

lighting control unseen it sets the scene

By Paul Diggin



Whether you're building a custom home or simply remodeling a room, the number of decisions to be made is almost overwhelming. Colors, furnishings, window treatments – the list is long. There is one thing, however, that is almost always overlooked, even in today's custom homes. There is an element you can add to your home that will greatly enhance almost all of the custom features you have so carefully selected: lighting control.



Although often thought of as more of a utility than a home feature, lighting is as important a design element as color. Quite a bit of time, effort, and money is spent on furniture, artwork, granite, woodwork, painting, etc., but where's the beauty if it cannot be seen properly? One of the main goals of lighting control is to create optimal lighting scenes that complement a room's décor. With beautiful interior items worth thousands of dollars, having no control over their appearance under light seems ridiculous.

In addition to the aesthetic enhancements the right light provides, the devices of a lighting control system can also improve a room's look. Interior designers often refer to light switches as wall acne. The largest bank of switches can be replaced with one simple keypad, and custom light controls come in a wide variety of colors and finishes.

The most sensible way to illustrate the functional benefits of lighting control is to describe the convenience these systems offer. There are many things we use in everyday life that, not too long ago, were thought to be unnecessary. Consider remote controls, power car windows, and keyless entry – all things many people would never dream of going without. Once you have a lighting control system in your home, you'll wonder how you ever got along without one. The convenience lighting control offers explains why it is one of the fastest growing services in the custom electronics industry.

Imagine never having to walk around the house turning off lights again. With the touch of a button at night, before you leave the house or even from the car, you can turn off unneeded lights.



If you don't like bright, shocking light in the bedroom or bathroom, you can instead have a slow adjustment of light levels as you wake or when you get up in the middle of the night. You can avoid walking in the dark to get into bed or go to the bathroom. Bedside lamps or sconces can be adjusted for night-time reading.

Lighting control systems offer the convenience of pushing one button to create different lighting scenarios and moods, such as a "whole-home entertain" lighting scene for parties.

In your home theater, you could slowly lower the lights as the movie begins and slowly raise the lights as the movie ends – creating a true theater experience.

Whether you want to adjust light levels for family television viewing or for pleasant conversation, in one room or around the whole house, you can easily do so with a remote control from the comfort of your couch.

Another convenient use of lighting control systems is to create paths of light. For early risers, for example, you can gradually increase light levels as you make your way from the bedroom to the kitchen. Or, for parents, illuminate a low-level lighting path from the master bedroom to a child's bedroom in the middle of the night. The possibilities are endless.

These examples have given a glimpse of what lighting control systems can do in a home. But what exactly is a lighting control system? Lighting controls are devices that control the light level within a space, be it artificial lighting or natural sunlight.

Lighting control systems can either be pre-wired as part of your construction project or retrofitted. For a large home that may be best served by complete lighting control, it is usually more sensible to consider a pre-wired lighting control system. This type of system starts with low-voltage wiring that connects all the different devices (light fixtures, shading and drapery systems, switches/dimmers, motion sensors, and wall-mounted or remote master controls) with a central control system that delivers power to each device.




The second option, which is the most popular, is a retrofitted system. While a retrofit solution does have some limitations, it can provide whole-home lighting control, and many retrofits are among the most flexible, easy-to-use systems on the market. Retrofitted systems don't require a proprietary, low voltage pre-wire and allow homeowners to add as much or as little lighting control as they want. An important benefit of retrofits is that they are scalable. Often, these systems start out small but are expanded as the homeowners begin to experience the benefits. You can start with control over five or six areas of your home and easily upgrade to a whole-home lighting control system later with no additional wiring.

Lighting control also offers practical benefits. Lighting systems are frequently tied-in to security systems or used as proactive security. Lighting control helps to ensure safe home entry because you'll never approach or enter a dark home. Lighting "events" can be triggered automatically to simulate occupancy in a home. A fully or selectively lit home has the potential to deter trespassers.

You can also simply turn on selected lights to feel safe in a given situation. For example, if you hear an alarming noise at night, turn on outdoor lighting or press "all on" to illuminate the entire home from a bedside keypad. In the case of an emergency, lights can be set to either full bright or to flash from any keypad and can also be tied-in to a panic button. A flashing house certainly draws the attention of emergency medical, fire, and police services.

Another sensible benefit is energy savings. With lighting control, many of your lights will not be on full bright. A dimmer is less expensive than a switch because over time dimmers save electricity and extend lamp life. Dimming lights by 25 percent extends the bulb life to four times its normal life expectancy. The more a lamp is dimmed, the greater the lamp life extension. Lighting control can also be used to protect valuable furniture, rugs and artwork from sun damage.

Given all of the benefits of lighting control systems, it's easy to understand why they are growing in popularity. If you're interested in installing lighting control, a good place to start is by thinking about which features are of most interest and importance to you and your family. This helps you to consider the different options and begin setting your priorities. The next step is to contact a certified industry professional to discuss your needs and which system would work best for you.

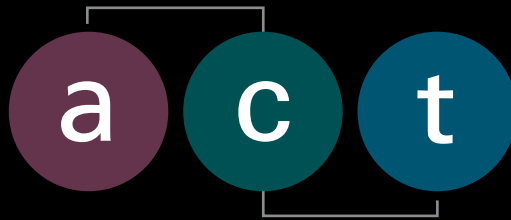
A lighting control system is a positive investment in the home as it adds value and contributes to the overall long-term comfort of those living in it. Lighting control also provides a wow factor. When considering custom features for your home, lighting control should not be overlooked. 

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