



Lisa Barter

Sophisticated lighting at Ameristar Blackhawk hotel and spa delights and surprises

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Open in late 2009, the [Ameristar hotel and spa at Blackhawk](#) features lighting design that is unexpected in a town best known as a day tripping casino destination.

With a large hospitality portfolio, the [Lighting Design Alliance](#) of Los Angeles fashioned the lighting for the hotel and spa. Their design layers light with open and lensed halogen downlights, LED and fluorescent coves and wall grazers, and MR16 accent lighting to provide drama on art objects ranging from highly textured pebble walls to rustic twig sculptures.

Each lighting type is individually controlled and set to a specific intensity level in a scene. Each scene combines different preset levels of light and is accessed through single touch wall stations with choices like "Cleanup", "Daytime", and "After Hours". Using preset dimmed scenes to create mood is recognized a key when selling a hospitality experience. The controls systems for the project include ETC and Crestron wall panels.

Aside from creating mood, [dimming lights](#) increases lamp (bulb) life. Dimming a lamp by just over 5% will actually double the lamp life, while dimming it 50% will increase lamp life twenty fold. In a hospitality environment, this also saves money on lamp replacement and labor.

Energy savings from dimming are nearly linear. Dimming a lamp 50% saves about 40% of the lamp's rated wattage.

While linear fluorescent cove lighting, LED wall grazers and LED backlighting are used in some areas, most of the hotel and spa front of house lighting is [incandescent](#) or halogen. Energy saving 37W IR (infrared) MR16 lamps, which produce the same amount of light as a 50W non-IR lamp, were used for many of the recessed fixtures. And while energy saving LED's and dimmable fluorescents were originally specified for more fixtures, value engineering mandated a shift to incandescent sources to reduce up front costs.

When asked to comment on the lighting's energy consumption, the project's lighting designer Ronit Fraenkel responds, "Six years ago when the design process started, we were specifying mostly neon coves and halogen downlights for our hospitality jobs. These days we typically specify LED's or fluorescents for coves depending on the application. Clients are now more open to using compact fluorescent downlights, and even insist on



Spa lobby featuring logo projected on floor

Photo: [ameristar.com](#)

incorporating LED's into the design to be green or get tax write-offs."



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By Lisa Barter

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Lisa Barter is a lighting designer who came into the field from architecture and interior design. Being the oddball imaginative person in a family...

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