

HOW CAN I USE LIGHTING BEST BY DESIGN?

UNDERCABINET LIGHTING (TASK LIGHTS)

Under-cabinet lighting, as the name implies, is intended to be placed under a cabinet or shelf to bring the light close to a given task. The nature of the task will dictate the most appropriate choice of fixture. If what you want is bright, shadow less, even, low maintenance illumination then a high quality fluorescent is the clear choice. If you are lighting a wet bar of side board where the tasks are intermittent, where atmosphere and decoration are a priority, and it doesn't get used much then there are many incandescent systems that could work.

- Generally, the fixture should be placed within the front half of the shelf to minimize shadows.
- Fluorescent systems fall into three major categories; T-12 (old style), T-5 (popular because of its low profile, but with poor light quality) and T-8 (recommended due to its excellent light quality). Also, use electronic ballasts whenever possible.
- Incandescent systems are generally low voltage and fall into three major categories; Standard (old style, yellowish light), Xenon (more light for slightly less power), Halogen (more light still, very white light).

RECESSED CANS (DOWN LIGHTS)

Recessed lighting has been very popular for many years and can be successfully applied to many lighting functions including kitchen tasks, spotlighting artwork, dining tables, and washing walls. Recessed lighting works best as an accent light and for some tasks. Most recessed fixtures are designed for directional light sources (or lamps), these can be R lamps, BR lamps, PAR lamps or low voltage types. Some recessed fixtures are designed for omni directional lamps (standard light bulbs or "A" lamps, and compact fluorescent lamps or CFLs). In all cases the entire lamp should be recessed above the ceiling plane to control glare.

- Except in small rooms with light colored surfaces, recessed lighting is a poor choice for ambient or general lighting.

- There are quite a few recessed fixtures designed for CFLs, however the ones that perform well enough to, say put in a living room or kitchen are commercial products that are quite expensive (\$150.00 and up) and often not suitable for residential use (not IC rated, and with housings and apertures that are too large).
- When lighting vertical surfaces such as wall art, the type of effect you want (spotlighting, wall washing or grazing) will determine the location and quantity of the housing(s) you use.
- Recessed lighting and track lighting function in much the same way, and have many of the same advantages and disadvantages.

BATH & VANITY LIGHTING

Vanity lighting is a tricky balancing act. On the one hand the light needs to be bright for tasks such as shaving and applying makeup, on the other, it, by definition needs to shine on the face and eyes, which creates a high probability for glare.

The solution is to use a large radiant surface like a white glass or plastic lens, (found on many vanity fixtures) that can introduce high light levels with out concentrating them at any one point. Ideally the mirror would be surrounded with lights, but this is not practical or necessary. Lighting on either side is a great blend of practicality, style and function.

- Never use recessed cans as the primary task light in a vanity area. They produce harsh shadows under the eyes, cheeks, nose and chin that make shaving or applying makeup very difficult. In a vanity area the task is on a vertical plane (your face) whereas a kitchen is dominated by horizontal tasks (the counters) that can be lit well with recessed cans.
- If you must use overhead lighting, a luminous soffit using high quality fluorescent, with a translucent lens can be a good choice.
- Unless the room is very small it's a good idea to have some general room lighting in addition to the vanity lighting.
- If you use a small sized fixture with a very bright lamp (or bulb) the fixture may give enough light but it will be glaring. It's better to use more than one fixture with a less intense lamp. This will make for less glare and will help to distribute the light more evenly.

KITCHEN LIGHTING

For most of us, our kitchens are one of the most-used rooms in the house. Not only do we relax in our kitchens, but we perform a lot of tasks - work that requires good quality lighting. Kitchen lighting requires that we pay attention to glare, shadows in order to make this room both functional and enjoyable.

Kitchen Pointers...

- Avoid using a single light fixture in the center of the room as your task light or you will always be working in your own shadow.
- Track lighting is best when aimed at walls - using track lights to illuminate the middle of a room is asking for glare problems.
- Light colored surfaces make a bright, cheery kitchen easier to achieve - dark cabinets are hard to "brighten up".
- Shiny granite counters are fashionable, but are ALWAYS sources of glare and difficult to light.
- In a kitchen the tasks are horizontal and the task lighting should be optimized for that orientation (i.e. shining down onto the horizontal surface).

WALL SCONCES

Wall sconces take so many forms it is hard to make any broad statements about them except to say that they are all mounted on the wall! They can be decorative or neutral, directional or diffuse, close to the wall or protruding out on a bracket. Wall sconces are a great way to add character to a room.

Wall sconce pointers

- If the fixture has an opaque shade or body (metal, ceramic or wood) it will distribute the light in a directional pattern and will rely on light reflected off adjacent surfaces to light the room. If the fixture has a translucent shade or body (glass, plastic, fabric or paper) it will give a portion of the light out in all directions.

- When used in pairs on either side of a window, doorway or fireplace sconces can add formality and elegance to a room.
- Sconces can be a good way to add continuity to a floor plan and visually tie together many different spaces in a house.
- Though they can be used successfully on an art wall, sconces are generally not a good choice for actually lighting artwork
- If you use a small sized fixture with a very bright lamp (or bulb) the fixture may give enough light but it will be glaring. It's better to use more than one fixture with a less intense lamp. This will make for less glare and will help to distribute the light more evenly.

CEILING FIXTURES (SURFACE MOUNTED)

Ceiling mount fixtures are great for providing general or ambient light.

Surface mount fixtures usually have a translucent lens that distributes the light in all directions evenly providing a uniform light throughout the space. Ambient light is used to soften shadows and control contrast.

Ceiling light pointers

- Though ceiling lights can provide good ambient light they don't always provide high enough light levels for tasks. Unless it is a small room with light surfaces and a bright fixture (like a laundry room or storage area).
- Though they are mounted on (or in) the ceiling, track and recessed lights have a very different type of light distribution that is more suited to accent or task lighting than ambient lighting.
- If you use a small sized fixture with a very bright lamp (or bulb) the fixture may give enough light but it will be glaring. It's better to use more than one fixture with a less intense lamp. This will make for less glare and will help to distribute the light more evenly.

OUTDOOR PORCH LIGHTING

Porch lights are an excellent choice for energy efficient fixtures that use compact fluorescent lamps (CFLs). Porch lights can provide many functions in addition to just lighting hazards on the front walk. They also aid in wayfinding by indicating where the door is. They can give a sense of security to people both on the inside and outside. And last but not least they can add a decorative touch by lighting attractive architecture or being stylish themselves. Though most porch lights are wall mounted, they can be ceiling mount, chain hung or recessed.

- Avoid fixtures with clear glass as this can lead to a high probability of glare. Use white or frosted glass, this will soften the light and also shield the lamp from direct view.
- Exterior fixtures often have long hours of operation which turns energy savings into dollar savings. Also the long life of CFLs can be a real convenience because they don't have to be changed near as often as incandescent bulbs.
- It is usually better to use multiple fixtures that have less intensity than one fixture that is really bright.
- Avoid high wattages, For most fixture types and applications CFL wattages should be in the 9 to 20 watt range (this is roughly the equivalent to 25 to 75 watts incandescent).
- CFLs are temperature sensitive, so in chilly weather the lamp may take a few minutes to come up to full brightness. In really cold areas, you may want to select a fixture that is fully enclosed. This will allow the lamp to warm up faster. It's a small price to pay for the many other benefits of using CFLs!

OUTDOOR FLOOD LIGHTING

Unfortunately residential flood lighting frequently suffers from two things; too much light in the wrong place!

How often have we seen a front walk lit with a flood light shining from the house to the side walk? Not only is the light glaring but it actually makes it harder to see the walk.

Or, have you seen floodlights lighting a parking area and the whole side of the neighbor's house? If the lights are usually on for long periods, compact fluorescent (CFL) fixtures can be a good choice. They generally won't give as much light as an incandescent flood, such as a 300-watt halogen or (2) 100-watt spots, but that's often a good thing as many exterior spaces are over lit.

- Flood lighting usually works best when done from a high angle shining steeply downward. This helps to minimize glare and light trespass.
- There are CFL flood light fixtures on the market in a wide range of wattages (9 watt to over 32 watt) and from many manufacturers.
- CFLs are temperature sensitive, so in chilly weather the lamp may take a few minutes to come up to full brightness. In really cold areas, you may want to select a fixture that is fully enclosed. This will allow the lamp to warm up faster. It's a small price to pay for the many other benefits of using CFLs!
- Too much light can actually make it harder to see. As the eye adapts to the high light levels, the surrounding area and shadows appear to be darker.

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