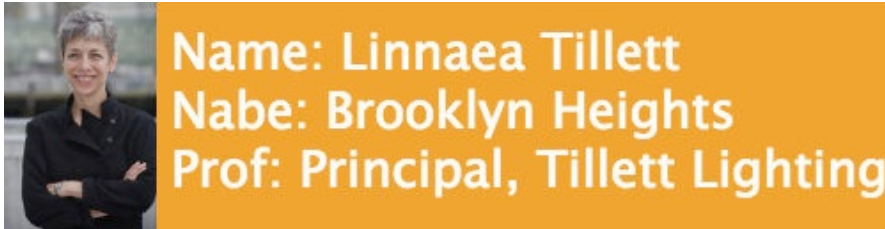


Brownstoner

The Hot Seat: Linnaea Tillett



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Welcome to the Hot Seat, in which we interview folks involved in Brooklyn real estate, development, architecture and the like. Introducing Linnaea Tillett, an environmental psychologist and lighting designer. She is the principal of [Tillett Lighting](#), lighting consultants for waterfront landscapes, infrastructure, parks, public art and private interiors. In Brooklyn, she designed lighting for the [Brooklyn Navy Yard Visitor and Exhibit Center](#) and the [Brooklyn Public Library Leon Levy Information Commons](#), among other spaces.

Brownstoner: What neighborhood do you live in, and how'd you end up there?

Linnaea Tillett: I live in Brooklyn Heights. I moved temporarily to Dumbo (from Manhattan) to work on an art/wayfinding project under the Brooklyn Bridge called “This Way.” Most days and nights I would roam around Brooklyn Heights while I was waiting for this or that piece of work to be done on the site. One night I wandered up Columbia Heights and thought to myself, “I could live here!” So when “This Way” had opened and I had a choice to go back to Manhattan or live nearer my office in Williamsburg, I completely denied how awkward the commute to work would be, and found an apartment to fall in love with.

BS: How did you get into lighting design, and what does your firm currently do now?

Coming from a family of designers (textiles, clothing, tableware — actually every single thing in the house I grew up with), I was used to looking at the world and wondering

what I was supposed to design. One summer, my sister-in-law, a costume designer, asked me to help her out on a theatre production. Nobody was available to work on the lighting, so they gave me a script, a mass of tangled dusty cables, a pile of rusted light fixtures and some bits of cracked colored gel. I read the script, made some choices, and hung the lights with bits of color in front of them. When I turned on the lights, I was stunned that a bunch of wires and rusted tin cans organized along the emotional lines of a script could have such an expressive force. And I was hooked. Not on theatre, but on light as a creative tool.

Now I own Tillett Lighting Design. We light infrastructure, landscape, public art and interiors. Each is a one-of-a-kind project that requires attention and sensitivity to the emotional dynamics of the space.

After the jump, details and photographs of Linnaea's projects in Brooklyn, her advice in lighting a small apartment, and her favorite interior and exterior spaces in New York City.

BS: What projects have you worked on in Brooklyn, and what Brooklyn projects are to come?

LT: "This way," the Brooklyn Bridge underpass art installation, was my first major project in Brooklyn. We just finished the Exhibition and Visitors Center at the Brooklyn Navy Yard, are underway with the renovation of the Brooklyn Public Library with Toshiko Mori (the Information Commons just opened, and there is more to come.) We are working on the Strand Theatre, Grace Church, and we just started a lovely private home in Williamsburg.



This Way, Brooklyn Bridge underpass art installation. Artists: Linnaea Tillett & Karin Tehve; lead design consultant: Emphas!s Design; commissioned by City of N Y Department of Transportation, Percent for Art Program, and DUMBO Business Improvement District; photo by Seth Ely.



Brooklyn Navy Yard Visitor and Exhibit Center: original building at center; addition on left. Client: Brooklyn Navy Yard Development Corporation; architect: Beyer Blinder Belle; landscape architect: D.I.R.T. Studio; lighting: Tillett Lighting Design; photo by Chuck Choi.

BS: What elements of a project’s architecture/design do you most pick up on to create an appropriate lighting scheme for the space?

LT: To be honest, I think about the materials of the space. How will the treatments and the wall- , floor- and ceiling materials transform the way the light is experienced? After all, we don’t look directly at light in our homes; we live in light reflected and changed by the surfaces it meets.

BS: Oftentimes we subconsciously experience the lighting in any given space. Is the goal to design lighting that people will notice, or lighting that people will feel comfortable in and may not even notice?

LT: As an environmental psychologist and lighting designer, I am not only concerned

with how it functions, but equally with how the space feels, whether that be comfort, calmness, excitement or mystery.

BS: For people living in small NYC apartments, who may not be lighting experts — what are some easy tips to use lighting to improve a living space?

LT: In a small environment, it is best to put small sources of light around a room so your eye doesn't take in the whole room (walls and ceiling) at one time. You want to build a bit of mystery, leaving some spaces darker. This will make the room feel larger. On the other hand, if you seek a cheerful, bright room, then remember that the carefully placed mirrors that make a space feel larger in the day, can read as a black hole at night. People often think mirrors increase light. They don't!

BS: Finally, your favorites: favorite Brooklyn neighborhood, favorite interior space in NYC, and favorite exterior space in NYC.

LT: My favorite Brooklyn neighborhood at this moment is Red Hook. It's too hard to get to from my studio, but I run through it in the morning, and I adore it. My favorite interior space.. that's hard, but I think it's Bemelmans Bar in the Carlyle. Exterior space — Brooklyn Bridge Park.