

## Boost Sales With Deck Lighting

by Brian Bell

Most of us are no longer simply deck builders. In fact, I'm guessing that many of you are just like me, a deck builder who doesn't build decks, or much of anything else, anymore. We're too busy—being designers and salespeople, manning the quality-control and customer-service desks, and managing the company's finances—to pick up our tools. On top of that, in order to grow our businesses, we have needed to become outdoor living experts. As my company has evolved, I have found that adding deck lighting to our portfolio has been a fun way to add a touch of class to our business, improve customer satisfaction, and—best of all—improve our bottom line.

### A Profitable Upgrade

Decks are still my company's bread and butter, but we've started offering hard-scaping and patio covers too. The beauty of a low-voltage lighting package is that it can be added to any or all of these projects. Since low-voltage lighting runs on 12-volt DC rather than 110-volt AC current, it's easy for my crew to install the fixtures and wiring, and most of the installation can be completed without an electrician's services.

Deck lighting is also an easy upgrade to sell. Once I've convinced clients that one of our decks is worth our average \$20K price tag (even though they have probably gotten lower bids from other builders), convincing them to spend another \$1K

to \$3K on a lighting package to make the deck amazing isn't much of a stretch.

Our average lighting package costs clients about \$1,500 and yields a good profit margin for us on the installation. As I tell clients, deck lighting isn't a necessity, but it provides a lot of value for a reasonable cost. We don't hard-sell this option, but at the same time, we don't make the mistake that a lot of deck builders in our market make by addressing lighting only when the clients bring it up, and then throwing in a cheap set of lights from Home Depot. They don't realize the opportunity they're missing to dress their projects up, provide their clients with a better product, and earn a little more money in the process.



In a successful deck lighting design, there is a balance between areas of light and areas of shadow. Note how these post-mounted fixtures cast their light down and away from the eye.



To avoid glare, deck lighting should be low key, except when highlighting a focal point such as a pergola or an unusual planting.

## EYE FOR DESIGN

### Good Lighting Sells Decks

I make it a point to get great nighttime photos of our completed decks, which I use to sell not only our lighting packages, but also overall projects. To do this, we hire a professional photographer. The money we've spent on photos has been easily recouped by selling more and larger projects.

Finding the right photographer isn't easy; I tried three or four before I found one who charged reasonable prices and could capture the beauty of our work and designs with both daytime and nighttime shots. I found that wedding photographers tend to be skilled at shooting outdoors under both daytime and nighttime lighting conditions. (The ones I use also enjoy the change of scenery and the flexibility that shooting our projects provides them.)

An average photo session that produces both day and evening shots costs me from



Step lighting is both a decorative element and an important safety feature when there is a change in elevation.

\$300 to \$400. When negotiating with a photographer about the fee, I always ask for full ownership of the photos. Some photographers charge less up front, but retain rights to the photos and charge you every time you want to use one.

### Fixtures

Our lighting designs always start with the effect we're trying to achieve. For example, to incorporate outdoor lighting into our patio covers, we sometimes install light bars in the bays of exposed-

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rafter ceilings. These lights are usually wired to a separate transformer that's on a switched outlet, which allows the client to turn these lights on and off independently.

We prefer to use LED fixtures. Though they are more expensive, they're more compact and they require less power for each lumen of light output. That is important because the total wattage of the fixtures on each circuit determines the size (and cost) of the transformer used, as well as the gauge of wire required.

There are a number of quality outdoor-lighting manufacturers. We've used Kichler products (kichler.com) for years, but now we primarily use Dekor's outdoor lighting products (de-kor.com). By partnering with a smaller boutique firm like Dekor, we get better customer service and we have more flexibility in getting products to suit our designs, instead



Gentle indirect lighting is provided by light bars installed in the rafter bays, and by unobtrusive fixtures mounted on the patio cover's corner posts.



Deck Dots LED fixtures can be walked on, are waterproof, and measure less than 1/2 inch in diameter.

of needing to design around a product.

For example, I am a big fan of Dekor's Deck Dots. They are the smallest, brightest, and easiest-to-install LED deck light I've seen. They are sold in fully contained kits as well as individually and

are designed to be installed flush in any surface from maintenance-free decking to concrete. ♦

*Brian Bell is the owner of Banell Custom Decks & Basements in Parker, Colo.*

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