

A Recipe for Great Kitchen Lighting

While the average size of new homes is shrinking, kitchens are not. Today's kitchen serves as the family's central gathering spot, as well as a dining area, homework station and casual entertaining space. According to the American Lighting Association, for a kitchen to effectively serve as a multi-tasking area, it is essential to have several different types of lighting in carefully planned areas.

Dallas, TX (Vocus) September 16, 2010 -- The average size of new homes is shrinking, but not when it comes to one room – the kitchen. According to the [American Lighting Association](#) (ALA), this multi-tasking room not only serves as the family's central gathering spot, but it also performs as a dining area, homework station and casual entertaining space.

“We might have reached the peak of the housing boom, but somehow kitchen islands seem to be getting larger and larger,” observes Catherine Schlawin, an ALA Certified Lighting Consultant (CLC) and manager/ Residential Lighting at [Dominion Electric Supply Co.](#), a chain of lighting showrooms in the Baltimore/Washington D.C. area. “I believe that because people are spending more and more time in their kitchens and using that area for so many different things, we need to be able to have lighting for every task and function,” she says.

The best method could be called the power of three. “Use a minimum of three types of lighting – a central fixture, recessed, and undercabinet – and put each on different switches or dimmers,” advises Joe Rey-Barreau, education consultant for the ALA and an associate professor at the University of Kentucky's School of Interior Design. “Having only one of these components creates a static, and often not functional, lighting effect.”

Schlawin agrees. “You can't just do rows of recessed lighting in today's large kitchens; that will make the space seem very flat and one-dimensional. You need a combination (i.e. recessed, undercabinet, toe-kick, cove lights) with at least one decorative element such as a drum shade in the breakfast nook or mini pendants over the island. People's kitchens are often tied into a family room or great room, and they're using that area for so many different things that they need to have lighting options for every situation,” she comments.

Schlawin is currently working with a builder to install a wireless lighting control system in their model home's kitchen/nook/family room area. The homeowners will be able to change their lighting depending on their needs – selecting a certain amount of lighting when serving breakfast and lunch, then opting to change the mood during dinner or entertaining, and going to full brightness when doing tasks such as homework and cleaning.

The first step is to analyze the functions of your kitchen and address the various activities that will be taking place there. “Dimmers in the kitchen are often not considered a high priority, but they can add dramatic impact,” Rey-Barreau says.

Where you put the lights is crucial. One mistake many homeowners make when installing an undercabinet fixture on their own is putting the unit against the wall. “Instead, placing it at the front of the cabinet allows the light to be distributed evenly over the area below,” Rey-Barreau explains. Another method Certified Lighting Consultants employ is installing recessed fixtures 30 inches from the wall to illuminate the countertop without

casting shadows.

Getting advice from your local ALA-member showroom can make a huge difference. “Electricians are trained to safely and carefully supply wire to areas where it is needed; they are not, by definition or training, lighting experts,” remarks Jeffrey Dross, senior product manager at [Kichler](#), a major lighting manufacturer. “Electricians know how to install a fixture, but not what it will or will not do to a room or how effectively it illuminates a space. Lighting showrooms are staffed with professionals who understand lighting and can make informed recommendations.”

For example, homeowners spend a small fortune on their kitchens – from the cabinets and countertops to tile and appliances. “All of those beautiful and well-designed elements will look sub-par if they are lit with \$100 worth of lighting products,” Dross says. “The correct quantity of lights will make a mediocre room design look better and a great one look perfect.”

Some of the fashionable materials in today’s kitchens create unique lighting challenges. Stainless steel appliances; quartz, granite, and glass countertops that have translucence; colored stained wood and painted cabinets; and natural stone can all be enhanced with lighting.

“Dark, bold colors or dense tile patterns will require a bit more light,” Dross explains. “If the backsplash has been changed from white to chocolate brown, the cabinet and task lighting might not be adequate. A room filled with bold paint, complex tile and turbulent countertop patterns needs something to surrender to the whole. The design of the accent lighting might need to be a bit more reserved to make the entire room work effectively.”

As an architect, Rey-Barreau is a huge believer in accent lighting. “It can truly make the difference between a space that is purely functional and one that is elegant,” he notes. One simple technique Rey-Barreau uses is to put LED strip lighting in the toe-kick of the base cabinets. “This is a good method for creating indirect lighting that is ideal for entertaining. LED strips can also be placed on top of the cabinets. If there is artwork on the walls, use either adjustable recessed lighting or small, track monopoints to highlight it.”

Another benefit to shopping at a lighting showroom is the opportunity to view displays that demonstrate the various effects that can be achieved by using each type of lighting. “For example, you can evaluate the differences between xenon, halogen, fluorescent and LED products,” Schlawin notes.

According to Rey-Barreau, recent technological innovations have yielded even more choices for energy-conscious consumers. “Compact fluorescent lighting is an excellent option for many reasons,” he observes. “These bulbs are four times more efficient than incandescent or halogen. It is also important to know that the color of compact fluorescent bulbs is now equal to, or better than, incandescent.”

LED lighting is fast-becoming an excellent option for kitchens, with LED bulbs available as undercabinet fixtures and even recessed lighting. “LED has the same benefits of compact fluorescent, except that the bulbs last much longer,” Rey-Barreau states.

At Dominion Electric, we’ve been embracing LED because the color can be fabulous, it’s often dimmable, and it’s so energy efficient while also being very tiny,” Schlawin says. “Overall, the kitchen can be one room where homeowners will venture out of their decorating box. The rest of their house might be very traditional, but they can let loose a bit in the kitchen and go a bit more contemporary.”



To learn more about how today's newest lighting styles can complement your kitchen, stop by an ALA-member showroom near you. Visit www.AmericanLightingAssoc.com, or call 800-BRIGHT-IDEAS (800-274-4484).

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