



Bright ideas

IN HOME LIGHTING

First comes function,
then it's all about mood



By Diana Bean
GOODLIFE

In the darkest days of winter, who doesn't long for light? And at this time of year, a home's lack of good lighting can suddenly become obvious.

"If it's good, you don't notice it. If it's bad, you really notice it," says Penny K. Bartlow, ASID, certified interior designer and president of PKB Design LLC in Owego.

If you're feeling around for light switches or peering into darkened corners, you need more ambient light to illuminate rooms and hallways.

If you can't read your recipe or see what you're chopping on your kitchen counter, you need task lighting.

And if you want to add some drama and atmosphere to your living room, you need some well-placed accent lights.

Put those three kinds of light in a room, Bartlow says, and you then have control over how the room looks and feels.

But when it comes to knowing how to best light a room, many people are in the dark.

In the newly constructed Kirkwood home for which she recently did interior design, Bartlow said the lighting was definitely important to the homeowners because it had been an issue in their previous home. In fact, she met with them before they even broke ground.

"I helped them make the most of the plan," she said, which included making improvements such as adding windows for more natural lighting. In the living room of the Italian-style home, a soaring two-story high ceiling meant that the room had a lot of volume. Adding two windows above the fireplace and hanging four pendant lights from the ceiling helped unify the space. Accent lighting in the recessed shelves surrounding the fireplace draws the eye to favorite pieces of artwork, and a wall of windows lets in natural light.



Photos by CHUCK HAUPT / GoodLife

At top: The dining room is not large, but it has many different sources of light, all of which can be used to set a mood. Above: Wall sconces light the stairway and add decor to a wall too big for conventional artwork.

Mixing it up in the kitchen

Good cooking needs good lighting, because you don't want to confuse the salt with the sugar. That's why of all the rooms in a house, the kitchen is the most important room when it comes to planning your lighting, Bartlow says.

The most important place for kitchen lights is under the wall cabinets, says Louis Francavillo, kitchen designer with The Kitchen Design Studio at Belknap Lumber in Binghamton. They light up the countertops, where most of the important work takes place. A popular choice is to use lights called "hockey pucks," which are about 2 or 3 inches in diameter and fit underneath the cabinet.

Under-cabinet lighting is easy to install. It can be either hardwired or plugged in, and it typically uses a lower voltage.

While task lighting for the counters is essential, it's important to light the whole kitchen in a useful way.

"The big thing today is using 'high



Task lighting is important in a kitchen, and these under-cabinet lights are great for detail work such as cooking. In the evening, they offer just enough light to fix a bedtime snack.

hats,' " Francavillo says. These are round lights about 5 or 6 inches in diameter that are flush with the ceiling. A typical kitchen might have six to 12, placed in strategic areas. "If you have a

snack bar, you want one over that," he says. The lights are put on different switches so the homeowner can choose which part of the kitchen to light up.

Another way to focus light on a particular area is with pendant lights. "They're neat over a kitchen sink, snack bar or island," Francavillo says.

In newer homes, the once cold, harsh fluorescent single ceiling light has been replaced by something not seen in most kitchens: mood lighting.

"With high ceilings in most new homes, cabinets don't go to the ceiling," Francavillo says. "We use mood lights, like a string of lights, that goes

on top of the cabinets but reflects off the ceiling and back wall."

If you like that effect, the same kind of lighting can be installed on the toe kick, underneath the base cabinets, he says.

Bartlow added plenty of accent lights to the Kirkwood home's kitchen, including interior lights on glass-front cupboards to show off collections of pottery and glass. Because when the cooking and cleaning up is done, the lights don't always have to go out.



Pendant lighting over an island counter is a popular choice. This display is in The Kitchen Design Studio at Belknap Lumber.



are plenty of light switches: about a dozen in just the kitchen and breakfast nook.

The homeowners can flood the kitchen with light or just gently bathe it for atmosphere. Many of the switches in the home have buttons that can be programmed to "remember" certain favorite combinations, such as accent lights on and pendant light off.

Dimmers play a big role in letting people create different moods, and many of the lights in the Kirkwood home have the ability to go

brighter or softer. The sconces in the hallway don't come on in a burst of light; they gradually brighten, which is easier on nighttime eyes.

Getting the right lights in the right combinations for each room can be a daunting task, but a trained interior designer can help take some of the anxiety and frustration away from the homeowner by identifying what styles of lights will work in a room and where they should go.

"Lighting is an investment in your home," Bartlow says. "Having good lighting adds value."



WHICH KIND OF LIGHT IS RIGHT?

There are three main uses of lighting: ambient, accent and task. And there are three popular kinds of light: fluorescent, incandescent and halogen.

Here are some examples of what kind of light to use for what purpose.

► **Incandescent:** "This is your standard Thomas Edison light bulb," says Greg Tredo, who does lighting design for Robson Lighting in the Valley Plaza, Johnson City. "It's generally a soft light with a nice, even spread," and is typically used as ambient light to illuminate a room.

"Incandescent lighting makes people look their best because it casts a warm glow," says Penny K. Bartlow of PKB Design in Owego. Incandescent light is usually supplemented by task and accent lighting.

► **Fluorescent:** "Fluorescent has come a long way," Bartlow says, and homeowners can expect to see it used a lot more.

The biggest advantages of fluorescent, Tredo says, is its energy efficiency and the fact that the

light bounces. That means it's good for use in rooms that have structures that cast shadows, like closets, laundry rooms, pantries and kitchens. However, Tredo points out, kitchens don't have to have fluorescent lights; incandescent and task lighting can be enough.

Fluorescent bulbs are no longer just the long tubes or rings; compact fluorescent bulbs are readily available and are more energy efficient. Fluorescent light used to have a bluish cast and wasn't attractive. Now it's warmer, more like the look of incandescent, Bartlow says.

Tredo says that when choosing a fluorescent bulb, it's helpful to know that the Kelvin rating affects the color of the light that's emitted. The higher the Kelvin rating, the more appealing — and more natural looking — the light will be. Ratings range from 2,700 to 7,500.

Fluorescents burn very little energy — a 20-watt fluorescent bulb burns as bright as a 60-watt incandescent bulb — but there's a downfall, Tredo says. Fluorescents are designed to be

left on for a long period of time. Turning them on and off frequently shortens their lifespan, and they are more expensive to begin with, he says.

► **Halogen:** This is generally a lighter, brighter, crisper light, Tredo says, and has a more direct beam. That's why halogen is typically used as accent lighting in recessed and track fixtures, because the light can be trained on a certain spot. They are excellent for task lighting, Tredo says, and are often used under kitchen cabinets.

Halogen lighting is a form of incandescent, but it's more energy efficient, Bartlow says.

A 40-watt halogen emits as much light as a 60-watt incandescent, Tredo says, but a halogen bulb may cost three times as much as the incandescent bulb. Halogen does burn hotter, but is safe as long as nothing comes into contact with it, he says.

Halogen accent lights that are used to highlight a picture or painting must be low-voltage to avoid damaging the artwork.

— Diana Bean