

# Seeing the Light

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As kitchens are now the new entertainment center in the home, frequently used by many family members and guests, it's more important than ever that they be well-lit. But what do we really mean when we talk about good lighting? A room is most comfortable when it contains *layered lighting*. Obviously, proper *direct* light is what allows you to cut your carrots safely, and be able to read your recipes easily. Beyond this simple demand for *task lighting*, it also helps create an ambience in the space, making it feel larger, cheerier, livelier, or perhaps more dynamic. The term *decorative lighting* refers to light sources that are more indirect, dimmable for romantic meals, or that create excitement by lighting up a focal point in the room. Finally, *ambient* lighting is general overhead lighting throughout the home that enables you to find your way without bumping into things.



Typically a kitchen will be designed with several layers of lighting incorporating the above categories. To save money, there may be overlap in the functions of these lights, depending on the fixture choice. For example, under-cabinet lights going around most of what is called the "mid-zone" of the room will create a nice gentle perimeter light effect, as well as providing direct light for countertop work. An overhead source such as a monorail light system, (a modern twist on the traditional track) allows the attachment of various types and styles of individual lights on one curvable-track power source. This can provide general illumination, special spots on a focal point, or "mood lighting" when dimmed. With the use of pretty or colorful glass fixtures, it can also be a decorative focal point all on its own.



Another great place to let the light shine is for the display of collections, or special pieces inside a cabinet. Due to the heat generated by lamps, this is the place to go with *low voltage*. Low-voltage lights come in two categories: those with the voltage transformer built into the base and those requiring a separate, remotely located transformer (usually occurring with a series of small lights such as halogen "puck" lights.) The advantage to using low-voltage is that you can operate the lamps on their highest wattage, which makes their color rendering optimal, while still using less power than the same amount of lamp wattage on line voltage. It also may be more efficient to use low-voltage lighting in places such as the mid-zone.

The cost of installing energy-efficient fixtures will pay for itself over time. There are many new choices of lighting with more efficient xenon bulbs and

even LED lamps. LED, which stands for "light-emitting diode" is a technology that is currently advancing in terms of available products, and it is energy and cost-effective, as the bulbs last for over 50,000 hours (about 6 years of continuous use).

You can create many dramatic effects with lighting. If you're on a tight budget, take a class or seminar, do some research online and tap the internet for unusual and less expensive fixtures. Just make sure you buy only products that have been UL approved, which means they were tested for safety by Underwriters' Laboratory. This caveat is important when considering inexpensive imports. Safety is a primary concern.



