

LET THERE BE LIGHT

Lighting your new kitchen

BY MICHAEL LICHTENSTEIN

The time has come to renovate your kitchen. You have collected your inspirational pictures, hired the perfect contractor, found the most amazing back splash tile and are ready to create the perfect room. Quick question: How much of the design process was dedicated to the lighting plan?

If “little” or “none” was your answer, you are not alone. As the owner of the Lighting Gallery, I have collaborated on numerous renovation projects and unfortunately have had to see the same mistakes made time and time again. Many homeowners fail to realize that a well designed lighting plan can make the difference between an okay kitchen and magical space. Furthermore, a poorly designed lighting plan could actually hurt the look of a room.

A well designed lighting plan will ensure the room is properly lit, adds visual interest to the space, provides flexibility to respond to different lighting needs and even saves the homeowner money by eliminating unnecessary fixtures. There are two key components to the design and implementation of an effective lighting plan - using the design technique known as light layering and proper planning.

The Light Layering Approach

A proper lighting plan incorporates multiple layers of



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lighting with each one contributing to a specific purpose. By using multiple sources of light you ensure the room will be properly illuminated; create points of visual interest within the space; provide flexibility to create multiple lighting moods or looks and eliminate unnecessary fixtures – saving you money. The three layers of a lighting plan are task lighting, accent/architectural lighting, and ambient/general lighting.

Task lighting

Task lighting helps you perform specific tasks, such as reading, grooming, preparing and cooking food, etc. Optimal fixtures include recessed, track, pendant and undercabinet lighting as well as floor and desk lamps.

Accent/architectural lighting

This lighting adds drama



An example of a layered lighting plan: pendants and LED undercabinet lights provide the task lighting, LED hockey pucks mounted under the upper cabinets provide visual interest by creating patterns of light on the cabinet faces (accent/architectural) and semi flush fixtures mounted on the ceiling fill in any gaps providing ambient/general lighting.

to a room by bringing attention to specific decorative or architectural features. Potential objects that can be highlighted include crown molding, artwork, plantings, columns, fireplaces or furni-

ture pieces in addition to specific wall textures or window treatments. Fixture options include recessed, track, undercabinet, inground and LED or fluorescent linear lighting.



Country Industrial Pendant by Visual Comfort provides general illumination for the room



Kiev Pendants by Tech Lighting provide task lighting for the center island as well as general illumination for the entire kitchen.

Ambient (general) lighting

This is the final layer of the lighting plan and provides general illumination to the area filling in the shadows left from the other two layers. It is best accomplished with indirect light sources commonly found in chandeliers, ceiling or wall-mounted fixtures.

An example of an effective multi-layered lighting plan for a kitchen would include:

Task Lighting - recessed and undercabinet lights to illumi-

nate the work surfaces

Accent/Architectural Lighting - LED linear lighting to illuminate the crown molding and LED hockey pucks to illuminate inside the glass upper cabinets

Ambient/General Lighting - a chandelier over the eating area as well as pendants over the island

Don't wait till it is too late to think about your lighting plan

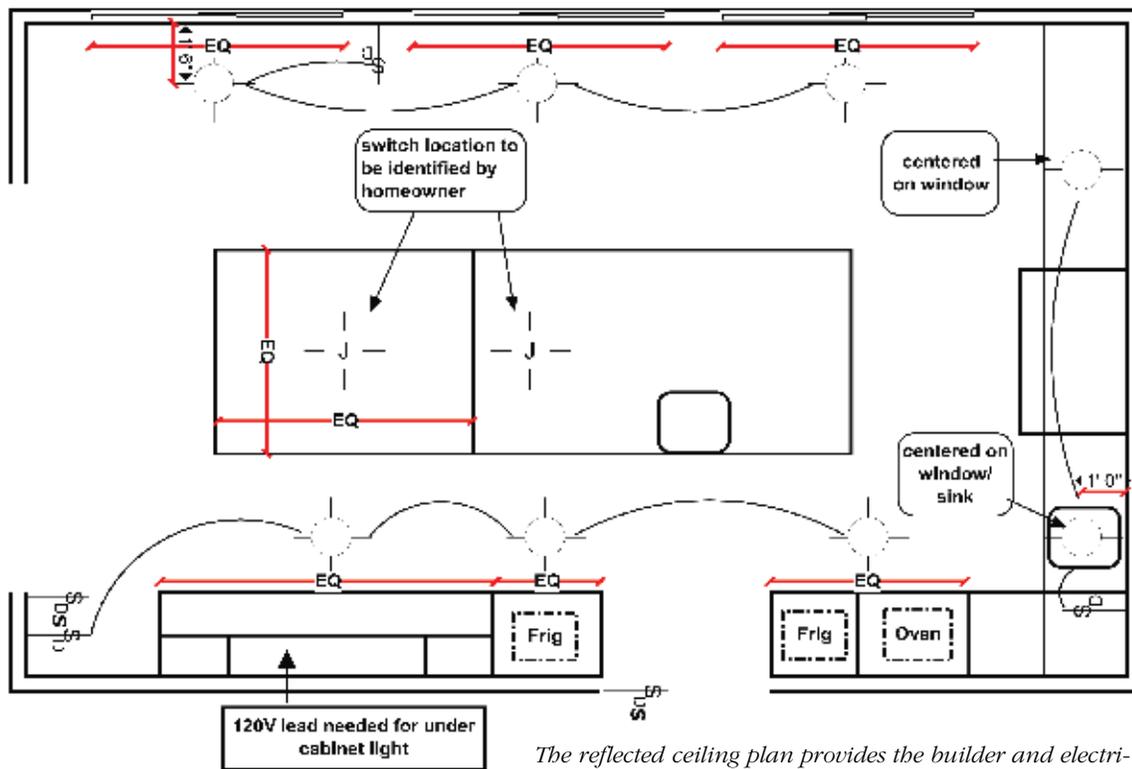
When the lighting plan is

formulated is just as important as the plan itself. It is critical to begin discussions about the lighting plan during the initial design conversations. By incorporating your lighting plan into the overall design concept you will ensure that the various design elements support one another. For instance, pairing a highly reflective counter top with a soft diffused undercabinet light to minimize hot spots and glare on the counter surface. In addition, having a detailed reflected ceiling plan (the document used to mark the exact location of each lighting fixture) available before the construction phase begins, will help minimize any potential construction conflicts such as framing that prevents you from placing lights where you want them, or wiring being installed for one type of application when all along you intended to use another application. If creating a formal reflected ceiling plan is not a realistic option for your project, at a minimum, before you begin the construction phase, you should be sure to discuss with your electrician and contractor exactly what type of fixtures you plan to use (decorative, recessed, undercabinet, etc.) and exactly where you would like them located.

In addition to discussing what you should do when planning the lighting for your kitchen, I would also like to point out two common mistakes that you should try to avoid:

1. Focusing on how the ceiling looks rather than how the recessed lights make the space look.

The primary purpose of using recessed lighting in a kitchen is to properly illuminate the work surface while at the same time add visual interest to the room by highlighting the architectural beauty and features of the kitchen cabinets. As such, the location of the recessed lights



The reflected ceiling plan provides the builder and electrician with the exact locations of the lighting fixtures being used so they can plan accordingly.

should be determined solely by the layout of the key kitchen components, not by how the ceiling will look. Recessed lights should be evenly spaced over the primary work surfaces to ensure there is adequate task lighting. To minimize shadows on the work surfaces, the recessed lights should be placed as close to the wall as possible without creating hot spots on any crown molding or cabinets (typically 20-22" inches off the wall). To help create visual interest, special attention should be placed on key features to be highlighted, such as a carved wooden oven hood, or a pair of protruding upper cabinets. When considering which objects to highlight, keep in mind balance and symmetry so the room appears evenly lit. In addition, because they are located so close to the surface, the recessed lights will create a halo pattern on the cabinet faces, therefore you should make sure that they are properly centered on the highlighted area.

2. Over Lighting the Space

Often times, the electrician or homeowner is concerned there will not be enough light in the kitchen and they install additional recessed lights in non-essential areas such as walkways, doorways and other open spaces and put them on the same circuit as the other recessed lights. While this approach will certainly add extra light to the kitchen, it minimizes the visual interest of the space, since both interesting and non-interesting areas in the kitchen are now evenly illuminated. At the core of lighting design is the concept that all areas of a room do not need to be lit at the same light level, which is why lighting designers utilize a layered lighting approach. For instance a primary work area requires a high level of illumination, but a walkway between a center island and the counter top can be adequately illuminated by

the ambient light produced by the pendant or chandelier over the island. There is no need to add additional lighting in that area.

Obviously not all projects require the assistance of professional lighting designer, but if you follow the basic concepts described above, I am confident your new kitchen will shine. Of course, if you have any questions, you are always welcome to visit me at the Lighting Gallery and I will do my best to assist you. ■

Michael Lichtenstein is the CEO and principal lighting designer at the Lighting Gallery. He has collaborated on numerous residential, commercial and hospitality projects in the Metropolitan area. His work has been featured in House magazine and Newsday, as well as Dear Genevieve on HGTV.

