

# Custom lighting adds dual dimension to homes

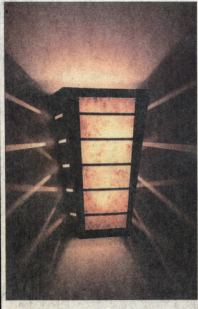


Photo above by Bill Medford; photo at top right by John Worsham  
The wall sconce above was created by Britt Medford of Two Hills Studio. It is made with dark pewter and heavy black wire. The sconce casts light on a corner wall. All top right is a copper sconce with a waffle weave design created by Texas Lightsmith. John Worsham, right photo, shows some of the sconces Texas Lightsmith makes at its retail shop Austin Studio. The company will soon move to larger accommodations.



By Alice Adams  
Special to this section

The Hill Country is alive with many and varied textures as Austin homeowners depart from standard all-brick, stone or stucco facades. Marring limestone with adobe, brick with fieldstone and rough, rugged beams with honey-smooth or cobbled exteriors, they create Grand Hill Country style, sharp Mediterranean lines and contemporary corners and angles jutting defiantly from their limestone foundations.

The underlying element for popular Hill Country motifs and other contemporary home styles, however, is the exterior addition of light and shadow created by handcrafted lighting fixtures. These fixtures can range from punched metal sconces, romantic

touchers and ornamental pinlights to unique edge lighting elements from unique, hand-crafted fixtures.

John Worsham III of Texas Lightsmith said one of this decade's growing trends is incorporating nontraditional building materials in custom home designs and complementing these materials with hand-crafted fixtures. "Some builders are recycling old wood by cutting it into timbers," he observed.

"Then they enhance the result with handmade lighting elements of copper, wrought iron or any one or more of the available unique finishes."

Worsham said that outdoor lighting has been a part of the popular landscape for years. "What we're seeing now is a re-surge of attraction to lighting and light fixtures, as well as large building budgets that make room for one-of-a-kind lighting-outdoors as well as inside," he said.

The craftsman is also seeing a wider variety of metals and finishes available for lighting fixtures. "I personally prefer copper because of its workability, its longevity and its ability to achieve a wide range of finishes," he said. "And, following closely on the heels of copper, I like working with wrought iron for many of the same reasons."

Worsham said clients today are coming to homebuilders and architects with definite ideas about home styles. Many want elements that are unique — something special and very different. "With construction on the scale it is in Austin, we're seeing homeowners with more money to spend who

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are allocating a larger portion of their building budget for lighting," said Worsham, who earned his art degree from UT then served an apprenticeship at a metal studio and took classes in blacksmithing at Austin Community College.

"I had always liked metal work and had been fascinated with armor since I was a kid," he admitted, adding he visited the Renaissance Festivals almost every year to feed his fascination.

Worsham's mentor during his apprenticeship — architect Britt Medford of Two Hills Studio, Inc., said his own architectural training eventually led him into the craft he now practices from his Austin location. "When I designed homes, I had some ideas about lighting and began making fixtures to accommodate those ideas," Medford said. "Client demand encouraged me to spend more time learning basic techniques but my architectural training helped me tremendously."

Handcrafted lighting fixtures are not strictly for new construction, although builders can definitely incorporate new and original fixtures to increase the depth of an environment. But today a homeowner wanting to update an existing environment may want to wait any of the city's design studios or lighting showrooms to see the options.

"Lighting plays a prominent role in what you see when you first look at a house, particularly at night," said Worsham. "And when you add custom lighting, the viewer sees something they don't usually see in an average home."

When lighting fixtures in an existing home, the designer said handcrafted lighting can often draw attention away from the aspects of the home that are not particularly interesting. And he offers this advice to anyone considering changing the lighting in an older home or selecting lighting for a new home: "You can al-

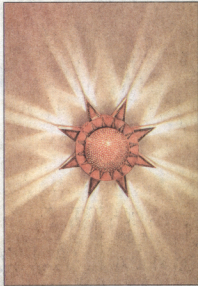


Photo by Britt Medford  
Britt Medford and Two Hills Studio created this starburst sconce in dark copper.

ways buy one fixture at a time if you have a limited budget," he said. "However, it's easiest to get a discount if you are buying five or 10 fixtures at one time."

Medford said anyone planning to build a custom home should allocate 2 to 3 percent of the construction costs to the lighting budget.

Both designers agree that one of the biggest mistakes made when planning a new home is waiting until the last minute to choose selecting lighting fixtures. Medford said mistakes are also

made by selecting lighting that is not proportional to the intended space or selecting lighting fixtures that create so much glare that the fixture itself cannot be seen.

Worsham sees fixtures selected late in the process when designing a home. "Sometimes they put off selecting fixtures until the last month of construction. But, that gives the buyer ample time to sit with the designer and come up with an appropriate style that can be tailored to the home," he said. "Sometimes, though, if peo-

ple wait until the last minute, the deadlines may be unattainable — or their budget may be down to the last few dollars."

"When in doubt, call a professional," Medford said. "That may sound overly simplistic, but we've seen that it is better to come into the showroom and see what they want rather than trying to visualize."

During Medford's 13 years in the custom lighting design business, he's seen just about everything, including the ram's head skull he was asked to eliminate and hang in a client's ranch home and the \$10,000 chandelier he designed to hang in an office building in San Francisco.

"Installing custom light fixtures on any building, whether it be a home or a commercial project, is like putting jewelry on. Those finishing touches that can make or break a building, those elements that make something beautiful are most special."

But he cautions against becoming too creative with lighting fixtures. "We tailor each of our lighting fixtures to the type of finish or size the client prefers and have an open mind to the ideas they bring in," he said. "But we don't do austere chandeliers, howling coyotes or Kiklopelli's. Our fixtures can be tailored to almost any setting and are sometimes whimsical, but not to the point of being silly."

Medford said he encourages new home buyers to look through magazines, to visit showrooms and see what's available. "It's really tough to go to a hardware store and try to visualize how a fixture will look in your bathroom," he explained.

Worsham also reminds his clients that lighting fixtures will have two lives — one when the lights are on and the other when the lights are off. "Our designs are crafted to look great, whether the lights are on or off," he said. "Exterior lights are only fun for a small portion of the time, so it is important that they look good either way."