

Effective Kitchen Lighting

The first rule is to start planning early and to think about how you are going to use your kitchen. Of course, we all cook there – some kitchens are so small that they can only be used for cooking and preparing food – but a larger kitchen in a family-sized home may also be used for eating, relaxing and chatting, reading, working, helping the children with homework and entertaining friends. The kitchen very often is the hub of family life and needs to be a ‘flexible’ environment – you may want bright light for cooking and a more intimate light in the evening for entertaining friends or spending time with the family. Take time to visualise yourself in your new kitchen, decide on the atmosphere you want to create and once the basic layout has been decided, consider your lighting. Initially you will need to mark where each fixture is to be located as a more complicated scheme may need extensive rewiring.

Not so many years ago, many of us will have had a fluorescent strip light on our kitchen ceiling (and my apologies to those of you who still do), providing good general lighting at low cost and casting little shadow, but fluorescent lighting is harsh, unattractive and more suited to an industrial environment. Also, if you want to create the ‘wow’ factor in your kitchen, avoid fluorescent lighting because although it will give excellent working light, it won’t bring out the best in your new worksurfaces and cupboards.

Mains halogen or low-voltage track lighting is a good alternative to fluorescent for general lighting, but make sure you position it correctly. Don’t put track lighting in the centre of your kitchen (unless it is very narrow) with the light directed at the worktops otherwise, when you stand between the light and the worksurface, a big shadow will be cast over your working area and you’ll be cooking in the dark. Instead, place the track over your head so that the light shines down onto the worksurface and reflects back up. In a reasonably sized kitchen you’ll need more than one track. As a further alternative you could also consider providing some general lighting in your kitchen with tungsten halogen uprights to wash the ceiling with a soft but effective level of light.

By far the most attractive technique for general lighting in a kitchen is to use recessed downlights with a wide beam spread. Try to select fittings that have a simple shape as they will be easier to clean in a greasy environment, and if you’re using low-voltage take care to allow enough depth of ceiling space and room for transformers. Again, take care with positioning downlights so that they shine onto where

If you’re preparing to spend time and money on a new kitchen, then don’t neglect one vital ingredient – lighting, says **David Amos**



In chef Michael Caines’s kitchen, pendant lighting provides interest whilst the worktops are illuminated by lights mounted on the underside of the wall cabinets

you’re working, reflect the light back and don’t just light the floor.

For task lighting in a kitchen, consider under-cabinet lights for your worksurfaces and control these separately from your general lighting. You can then use them both for working in the kitchen and for providing a softer, more informal effect when dimmed and your general lighting is turned down or off.

For the central island of a kitchen you could again use recessed downlights or a pendant fitting which, very often, is chosen simply because it adds some decoration to the room and a little interest. Pendants are also very effective placed over the dining table in a kitchen and provide adequate light for both eating and reading.

Finally, have a little fun with some innovative touches. If your kitchen has some interesting niches – a dresser or an architectural feature – then think about lighting them. The light source should not be bright, but just enough to create a little visual interest. Why not back-light some of your shelves, putting the contents into dramatic silhouette? Even simple table lamps make an excellent addition to a dark corner; they can be plugged in easily, moved around and come in so many styles.

Above all, make your kitchen into a space where you will love to spend time whatever your mood, whatever the weather, time of day – and whatever’s in your fridge. □

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