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Lighting Designer Shares Recipe for Kitchen Lighting

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Your kitchen needs to be well-lit, for many very good reasons - among them, beauty, safety and comfort for the cook.

Lighting Designer Randall Whitehead has been illuminating homes for more than 25 years, and in that time has tackled dozens of kitchen lighting challenges.

"Many facets of your kitchen design will determine the way it is illuminated. Not only do such variables as ceiling height, natural light, and surface finishes affect the placement or amount of light used, but there are other factors you should consider as well," he says.

Whitehead created the following checklist as you consider the kitchen you want to light:

-Color

Darker finished surfaces absorb more light. An all-white kitchen requires dramatically less light (40%-50% less) than a kitchen with dark wood cabinets and walls.

-Reflectance

A highly polished countertop acts just like a mirror. Any under-cabinet lighting will show its reflection.

-Texture

If your end design includes brickwork or stucco, you might want to show off the textural quality of those surfaces. To draw attention to a texture, direct light at an acute angle to the textured surface. Luminaires located too far away from the wall will smooth out its appearance - which might be a good idea for bad drywall jobs.

-Mood

Floor plans are more open now. Guests will flow from the living room to the kitchen to the dining room. The kitchen should be just as inviting as the rest of the house. Make sure that there is enough ambient light in the kitchen. This softens the lines on people's faces and creates a warm, inviting glow.

-Tone

The warm end of the color spectrum works okay with incandescent light, but



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cooler colors can be adversely affected by the amber quality of incandescent light. Blues can turn green and reds can turn orange. Selecting a bulb that provides a cooler color of light can improve skin tone and room colors.

-Code

In California, for instance, designers must deal with Title 24 (the State Energy Commission's requirements for new construction and remodel work that exceeds 50% of the existing space).

General lighting must be fluorescent (or have an efficacy of at least 40 lumens per watt) in kitchens and baths, and must be the first switch as you enter the room.

Today many decorative luminaires are made to take compact fluorescent lamps, now dimmable in the quad versions. California is not the only state with such regulations. In the near future, most states will be affected.

-Windows

During the daytime, windows will let in wonderful light and show off landscaping. At night, they become reflective "black holes" unless some thought is given to exterior lighting. Outside lighting will visually expand the interior space into the exterior after dark.

-Sloped Ceilings

Even if there is enough space above a sloped ceiling to install recessed luminaires, special care must be taken to select luminaires that don't direct glare into people's eyes.

-Pot Racks

A pot rack may look just perfect over that center island on the plan, but it's extremely difficult to light a work surface through cookware. Consider recessed adjustable luminaires to cross light the surface, or focus downlight in the center of the rack.

-Door Swings

Make sure that switches are on the unhinged side of a door. Otherwise, you will have to reach around to the back of the door to turn on the lights.

Of course, many aspects of this checklist apply to other rooms in the house, so feel free to refer to the list as you go from area to area.

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