

27 Kitchen Lighting Tips

August 23, 2018 by Steve Brielmaier



The kitchen is truly the heart of the modern home. No longer is the kitchen an isolated space meant only for food preparation. Since families spend most of their “together-time” in the kitchen, it is especially important to light it properly. Because of the wide variety of tasks performed there, the kitchen can be the most complex lighting situation in your home, and most have major lighting mistakes. We can help you avoid these lighting errors by considering factors like: functionality, style, color, light quality, safety, etc. This guide is designed to help you light your kitchen like a pro. We compiled our best kitchen lighting tips and then we asked some of America’s top interior decorators for more ideas so you can create a perfect plan for your kitchen. LampsUSA wants to help everyone become a smarter consumer and save you from repeating mistakes that can be easily avoided.

Kitchen Lighting Design Tips from the Pros



1. Use Natural Sunlight - The sun is the original and best source of light, so be sure to take full advantage of natural sunlight in your kitchen. Sunlight is nature’s ambient light source. Consider skylights or solar-tubes if you are not blessed with large windows. By harnessing indirect sunlight, you can use less electric light. So you will save energy while creating a warm, inviting atmosphere.

2. Avoid the “Glare Bomb” - The #1 error is to try to light everything with one fixture. What you end up with is single source that creates glare on some surfaces and shadows elsewhere. Fortunately, glare bombs are easy to avoid if you use light layers.

3. Light Layers – You may have heard designers recommend “layering” your light (layering is the most common tip we received from designers. If you remember only one idea from this article, be sure to use layered light!)

But how do you actually “layer” light and how do you know if you are doing it correctly?

A well-lit kitchen must include 4 types of lighting:

Ambient Light – General illumination to light the overall room.

Task Lighting – intense light focused where you need it, to help you get jobs done like chopping, washing, cooking, reading, etc.

Accent Lighting – light that helps draw attention to art, family photos, fireplaces, trophies, etc.

Decorative Lighting – Lighting is your home’s jewelry. Just because a light is functional, doesn’t mean it can’t be beautiful.

Keep reading and we will explain how to implement these 4 layers. Whenever you consider a kitchen light, try to define which of these 4 functions it will serve. (Be aware most ambient lights should also be decorative, and give you a thrill each time you see it!) NEVER forget the power of layered light.

4. Layer 1: Start with Ambient Light – Think of ambient light as general soft illumination to light the overall room and help “humanize” your space. Every kitchen has an ambient light source. The problem is that many kitchens stop there and don’t add the other critical layers. The most common ambient light solutions in a modern kitchen are chandeliers or semi-flush lights over dining tables, or mini-pendants or island lights over center islands.

5. Layer 2: Choose Decorative Lighting – Some lighting pros speak of decorative lighting along with Ambient because the 2 are closely related, but we wanted to break them out to make sure you explicitly consider the look and feel of your light fixtures. Lighting is the jewelry of your home and it should reflect your personality. Plus you should LOVE the way it looks. Since the kitchen has become the main gathering center for parties, your lighting will be noticed so choosing lighting you are proud to show your guests is especially important. Be sure to choose something that blends with your décor but is unexpected or at least interesting. The world has enough boring lights. Find something you love for your kitchen.

6. Layer 3: Add Critical Task Lighting – intense light focused where you need it, to help you get jobs done like chopping, washing, cooking, reading, etc.



7. Layer 4: Consider Accent Lighting – light that helps draw attention to art, fireplaces, trophies, etc.
8. Always Add Dimmers - Light layers work best when you have dimmers and plenty of switches. (you may have to upgrade to LED dimmers when you upgrade to LED bulbs)
9. Add Variety – Don't overuse any one type of light in your kitchen.
10. Add One Statement piece – Because we added variety, and did not rely too much on hanging lights, we can now make the few lights that remain truly memorable. Find a light you LOVE and make it the star of your kitchen. Be sure to ask the opinion of a lighting designer or friends with good taste. But be sure that you love it, because you will be the one looking at it everyday.

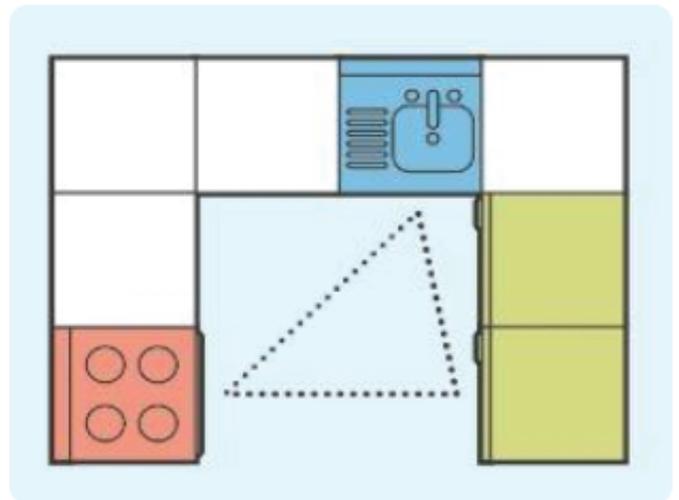
Kitchen Lighting Positioning

11. Kitchen Chandelier Height? – Homeowners are often uncertain how high to hang their new kitchen chandelier. One variable that might alter this guideline is your ceiling height. If you have 10' or higher ceilings, then some designers suggest raising the light 3" for every foot over 8'. Remember, not all designers agree on this, so the best strategy is to test the fixture at 33" above your table, then try it higher. If your fixture is larger, it might look better higher. Let your eye be your judge. Guidelines need not be followed 100% of the time.



12. Recessed Light Positioning – Rookie builders or installers sometimes center the can lights on the middle of the walkway.

13. Light the Triangle! – Always consider the “Kitchen Work Triangle”, which is the common work-path from your Refrigerator to your Stovetop, to your Sink. (You may wish to make this a rectangle and include your most used countertop where you chop veggies, etc.) Kitchen designers strive to keep an efficient flow in the triangle so lighting these areas is critically important. This is where our Task lighting layer comes in handy. Be sure you have extra downlights on your work surfaces. Under-cabinet and recessed lights work the best over work surfaces and flush mounts work well over the sink.



14. Consider The “Rule of Three” - Humans perceive balance when we repeat an element three times. If your kitchen island is large enough, you can add 3 pendant lights. In general, you should install one pendant for every two feet of counter space. Try to use an odd number of pendants to create better balance, but don't force it if you don't have enough room. Thinner pendants, might look better with extra fixtures.

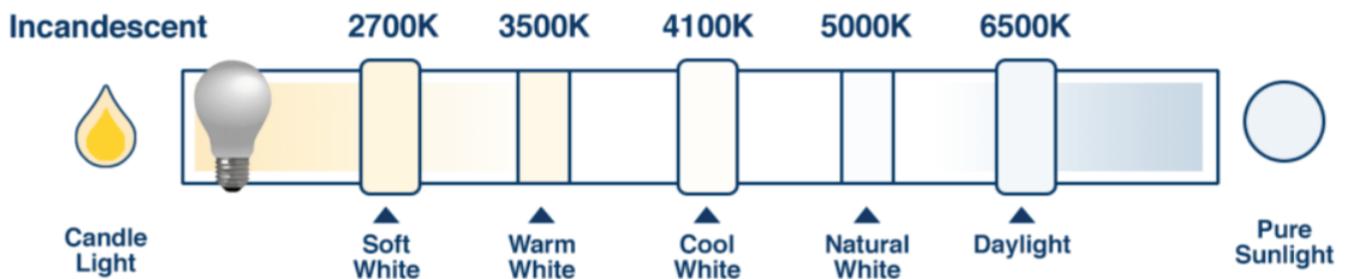
15. Kitchen Light Sizing - The basic rule here is that the lighting size should be proportional to the kitchen size. Consider both square feet and ceiling height. The larger the kitchen, the larger scale lighting you should consider. Fixture manufacturers make some great “over-sized” fixtures, so you have lots of choices, but be careful not to let the lighting over-power the room.

16. Can you See me Now? - Keep your sight lines open.

17. Kitchen Island Lighting Tips – most kitchens have an island right in the center of the action. So lighting this critical area is very important. You want to make sure to have proper surface illumination, but most lights will do that. Factors to consider when choosing island lighting:

- If you have only one junction box, consider a traditional Island light, which only needs one electrical connection. But often, individual pendants will look better, so hire an electrician if you need one.
- If you have several light layers with good ambient light, you can consider some of the stylish opaque designs that only provide down-light. But most kitchens will need the island lights to help with the ambient light, so keep that in mind.
- The island is a good place for your statement piece. (See tip #10)
- Always add dimmers. Island lights are asked to perform task and ambient functions and you need dimmability to adapt to changing jobs.
- Recessed can work above an island, but just be sure you have other good ambient light sources.

18. Bulb Color Temperature – Light bulbs today have so many options, choosing the right one can be difficult. One increasingly important factor is the bulb “color.” Color temperature determines the light color and is measured in “degrees Kelvin.” Typical bulbs vary from 2,400k (yellow) to 4,500k (cool white) to 6,000k (crisp bluish “daylight”) You will get better results if you keep the light in your kitchen at the same “color Temperature” throughout the entire room. Fun Fact: Incandescent bulbs get yellower as they dim, but LED bulbs stay the exact same color temperature as they dim. Keep this in mind as you choose your light bulbs. Always buy 1 test bulb to confirm the color and quality of light looks right before buying them all.



19. Kitchen Lighting Ideas for Style - Lighting helps to set the “mood” of your kitchen. It is important to match the style of your cabinets and furniture.

20. Range Hood/Microwave Down lights – Most ranges and built-in microwave ovens include a down-light for lighting the stove-top. In case yours does not, or if the bulb is burned out, consider adding one. Proper stove lighting is essential so don’t miss this task lighting opportunity.

21. Light Kitchen Cabinets and Drawers – LED strip lights allow you to now put lighting into places you never thought possible. Be sure to consider lighting any dark storage area with LED strip lights. These work best if they turn off automatically when the drawer is closed.

22. Pantry Lighting – The pantry has made a comeback, so don’t forget to provide good lighting in your pantry. Flush mount lights tend to work the best. Avoid recessed since they will create only downlight and therefore shadows. A switch connected to your door so they light goes out when you close the door is a great idea.

23. Lighting over Sink – The sink is a key area from the kitchen triangle. Most electricians provide a junction box above the sink. If you have 8’ ceilings, you are limited to flush mount or recessed options. Taller ceilings let you be more creative with pendants or linear suspensions.

24. Under-cabinet Lighting – Kitchen countertops need up to 10 times more light than normal, so be sure to take advantage of the space below your cabinets and add some under cabinet lighting. This is the secret weapon of many designers we talked to. Be sure to mount them at the front of the cabinet and direct the light backwards. This way, you will get even light distribution on the countertop and the backsplash, and will best conceal the light source, thereby reducing glare. If you have shiny back-splash or countertops, be sure to choose an under-cabinet light with a good lens filter to avoid bouncing light directly off the reflective surface. LED makes the best undercabinet lighting, since it is thin and does not get super hot like xenon or halogen.



25. Bonus Undercabinet Tip – Install the cabinet lighting at the front of the upper cabinets is a must to achieve this best work space lighting on your Kitchen counters as well.

26. Plan enough Light for Every Kitchen Area – Countertops and other work areas need way more light. For safety and accuracy, be sure to light each area to at least these foot-candle levels:

| Space/Task | Light Level (Footcandles) |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Kitchen general lighting (on floor) | 5 |
| Kitchen food preparation (on counter) | 50 |
| Kitchen sink (on top of sink) | 30 |
| Kitchen cooktop (on cooking surface) | 30 |
| Dining (on tabletop) | 20 |

27. Light Differently – Don't be afraid to break the rules. After all, we are just offering rules-of-thumb and our guidelines can be bent or broken to fit your personal need. Think outside the box if it fits your lifestyle.