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Lighting design: Retail design ceiling, ,

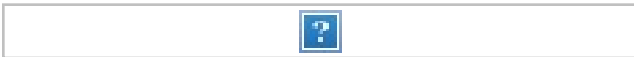


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**Retail design looking upwards: lighting as infrastructure and an element of brand presentation**

**The ceiling has long been neglected as a part of architecture but is now being increasingly recognised by designers as an independent element of design. Ceilings provide a flexible basis for illuminating products and at the same time a valuable framework for brand presentation. Design flexibility in this regard ranges from expressive, technical styles to a purist or even magical ceiling appearance where luminaires remain elegantly concealed. This article explains how lighting on ceilings can be skilfully used for displaying and highlighting goods, and also outlines the possibilities of the lighting concept and specific luminaire arrangements on ceilings.**

We seldom enter shops with flat white ceilings and uniform, orthogonal grids of luminaires. Such approaches would appear too similar to expressionless classrooms, corridors or rooms in administration buildings, and would definitely not have a positive effect on the shopping experience. Ceilings in shops are more frequently the exciting stage for presenting and highlighting the brand. As a counterpart to opulent, densely arranged goods displayed on tables and in shelving, shop ceilings are often the calm antithesis. A discreet, harmonious impression is created if the room's materials, colours and language of design are continued on the ceiling. According to the brand profile, an urban character is achieved by raw materials such as exposed concrete and bare ceilings, or a natural, soft atmosphere with wooden slats and textile strips. If customers are to be stimulated by the retail design, contrasts in colour and material set a counterpoint: black ceilings create a narrow, cave-like appearance whereas wide-area light ceilings hint at diffuse outdoor skies. Via the parameters of brightness and planarity, ceilings can be an important medium for atmospherically using distance or intimacy for brand communication and product presentation purposes. Ceilings can also be equipped with strips of light to help guide customers through the store.



The light cove emphasises the height of the space in the centre of the room. Accent lighting has a discreet appearance with recessed ceiling luminaires and white spotlights. Colette Store, Paris. Photographer: Edgar Zippel.

## **The ceiling as an important element of infrastructure in shop lighting**

If the ceiling is merely seen as a stage for self-presentation or a medium for supporting customer orientation an important aspect is frequently neglected - using the ceiling as technical infrastructure for attractive goods illumination. In such cases it is less a matter of how the light validates the ceiling itself as an eye-catcher, but mainly concerns the brilliant accenting of goods at the point of sale via the ceiling. Advantageous in such cases are luminaire ranges with a wide spectrum of functions to achieve the desired light impact with differing mounting methods. It doesn't matter whether a brand selects a concept with just accent lighting, wallwashing, horizontal general lighting or a combination of these - the lighting solution can be installed either as a subtly integrated version recessed in the ceiling or as a flexible solution for tracks. Together with the drywall construction, sophisticated solutions can be created using ceiling ducts, coves or lamellae that model the striking brand presence with ceiling patterns and light effects..

## **How can lighting become a part of brand presentation?**

Corporate lighting concepts play an important role in the retail sector. These can subtly strengthen the identity of a brand by using a characteristic lighting design that is consistently implemented across regions and branches. Successful corporate lighting is based on two pillars: on the one hand it defines light moods, light impacts and effects that visualise and underline the brand values, and on the other hand the selection of luminaires is decisive for also communicating the character of the brand through their design. While specifying a luminaire design suitable for the image of the store is a comparatively simple decision, creating a characteristic light atmosphere requires an understanding of how customers perceive light. The interplay of light and surface materials as well as luminaires and ceiling architecture enables the development of brand factors such as high quality, modern

spontaneous or natural appearances.



Light coves with changing colours reference the apparel in the shelves, communicating a holistic brand experience. Lacoste Showroom, Aubervilliers. Architect: Devanlay. Photographer: Dirk Vogel.

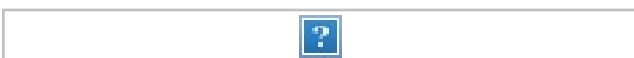
## **Rounding off the image with product design: working with the design of the luminaires**

The form, colour and construction method of luminaires represent the second pillar in a corporate lighting strategy. Modern lighting technology in such cases enables high flexibility with regard to luminaire design with identical light concepts if the manufacturer's luminaire systems are highly modular and diverse. Lighting tools having the same characteristics across families and types form the basis for a contemporary, holistic design approach. Rich-contrast accent lighting for lively, diversified brand presentations can be elegantly achieved for example with recessed ceiling luminaires or with striking spotlights featuring a technical flair. The division into ceiling-integrated lighting, e.g. with downlights and additive lighting systems such as spotlights on tracks or pendant luminaires, is surely the most noticeable differentiation for giving ceilings a purist and modern, or else technically expressive, appearance using luminaires. Spotlights with their size, shape and colour provide a further option for differentiating the brand image. Silver-coloured luminaires installed on white ceilings emphasise a cool, technical brand appearance in comparison to white spotlights generating a discreet and neutral atmosphere in this context.

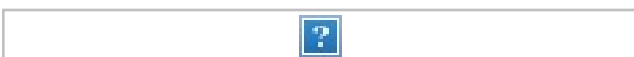
Decorative luminaires play a particular role in such cases, and their impact is primarily due to the design of the luminaire itself and less due to its light effects in the space. As eye-catchers on the ceiling they characterise the room with their shape and colour, generate associations such as romantic, classic or glamorous, or else establish connections with their ornamental features and materials to specific cultures such as the Arabian or Asian worlds. Lighting design based merely on decorative luminaires is not used in shops because such luminaires do not usually have lighting technology mature enough to successfully illuminate the goods. Customers may well get the impression that the decorative luminaires in the shop dominate the light concept, but the display of goods with use of light is actually achieved via subtly integrated recessed ceiling luminaires.



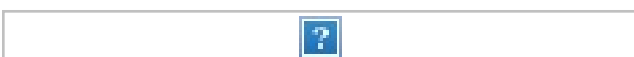
Black spotlights on the ceiling blend discreetly into the light ceiling of the Art Nouveau hall. The black frames of the tracks consistently transfer the black grid lines onto the white-plastered ceiling fields. Kiton, Milan. Architect: Franco Maggi, Milan. Lighting designers: Gruppo C14, Milan. Photographer: Dirk Vogel.



Luminaires are installed in a black ceiling duct to achieve a concise, graphic ceiling appearance. Ermenegildo Zegna, Milan. Photographer: Frieder Blickle.



A bare ceiling gives the space a raw atmosphere, and the suspended black track with spots intelligently reflects the black lines of the architecture. Giralt Sabateries, Game Shoes, Barcelona. Photographer: Sebastian Mayer.



An exposed concrete ceiling creates a raw, expressive character. The track installation is pragmatically surface-mounted. Pier 14, Zinnowitz. Architect: Harald Linde, Bäder Immobilien Usedom GmbH and Mark Bendow, Interior Environments Berlin. Photographer: Rudi Meisel.



Round recessed luminaires were unobtrusively integrated into the ceiling, allowing the linear geometry of the space to dominate. Zeiss Optik Kästner, Stuttgart. Architect and lighting designer: Labor Weltenbau, Stuttgart. Photographer: Thomas Pflaum.

## **Radiating individuality: unique positioning via striking light and ceiling details**

Shops placing an emphasis on storytelling and individuality in their brand communication rapidly distance themselves from conventional white suspended ceilings during the concept phase. Such retail outlets see ceilings as a sculptural element for brand presentation by creating a special atmosphere via material, form, colour and light that significantly differs from normal ceiling designs. Using technical luminaires for highlighting the products takes on more of a secondary role because in such cases the form and colour of the ceiling dominate the overall impression. Ceiling ducts, lamellae and light ceilings are only some of the options available for designing ceilings in a different way. Black ceiling ducts can cleverly conceal technical elements such as luminaires, fire protection devices and air conditioning equipment and also emphasise the length of the space. Baffle ceilings also create an elegant impression, although the smooth view from below has a finely uniform line pattern. If the structure runs parallel to the entrance facade a view of the luminaires can be almost completely concealed when the shop is entered, if the spotlights do not protrude from the baffles.

This underlines the impression that the effect of light in the shop is what counts and not the luminaires themselves. Light ceilings also provide an alternative impression of the space, triggering associations to daylight with their brightly luminous surfaces. The diffuse distribution of conventional light ceilings corresponds to a cloudy sky though and not to radiant sunlight with brilliance and rich-contrast modelling. Supplementing light ceilings with spots for directed light therefore makes sense to give the products a radiant appearance. Light strips on ceilings represent a more purist version of the light ceiling, and their form and alignment can be specifically used to help guide customers through the shop. In addition, countless further options are also available for establishing unique ceiling details with a particular brand. If new details are to be used over several retail outlets, it is recommended to test the concept, installation and new alignment of the luminaires first so that any minor weaknesses are not reproduced.



The red ceiling forms a companion piece to the red carpet of the bookstore. White luminaires on white tracks give the space a linear dynamism. Dussmann das KulturKaufhaus GmbH, Berlin. Architect: ROBERTNEUN Architekten, Berlin. Photographer: Rudi Meisel.



The black colour of the ceiling is consistently continued in the luminaire colour, enabling a discreet luminaire appearance. BLACK SWAN, Beijing. Photographer: Sebastian Mayer.



The silver colour of the mobile furniture is reflected in the tracks and spotlights of the jewellery store. Niessing Shop in the Stilwerk, Düsseldorf. Photographer: Dirk Vogel.

## **Which luminaires are suitable for which purpose with ceiling mounting?**

A fundamental differentiation in luminaires is provided by classifying installations into flexible or fixed mounting. The flexible mounting solution with track comes from the desire for a technical appearance with a lower-cost by installing directly on the ceiling. A recessed version on the other hand is needed if the track should discreetly blend into the ceiling. Lastly luminaires with fixed mounting are prescribed.

## Flexible but visible: tracks for surface-mounting and suspending

The flexible mounting of spotlights uses tracks into which the luminaires can be simply inserted, removed and repositioned in another location. With changing lighting requirements, e.g. with frequent seasonal or product changes or different interior arrangements, this method has often proved advantageous because no re-cabling is needed. The track itself can be fixed directly to the bare ceiling or to a substructure. A system consisting of suspended tracks is suitable if height differences exist, caused for example by air-conditioning ducts. If indirect ceiling lighting is desired, a light structure with secondary light emission can be used instead of a conventional track. Spots can be fitted, as with surface-mounted tracks.



The suspended structure of the tracks lowers the mounting height, enabling indirect illumination of the ceiling to brighten the space via the light structure. Benetton megastore, Kärntner Straße, Vienna. Architecture: Marc & Tino Wieser, MTM Textilhandel GmbH, Vienna, MVD Austria, frank rieper architekten, Vienna / Graz; interior & CI designer: Vincenzo De Cotiis, Milan. Photographer: Rudi Meisel.



Technical lighting in the form of spots is positioned to the side of the beam. The large pendant luminaires create a nostalgic flair. 14 oz. Store, Haus Cumberland, Berlin. Architect: s1 Architektur, Henning Ziepke, Ansgar Schmidt, Berlin. Photographer: Edgar Zippel.

## Flexible and discreet: tracks for recessing

Installing recessed track is recommended for creating calm, smooth ceiling appearances when viewed from below. Flanged tracks for suspended drywall ceilings are available for installation flush to the ceiling. Following drywall work the electrician can then comfortably install the tracks. The tracks can also be used as infrastructure by using hooks for hanging decorative objects.

## Fixed, visible mounting: surface-mounted and pendant luminaires

If a ceiling appearance is preferred with individual light points instead of several lines of tracks, surface-mounted and pendant luminaires are the right choice. The reasons for specifying surface-mounted and pendant luminaires are often pragmatic: suspended ceilings are frequently rejected due to economic reasons - luminaire mounting and cable routing is directly installed on the bare ceiling. Particularly with high shops, pendant luminaires enable mounting heights to be freely selected to thus allow the height of the room to be visually lowered - the sales space is given a more private, intimate character by moving the luminaires into the field of view of the customer. Because such luminaires usually have wide light distribution, general lighting can be achieved but not rich-contrast accent lighting.

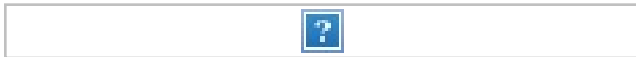


Blue, diffuse ceiling lighting gives the shop an impression of height, and with warm white accent lighting creates a contrast-rich sense of emotion for the products. The Pro Shop in the CenturyLink Field soccer stadium, Seattle / USA. Architect: Rossetti Architects, Detroit / USA. Lighting designer: Devki RajGuru, LittleFish Lighting Inc., Redmond / USA. Photographer: Arnaldo Dal Bosco.

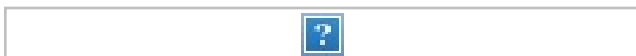
## Fixed, discreetly recessed mounting: recessed ceiling luminaires and directional spotlights

If a purist ceiling appearance is desired where the light impact itself is what counts in the shop and

where luminaires should be concealed from customers, recessed luminaires are clearly the right choice. The ceiling appearance remains clean because luminaires do not protrude from the ceiling. The ceiling opening is therefore hardly noticed - clearly structuring the arrangement of the luminaires also contributes to a calm ceiling look. Lighting designers can choose between two recessing details: for rapid installation a recessing detail consisting of a covered trim is available which covers rough ceiling cut-outs. On the other hand a ceiling-flush mounting ring has a sophisticated, purist appearance. The transition between the ceiling and ring must however be plastered by the drywall constructor. In addition to wide distribution downlights for general lighting or wallwashers, directional spotlights are also part of the spectrum of recessed ceiling luminaires. These spotlights have fixed mounting points and use the same mounting details as the downlights, but have pan-and-tilt movement in their frames, providing flexible accent lighting with fixed luminaire arrangements.



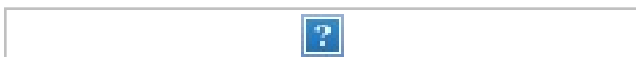
Luminaires are concealed from customers in a dark cove between the ceiling and wall, giving preference to the light and not the luminaire. Furla Store, Milan. Architect: APRIL. Photographer: Thomas Mayer.



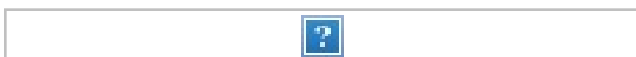
The white ceiling channel creates a stark contrast to the dark ceiling. Luminaires are compactly integrated as cubes in the channel. Victorinox Flagship Store, London. Architect: Retailpartners AG, Switzerland, Daniel Wettstein, Wetzikon. Lighting designer: Neuco AG, Zurich, Thomas Lack. Photographer: Rudi Meisel.

## How can luminaires be intelligently arranged in the ceiling?

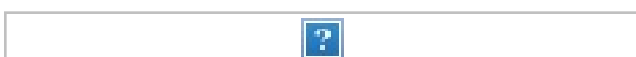
Because with alignable luminaires no direct connection exists between the arrangement of luminaires and light effect, many lighting designs can be implemented with very different ceiling appearances. This in turn gives interior designers high flexibility for designing when supporting the brand identity of the shop via the luminaire arrangement. The design principles of symmetry, proximity, uniformity and continuity provide a good basis for the grouping of luminaires, and these are then supplemented by specifying luminaire mounting height and drywall details.



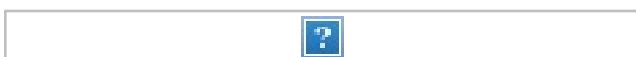
Flush with the ceiling: spotlights are operated on ceiling-flush tracks - either with plaster trim profile or as a flanged track on suspended light structures. The result is a highly discreet ceiling appearance.



Ceiling surface-mounted: the surface-mounted track provides a quick and economic solution with retrospective installation.



Ceiling channel: integrating the lighting tools into a ceiling channel removes the luminaires as much as possible from the view of the observer. Deckenkanal: Die Integration der Lichtwerkzeuge in einen Deckenkanal entzieht die Leuchten weitestgehend dem Blick des Betrachters.



Suspended: the pendant version with wire provides a pragmatic solution for installing tracks in high rooms or if ceiling mounting points are limited. Combining with a light structure provides supplementary indirect lighting to brighten the ceiling.

## Principles of good design: creating interesting rhythms with points and lines

Recessed ceiling luminaires and spots appear as points on the ceiling, thereby creating a design pattern characterising the atmosphere in the space. The standard solution for uniformity is based on a regular, orthogonal pattern. Both the light effect and ceiling appearance quickly become monotonous in such cases though. Supplementary accent lighting enables a further pattern to be added or the light points to be brought together as pairs, groups or lines. This lessens the monotony of a uniform layout and emphasises the axis of a room. The design principles can also be applied to arranging spotlights on tracks to create groups for example, in this way avoiding a subordinated configuration of the spotlights. This applies particularly to accent lighting using spotlights in shop window displays.



The concept of a starry sky is manifested in the irregular distribution of recessed luminaires. The large daylight apertures provide a cloud-like impression. Bory Mall, Bratislava. Architect: Massimiliano Fuksas, Rome. Photographer: Dirk Vogel.



Black tracks elegantly emphasise the linear appearance of the ceiling strips. Lanificio di Tollegno / Ragno, Milan. Architect and lighting designer: RetailDesign, Paolo Lucchetta, Milan. Photographer: Dirk Vogel.



Für ein klares Deckenbild werden die Deckeneinbauleuchten in zwei Reihen zusammengefasst. Die rechteckige Leuchtenform setzt einen Kontrast zu den organischen Ornamenten auf der Wand. Chaumet, Paris. Architekt: Fabienne Gelle. Fotograf: Dirk Vogel.

## Playing with vertical axes: structuring the room via the mounting height

In addition to a horizontal arrangement of luminaires, the retail atmosphere can also be adapted using the mounting height. If pendant luminaires are installed at lower heights – independently of whether these are technical or decorative luminaires – a personal association is created between customers and the luminaires compared to solutions featuring downlights installed flush in the ceiling. Shop-in-shop designs are particularly suitable for defining zones and separating these from their surroundings by using the mounting height with decorative luminaires. This approach can be implemented either directly with pendant luminaires or with use of suspended ceilings. However, pendant luminaires should be positioned above reach height, thus avoiding handling by the public..

To emphasise the height offset of an additionally suspended ceiling, cove lighting is suitable that emits diffuse light subtly emphasising the graduations in height. Illumination of the cove with warm white or neutral white light is discreet in such situations. Coloured lighting reflecting the brand colour is an alternative solution to achieve more emotion and strengthen the association to brand identity.

## Light, not luminaires: concealing luminaires with the drywall construction

The drywall construction offers diverse options for removing the luminaires from the field of view and focusing on the light effect on products. Black luminaires in dark-painted ceiling channels or in round, dark apertures quickly take the lighting tools away from the field of view. The result is frequently the dual effect of a large, bright surface contrasting with individual, dark strips. Lamellae configured in parallel or as a grid also conceal luminaires. These however do not create the dual effect of a ceiling channel but fascinate with their finely structured, uniform ceiling structure in which luminaires are almost invisibly integrated. A similar effect of concealment is also created by ceilings with opulent, decorative elements.



Das Raster der eng gestaffelten Lamellen verbirgt die Ansicht der darüberliegenden Strahler und lässt ein sehr homogenes Deckenbild entstehen. DREIPUNKT Möbel Showroom im Stilwerk, Stuttgart. Architekt: Bernd Schellenberg, DREIPUNKT International. Lichtplaner: Stephan Haubner, Wesenlicht, Stuttgart. Fotograf: Dirk Vogel.

## Summary: presenting both the brand and products with light and luminaires

The success of corporate lighting concepts lies in the interplay of light atmosphere and the correct selection of luminaires. In the first step the atmosphere is defined, establishing either a natural or theatrical impression in the shop. Selecting the right luminaires with respect to suitable lighting technology and attractive designs only takes place in the second step. In such situations the ceiling provides a diverse infrastructure for positioning the required lighting tools and also for formally integrating these into the ceiling in accordance with the retail design. Discreetly displaying the ceiling with light or achieving a striking eye-catcher allows the operator to present a holistic experience for shopping purposes.

## Lighting recommendations for ceilings in shops

- Bright ceiling colours and materials as well as indirect light, particularly with low rooms, help to generate an impression of distance.
- To attract the attention of customers to the products in the shop it is recommended to use highest illuminance levels at the point of sale, and to reduce other areas, e.g. presentation of the ceiling, to this aim.
- Designing retail stores should place the display of the products and the spatial experience in the foreground. Recessed luminaires are suitable for this purpose as well as surface-mounted luminaires and spotlights in the same colour as the ceiling.
- Manufacturers with a wide spectrum of luminaires and differentiated light distributions offer lighting designers flexibility in design to realise lighting solutions featuring various mounting methods.
- Spotlights and tracks are suitable for high levels of flexibility, creating a discreet ceiling appearance with a luminaire colour corresponding to the ceiling or by integration into a ceiling duct or between lamellae.
- Defining zones for shop-in-shop designs and distancing these zones from their surroundings can be achieved by using the mounting height and other luminaire designs.



**Dr. Thomas Schielke** Dr. Thomas Schielke studied architecture at the Darmstadt Technical University, Germany. He has worked for more than ten years as editor for didactic communication at the luminaire manufacturer ERCO and is co-author of the textbook "Light Perspectives: Between Culture and Technology".

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