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Lighten Up

If winter gray gives you the blues, try these bright ideas from local lighting luminaries.

By [Calise Cardenas](#)



Photo: Courtesy Lighting Designs Inc. / Mike Jensen

It's on Designers battle cold-weather blahs with light-spreading sconces and dimmable bulbs that accentuate artwork.

THE TRUE TEST of a Seattleite's spirit comes in the short, dark days of winter. We all have our SAD-stumping mechanisms—sweat sessions at the sauna, all-inclusive piña colada benders on the Riviera Maya, [Nutella milk shakes from Lunchbox Lab](#). But of all the strategies out there, a well-conceived lighting scheme may just be the most effective.

Bounce It. Carol Schaefer, principal at GGLO (206-467-5828; www.gglo.com), a Seattle-based integrated design firm, says one simple trick to keep things cheerful is to bounce light off surfaces like walls and ceilings to reflect light back into a space. “The tendency,” says Schaefer, “is to put recessed or downward-facing lights in the middle of a room, when you should really put them within 30 inches or three feet of a wall.” She points out that when the bulb is considered the primary source of light, there's a perceived brightness, but the light spreads itself too thin through the room. Point the light at a wall, and the brightness expands evenly throughout the space while glare is reduced.

Spread It. Playing with the texture and color of wall surfaces can also make the light feel more active. Denise Fong, a principal at the downtown lighting–design firm Candela (206–667–0511; candela.com), emphasizes the importance of creating ambience with warm colors. Use a bright color on one feature wall, says Fong, but if you want to maximize the spread of light through a room, keep the remaining walls and the ceiling white and use upward–facing lamps spaced strategically to even out the glow.

Dim It. And don’t go too bright. Interior designer [Amely Wurmbrand](http://AmelyWurmbrand.com) (206-542-0447; amelydesigns.com) recommends halogen lights on dimmers, because, she says, a light you can’t dim can be overwhelming and cold. Dimmers will double the life of a lightbulb, and having control over the light source allows you to better simulate sunlight—so you won’t miss it too terribly during the next few months. If you don’t have dimmers in your budget, Wurmbrand offers an easy, low–cost solution: candlelight. The warm luminescence from flickering flames creates a dramatic mood that no bulb can simulate. Hand–blown glass votives are another way to create a beautiful, warm light without a lot of effort or cost.

Get Help. Wurmbrand’s go–to lighting guy, Sidney Genette at Lighting Designs (206–467–6484; lightingdesigns.com), offers a two–hour, \$300 in–home consultation covering the basics and offering quick tips to enhance cheer. Switch to pink lightbulbs, for instance, and you and your guests will look younger while the room will appear cleaner. Create warmth by “uplighting” from the floor, says Genette, using pink and blue gels in corners. For Seattleites prepared to overhaul their entire lighting scheme (and to commit to a six– to eight–month project) the glow guru charges \$1—\$3 per square foot “depending on the owner’s taste and complexity of the project.” Genette gathers inspiration from everywhere to serve his clients. One recently asked him to draw from both architecture in San Francisco and the scarlet–hued scheme that Insatiable Studios designer Jil Smith created for Dahlia Lounge in downtown Seattle. “To me,” says Genette, “lighting is art.” In the fight against winter gloom, it can also be a weapon. 🌸

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