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## Lighting can transform a wedding space

By **Diana Marszalek**, Associated Press

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You'd be hard pressed to find a bride who doesn't make flowers, centerpieces and tablecloths a priority when it comes to creating a certain mood for the wedding.

But talk to wedding lighting designer Bentley Meeker — whose clients have included Chelsea Clinton and Catherine Zeta Jones — and he'll tell you that simple tricks, such as changing the color of light bulbs, can create the desired ambiance more effectively than roses and fancy tablecloths ever could.



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*Bentley Meeker, Associated Press*

This undated photo courtesy of wedding lighting designer Bentley Meeker shows lighting designed by Meeker at Billy Joel's wedding in Centre Island, N.Y. "Wedding lighting is really about what people are always trying to do with their weddings, which is to create a certain vibe and atmosphere," the New York City lighting pro said.

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"Say you're going to do a wedding in your office, and you bring in flowers and the tables and you still have fluorescent lighting," he said. "It will look like your office decorated for a wedding.

"But if I came in and lit the office and didn't do any other decorations, we would have transformed that space."

Diann Valentine, a Los Angeles wedding designer and expert on the cable station Wedding Central, agreed that lighting should top brides' decorating priority lists because it "allows us to program the mood of an event."

That might mean changing the intensity of light throughout a wedding — dimmer for cocktails, brighter for dinner, for example — or using it to completely change the feel of a room.

Rainer Flor, who married wife Candice last month at singer Gloria Estefan's Costa d'Este in Vero Beach, Fla., said lighting effects enhanced the "Miami chic" atmosphere they were looking for. With floor lights and strategically placed LED lights, he said, the room, right off the beach, "looked almost like an aquarium."

Central Florida wedding planner Karry Castillo, who helped design the Flors' wedding, said effects can range from simple spotlights on particular room features or decorations, to lighting motifs and patterns on walls, floors and ceilings.

In addition, lighting effects can be relatively inexpensive, anywhere from a few hundred dollars to thousands, depending on complexity.

"In many ways, lighting not only enhances the elements you have in place, but it can also give you a lot more bang for the dollar too," Castillo said.

Meeker is particularly fond of using pink and amber light bulbs, though he warns that those colors must be used cautiously ("There is ugly amber"). Dimmed incandescent light is another of his favorites.

Particularly in closed rooms, he said, use lighting that's appropriate for the setting — fixtures that can be absorbed into, rather than take over, the larger setting.

"It has to look beautiful so when the guests walk in they lose their breath," Meeker said.

Make sure light isn't so glaring — or dark — that it distorts or distracts from the wedding party.

And choose soft, flattering colors to create a serene atmosphere, particularly by quelling strong lights. "Lighting can change so much that people really feel good about themselves," Meeker said.

Meeker sometimes works with crews 120 strong, and charges anywhere from \$4,000 to \$500,000 to custom light a wedding. But there is plenty that brides and wedding planners with more limited resources can do quite simply, he said.



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One cost-free suggestion: Dim the lights.

"If you want to transform a space, you put everything on dimmers," he said.

Meeker says he dims lights somewhat darker than you'd expect ("Your eye adjusts"); whether you can see your shoes and laces clearly is a good barometer or whether you've hit it right.

Other wise advice: "Ask your mother or mother-in-law-to-be, and if it's not too dark for her, there's your atmosphere."

Meeker also suggests this fairly inexpensive trick: Use small spotlights (about \$30 each, he said) to highlight architectural or decorative features around the wedding space.

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