

On our [web site \(www.RichArtCo.com\)](http://www.RichArtCo.com), you will find some articles on track lighting and its components as well as fixtures to be integrated into a functioning system. Our fixtures are selected for their relative unobtrusive silhouette and most important, the quality and type of light they produce. These include two new technolo-

gies not readily found in the average track light selection: [compact fluorescent](#) and [high intensity discharge](#), a new generation metal halide – both extremely high efficacy solutions. ■

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.