

Luxurious LEED

As the first Platinum-rated hotel, Proximity employs selective use of electric lighting to ensure its sustainable status.

By Beth Furtwangler

Bigger is not always better when it comes to lighting. In fact, the Proximity Hotel has proven that less is actually more. The Greensboro, NC hotel is the greenest in the country, thanks to its efficient energy use, sustainable site development and savvy lighting scheme. As the only hotel with LEED Platinum status, the highest level of certification by the U.S. Green Building Council, Proximity's design maximizes daylight exposure and minimizes energy use from lighting — without compromising the hotel's luxury.

"We're saving all this lighting and still keeping the ambiance of the hotel, so guests don't notice the sacrifice," says Dennis Quaintance, Chief Design Officer and Chief Executive Officer of Quaintance-Weaver, which owns and built Proximity.

Achieving that balance of energy efficiency and a quality guest experience was Quaintance's primary concern when starting out to create the greenest hotel in America in January 2006. "Our guests come before green efforts," he says. "It's not sustainable to go broke."

From the first meeting with East Bend, NC-based Johnson's Modern Electric Co., Quaintance emphasized the need for learning. "We wanted to move green construction forward, not backwards," he says.

That meant testing countless light fixtures and creating prototype rooms, all because Quaintance was determined to avoid making even one "stupid decision." Creating the ideal lighting plan was a challenge, but "turned into a delightful journey," Quaintance says.

And, as it turns out, the journey had a happy ending: The nine-story hotel, which opened in late 2007, earned 55 LEED credits of sustainable practices, exceeding the 52 minimum required for the Platinum rating. Some of the awarded credits were based on reducing light pollution and providing daylight exposure. For the latter, Proximity goes above and beyond: More than 97 percent of its regularly occupied space has direct views of the hotel's 2.5-acre garden-filled setting.





The two-story Social Lobby requires minimal lighting fixtures, thanks to the abundant natural light from its dramatic windows.

Daylight, Fluorescents at the Fore

Stepping into the hotel's chic Social Lobby, which features a two-story-high ceiling and an open floor plan framed by winding spiral staircases, you wouldn't think you were in a so-called "eco-friendly" hotel. But look around and you'll notice the locally made furnishings, not to mention the floor-to-ceiling windows allowing natural light to flood the lobby.

Lighting fixtures are sparse and half of the four ceiling fixtures are generally turned off during the day to preserve ambiance. To further set the mood, six 20W spotlights are aimed at orchid plants throughout the lobby.

The hotel's Print Works Bistro is enclosed by 52 7-foot-tall windows on three walls, overlooking the gardens. "We could take away half of the windows in the restaurant and it'd still be completely day-lit," Quaintance says.

Given the sheer abundance of natural lighting, Quaintance strove to create the ideal lighting system to complete the restaurant's atmosphere. The answer? Four-pin compact fluorescent lights with electronic ballasts that offer lumen outputs approximately four times greater than incandescent bulbs, not to mention a fraction of the heat.

The lights are enclosed in custom-painted lamp shades and wired to a dimming system, which runs them at about 16 percent output at night and 25 percent during the day. "Otherwise, it looks like we're closed," Quaintance says.

All of the 147 guest rooms feature extra-large windows, measuring 7 feet, 4 inches on each side. To maximize the natural light, the rooms include light-colored furnishings and walls, and the lamps have adjustable settings.

Like most hotels, Proximity is not just for travelers but also plays host to business conferences, weddings and family reunions in its 7,200 square feet of event space. Much like the rest of the hotel, event rooms boast ample natural light through large windows. And the energy-saving lighting technology doesn't end with guest rooms and lobbies. The kitchen features T5 fixtures, with an efficacy of more than 100 lumens per watt.

Even the emergency stairwells are energy efficient. A normal stairwell typically requires two 4-foot T12 lights per landing, but the Proximity's stairwells use one fixture on each landing.

While Quaintance's initial concerns about sacrificing the guest experience in the name of energy efficiency were reasonable, the results have left no doubt about the decision to pursue a LEED Platinum rating.

"We have zero lighting complaints," Quaintance says. In fact, guest reviews overall have been remarkably positive. "If you go deep and really consider everything and test this stuff, you can use half the lighting load. You'll be delighted with the outcomes and so will your guests."

WHO'S WHO

PROXIMITY CHIEF DESIGN OFFICER:

Dennis Quaintance, CEO and President, Quaintance-Weaver Restaurants and Hotels

ARCHITECT: Pete Almasy, Associate, *Centreport Architecture*

INTERIOR DESIGN:

Bradshaw Orrell, *Bradshaw Orrell Interiors*

ELECTRICAL CONTRACTOR:

Steve Johnson, Johnson's Modern Electric Co.

ENGINEERING CONSULTING:

Joshua East, Brite Engineering

ELECTRICAL DISTRIBUTOR:

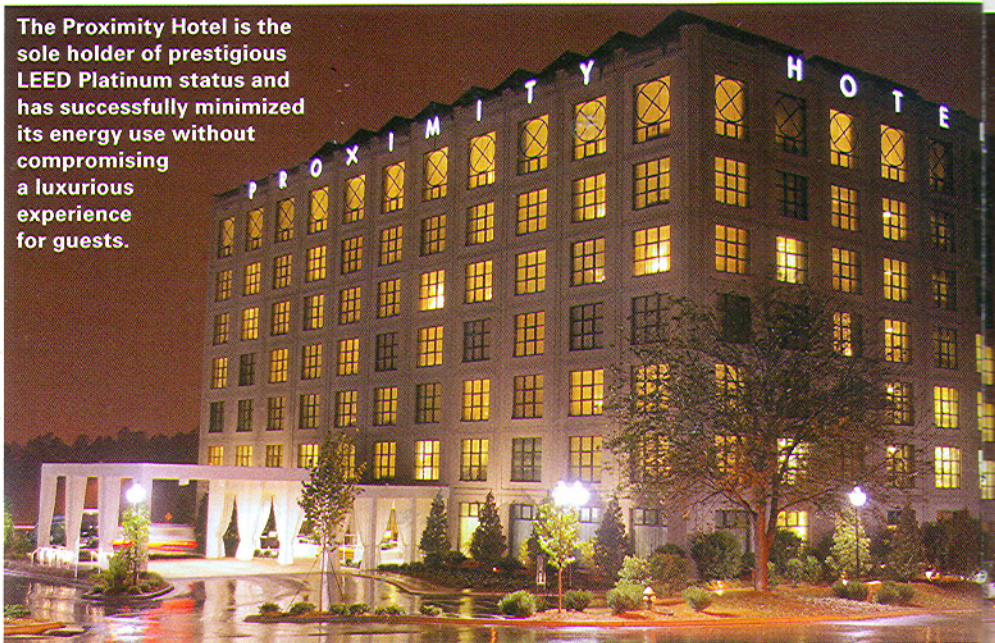
Joey Gray, Eck Supply

LIGHTING MANUFACTURERS:

Coronet Lighting, Incon Lighting, Lithonia Lighting, Nulite Limited, Progress Lighting



The Proximity Hotel is the sole holder of prestigious LEED Platinum status and has successfully minimized its energy use without compromising a luxurious experience for guests.





Fluorescent lights enclosed in custom-painted lamp shades softly illuminate the Print Works Bistro dining room.



Maximizing its use of natural light, the Print Works Bistro is surrounded on three sides by windows overlooking the hotel's garden.