



# LIGHT

*it up*



Peter Jackson

Peter Jackson, director of Lighting Gallery, talks to **Carolyn Henderson** about his striking shop and its illuminating contents

If you want to see your home in a new light, talk to Peter Jackson. Whether you live in a classic Suffolk barn conversion or a new-build starter home, he has the answers, from crystal spiral chandeliers to sleek, minimalist styles.

Peter has been in the lighting industry for more than 30 years and his experience even includes manufacturing. Now, as director of Lighting Gallery in Higham, near Bury St Edmunds, he concentrates on retail.

This is retail with a difference, though. Lighting Gallery is a dedicated, 3,500sq ft showroom with a lofty ceiling and purpose-built display units that allow hundreds of designs to be shown to their best advantage, not crammed into a corner.

The building was originally the goods yard for Higham railway station, which was a victim of the infamous Beeching cuts in 1967. When Peter took it over in 1999, it was dark and poorly lit and the arched windows, which are such an impressive feature today, had been bricked over.



"There was a suspended ceiling, the walls were painted a depressing green and the only natural light was a half window in the bottom corner," he recalled.

"It was divided into lots of rooms and when we ripped out the walls, we revealed the beams and decided to leave them."

Today, the building deserves the title of gallery, because many of the designs within it are works of art. There's something for all tastes and all budgets, from designs that can grace the most imposing rooms to outdoor lighting and table lamps that are as beautiful switched off as when they are illuminated.

"Our market is decorative lighting," explained Peter. In other words, it does its job, but works beautifully.

"There are fashions in lighting. If you look back 30 years, people would buy light fittings and expect them to last a lifetime. Now we buy things expecting to change them if we get tired of them in, say, five years."

While we can all look at a design and assess whether or not it appeals to us, working out how it will look in a particular setting is not so simple.

"Most people are not very good at visualising that," said Peter.

"I accept it isn't easy – that's why we had special display units made so that we can not only group things in families, but show them at the right height."

This, plus Peter's expertise, helps prevent the commonest mistake – buying a design that looks good in a shop, but turns out to be too small.

He covers every part of the market and offers lighting solutions for every room. There is even outdoor lighting, with about 50 designs on display.

"We keep them all in stock," said Peter. "Customers like the fact that they can walk in, choose a design and take it with them rather than having to wait for something to be ordered in."

The wide range of stock and easy accessibility of the shop means that visitors come from all over the country. In some cases, Peter is dealing with

There are  
fashions  
in lighting



customers whose parents and grandparents have been to him for help.

"I never know who is going to come through the door," he said. "It could be a young couple with a loft conversion, someone with a small thatched cottage, the owners of a classic Suffolk barn conversion or someone who has just bought a modern house on a housing estate."

Not all buyers are looking to light private houses. "Yesterday, I was in a church to see if I could help find the best lighting solution," Peter said.

"In that case, it's the height of the building that poses the challenge. You have to light it effectively, but in a way that is in keeping with the architecture.

"I've also done work for some of the Cambridge colleges. I supplied lighting for Peterhouse College and was called in when Emmanuel College wanted to turn one of its properties into a library – they decided on brass chandeliers, which looked perfect."

If you've never really thought about the difference lighting can make – and apparently we lag behind the rest of Europe in our appreciation – think again. Lighting Gallery could change your mind and help you transform your home indoors and out.

