

SKYLIGHTS

Turn off the lights and let the sun shine through

One good way to cut down on energy consumption is by making use of natural light. It is possible to build a home where you don't need to turn the lights on until darkness falls. This can be achieved through strategically placed windows, as well as through use of skylights and sun tunnels, which will provide natural light as well as privacy in bathrooms and in areas that typically don't have windows, such as closets and laundry rooms.

"Skylights admit 30 percent more light than vertical windows in dormers and provide the drama of a sky view that can't be achieved with vertical windows," says VELUX America's product manager Joe Patrick. He also points out that, unlike vertical windows, skylights can add light and ventilation without taking up valuable wall space.

Years ago, skylights were the bane of builders because of leaks and heat infiltration, but Patrick says many manufacturers' skylights today come with high-energy-efficient glass and low-emissivity coatings. "They do a good job of blocking out excess heat in summer and keeping heat in in winter," he notes. "Today's technology minimizes the old problems with skylights."

Many skylight models can be opened and closed by remote control, and some are available with electrochromic glass that can be lightened or darkened via remote to cut solar heat gain down by as much as 80 percent. Others have built-in blinds to control light.

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And even homeowners with small interior laundry rooms, powder



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rooms, or walk-in closets can take advantage of natural light through the use of sun tunnels. Sun tunnels use a reflective tunnel to bring light from the roof down into interior spaces without windows.

"Using natural light can save on electric costs," Patrick says. Skylights can also provide dramatic architectural effects in bathrooms or in attic rooms with a low roof pitch. VELUX's balcony roof windows, for example, allow homeowners to bring light into a room that falls under the home's roof line while also creating a unique balcony when opened. You can also place skylights over tubs and showers to make use of natural light when bathing while still maintaining privacy.

And, of course, there's the real and positive effect that sunshine has on humans—helping us feel wakeful in the mornings and energetic throughout the day. Fluorescent lighting can save energy, but it probably won't lift your mood like sun pouring in a window. ☀