

TIM,

we are remodeling our kitchen and want to use the opportunity to improve our lighting.

What should we consider when adding lighting to our kitchen?

Kitchen lighting is an often-misunderstood part of the building or remodeling experience. While there's no doubt that kitchens have evolved into central entertainment and gathering centers, we sometimes forget that kitchens still have very specific functional purposes. Given that we are often slicing and dicing or working with hot cooking vessels, proper lighting is essential in various spaces throughout the room.

So how do we create that inviting and esthetically pleasing kitchen that serves as both entertainment host and task master at the same time? Many times, the answer lies in the proper use of recessed and under cabinet lighting to illuminate countertops and other kitchen work spaces. Here are five professional lighting tips to help you when laying out lighting in your next kitchen project.

1. LIGHT THE COUNTERS

A common mistake in kitchen lighting is to add overhead lights over floors rather than above workspaces like countertops, sinks and ranges. Recessed downlights, the workhorse of most kitchens, are often placed too far in front of or behind countertops. This can create harsh shadows right where you might be working with sharp knives. Instead, direct recessed lighting closer to the countertop surfaces to minimize shadows and enhance the beauty of cabinets and countertops.

2. FIGHT SYMMETRY

Home owners can sometimes get caught up in lighting dictated by a strict geometric grid of downlights on the ceiling. And while this approach can look beautiful on the lighting blueprint, lighting professionals will quickly argue that no one cooks on their ceiling.

Oddly, kitchen recessed lighting is one place we should resist our instinct to create symmetry. Poorly lit kitchens bring unwanted attention to the lighting layout



because we instinctively notice something seems to be missing. Conversely, when recessed lighting is properly placed, we notice how beautiful the kitchen appears rather than the geometric shape of the lighting grid on the ceiling.

Kitchen designers regularly encounter this issue during lighting discussions and sometimes advise that the geometric approach is a bit like putting the bed in the middle of the room instead of against

a wall. Clearly, it's more "symmetrical," but sadly, it won't function well in that position.

3. REDUCE SHADOWS

Recessed downlights can create unwelcome shadows, but this is minimized by using more smaller downlights in place of fewer large fixtures. 6" and 8" recessed cans are inexpensive, but if your budget allows, consider a few more recessed



downlights in the 2-3 or 4” range. The smaller can lights will tend to cost more, but your counters will be better lit, your upper cabinets will be brighter, and you may reduce glare and make the kitchen more comfortable.

4. UNDER CABINET LIGHTING

No matter how well we place the downlights, upper cabinets will always block some of the light and make the space below them dark. Therefore, I recommend under cabinet lighting in every kitchen, and getting it right can elevate your entire experience. Just like recessed downlights, under cabinet lighting needs to be in the right place. Under cabinet lighting placed too far back and the backsplash is well lit, but the countertop is left dark. Too far forward can leave harsh shadows on the counter and leave the backsplash unlit. When properly placed, under cabinet lighting will push lighting to the counter below and illuminate the entire surface.



5. REMOVE THE BACKSPLASH OUTLETS

While we are designing our undercabinet lighting, we can enhance the beauty of our backsplash in the process. Traditionally, the outlets have been placed in the kitchen backsplash creating a sometimes-unsightly array of outlets and covers. Fortunately, manufacturers now offer integrated under cabinet lighting and electrical outlets, thereby removing the sometimes-awkward placement of electrical outlets.

Whether you are building your dream home or remodeling your familiar kitchen, choosing an experienced builder and designer can help you get beautiful lighting results that will serve you and your family for many years to come. **BG**



Tim Graham has been building homes in South Central, KY for over 30 years. He is a Master Builder, a Registered Builder and a Certified Green Professional.

Tim Graham, President,
Design Builders, Inc.
www.designbuildersonline.com