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KITCHEN CABINETS SPOTLIGHT CLEAN LINES, PAINTED FINISHES

By Kim Berndtson

LEDS LIGHT THE WAY

Lighting has become an integral part of today's designs. And, with technological advancements and increased availability of LED options, it's easier than ever for designers to create magical spaces.

Lighting has emerged from the shadows of kitchen and bath design. No longer an afterthought, it has become a critical element in kitchen and bath design, enhancing both the functionality and aesthetics of these spaces.

"You need to be able to see what you're doing," says Barbra Bright, Barbra Bright Design, in San Francisco, CA. "In a kitchen, especially, it's about function."

"Good lighting is imperative," adds Dawn Maggio, CGC, ID, EPACC, GAC, Broward Custom Kitchens, in Pompano Beach, FL. "Without light, there is no color, and details are muted in poor lighting conditions."

BENEFITS OF LEDES

Lighting's move to the forefront can be attributed in large part to what LED lights bring to the table. LEDs' improved efficiency of operation – compared to incandescent, halogen, fluorescent and xenon lights – is well known, taking far less energy to keep a space lit. LEDs also last longer, so they need to be changed less often. "That's a bonus, especially for tall ceilings," says Maggio.

"There is a huge savings when using LED fixtures," adds Penny Southam, ARI-



DO, IDC, Southam Design, Ottawa, Ontario. "Re-lamping is rare for LEDs."

And even though LED fixtures cost more initially, prices are coming down as the number of manufacturers offering LED lights is increasing. "The technology is becoming more cost effective," says Alison Freeman, Freeman Kitchen/Bath/Home, in Vienna, VA. "I have found a lower-cost option, so the cost difference isn't as great. Initially, LEDs were about double, but now it's a lot less so it's an easier sell to the client."

"LEDs used to be an upgraded option because of the cost," adds Shelley Lober, owner/CKD, Kitchens of Diablo, Danville, CA. "But now retrofit cans are available at very reasonable priced."

Designers also appreci-



This kitchen, designed by Penny Southam, features flat doors with natural, oil-rubbed cherry accents. But the most dramatic feature is inarguably the color kinetic LED strip lighting, which takes center stage. Southam worked with her client, who is an inventor, to create the design statement. A Montreal glass artist custom crafted the textured glass backsplash and ceiling panels, which feature inlaid tree branch patterns melded into the glass, carrying from one panel to the next. Each panel is suspended by 6" stainless steel standoffs that are backlit by the same LED color kinetic strip lighting that backlights the backsplash. Handmade 2"x2" stainless steel switches are recessed into a cherry accent panel and backlit as well. "It's a fun detail that is small, but carries a punch," says Southam. "A lot of thought was put into every detail in this kitchen."

ate the 'warm,' natural look of LED lights. "They offer a nice wide spread of light," says Bright. "They look really natural. Most people don't even know they're LEDs."

The quality of LED lights is much better when compared to fluorescent lights, adds Freeman. "They offer a much prettier light, making your food and countertop look so much better. But do pay attention to what you're buying. Look for those classified as 'daylight.'"

In residential applications, Southam always specifies 2700K (Kelvin) or 3000K lights. "They give off the same warm tones that are seen in incandescent and halogen lights," she notes.

Another benefit is that they are dimmable, giving them the ability to easily move from task to mood lighting based on the homeowner's desire for more or less light. "They can adapt to

those who don't like bright light, and suit the needs of those who do," notes Lober.

The quality of today's LED lights is also much better when compared to early versions. "About eight years ago, I put large 6" LED can lights in an office space at my showroom," Lober continues. "It was so bright, it felt like a UFO was landing. It was uncomfortable. I took them out and put in incandescent can lights. We have since swapped them out again with new LED cans. LEDs have come a long way."

While LEDs look warm, they run cool, making them an attractive option for spaces where heat build up can be a concern. "I can use them in places where I couldn't put halogen or fluorescent lights," notes Tim Benkowski, timothyj kitchen & bath, in Milwaukee, WI. He adds that he has used them in shelving in his showroom where

he lit glass-topped, hollow floating shelves with LED lights, thereby illuminating displayed objects from underneath them. "LED lights have





Photos: Gordon King



“We use LED lighting in general and task lighting as LED fixtures have become more cost efficient,” says Southam. “Puck lights are also now available in LED as well as in recessed and surface-mounted options. These are excellent options for accenting open shelves or cabinets that have glass doors.”

“We do undercabinet lighting in every kitchen,” adds Freeman. “And, if the cabinet door is glass, we use puck or strip lighting for accent. LEDs have really become standard in these places.”

Some cabinet manufacturers are even beginning to add pre-wired cabinets to their

Shelley Lober used neutral white 3500K LED lights for this residential kitchen and display in her showroom. For the kitchen, she ran LED strip lights underneath each upper cabinet, combined with LED can lights. For her showroom display, she used a 30" and 36" strip underneath the overhang of the barstool area.



really opened up a whole new world of what you can do with lighting.”

EVEN ILLUMINATION

Greater availability of LED options has made it easier than ever for designers to light up even the darkest of places, including drawer interiors.

“I am very excited about a new display at my showroom where each drawer will light up when you open it,” says Lober. “They are motion ac-

tivated with a sensor and electronic chip so they go off after 15 seconds.”

According to many designers *KBDV* spoke with, LED lights are now commonly – and in some cases, exclusively – used for general and task lighting as well as accent lighting.

“I’m using them in pretty much every possible way, from general and task lighting to indirect and ambient lighting,” says Benkowski.

product offerings, making installation essentially ‘plug and play.’ “Undercabinet lighting has really become standard,” says Richard Kane, principal, designer, Kitchen Interiors, in Natick, MA. “Cabinet manufacturers are getting in on it and pre-wired cabinets are now a SKU.”

“For undercabinet lighting, there isn’t anything better than LEDs,” adds Maggio. “They really light up the area, serving as a bright task light.” She also appreciates the flexibility

that some of the newest LED introductions offer, such as those that allow adjustability after installation. “Lighting systems are difficult to test drive before installation,” she says. “With these new systems, you can install a cable across the cabinetry and place the lights where you want them. That’s nice because if you install an elaborate lighting system and something doesn’t work right, you can add or take away from it. Strip lights are also nice because you



Dawn Maggio designed this Florida home’s bathroom with a bit of a British West Indies tropical flair. ‘The homeowners are avid travelers and have brought back many items and ideas from their travels,’ she says. The tub surround and countertop are 2-1/4" triple-layered onyx with a hand chiseled edge. The stone is backlit by LED lights for a dramatic and exciting effect.



can just add another strip if needed. There really are a lot of options available now.”

Strip and tape lights have really opened up lighting options inside cabinets. Their ultra-slim profile gives designers the ability to run the lights vertically from top to bottom, behind the face frame, making them a great choice for cabinets with wood shelves.

“You end up with lighting that comes in from the side and front,” says Benkowski. “The light shines back into the cabinet. And, the illumination is even. The lights are closer together so there are no hot spots, or dark spots.”

The strips are much less visible as well, notes Freeman. “That’s important because you want to see the light, not the fixture,” she says. “It’s a really pretty way to illuminate a glass door cabinet with wood shelves.”

LED lights in general have a much slimmer profile when compared to other lights. “Lights used to be big and



Photo: Andrew McKinney Photography

When Barbra Bright posted this kitchen in her portfolio on Houzz, it was added to more Ideabooks than any of her other designs. “Why? It’s all about the lighting!” she writes in her blog. “There’s LED strip lighting behind the face frame of the wall cabinets that make the cabinets glow. The undercabinet lighting is also LED. They are bright, dimmable, and have a nice warm light similar to incandescent. In terms of light color (Kelvin), I usually use either a 2700K or 3000K. Also, I prefer ‘strip’ for undercabinet lighting versus puck since it gives the most coverage. Just be sure the fixture is pulled toward the front of the cabinet and not the back. Lastly, consider visiting a lighting showroom so you can see fixtures in person.”

bulky,” Maggio adds. “Now we have options where you don’t even need a light valance. We always had ‘work arounds’ in the day, but now with the new options, you don’t need them. Transformers can be large, though,

so you still need to think it through completely before you design a light system. But the LEDs are easier in some instances.”

While LEDs in decorative lighting have lagged a bit behind, they are catching up. “For pendants, I still use incandescent or halogen lights,” says Bright. “And sconces are chosen based on the design style and the look I’m trying to achieve...If it happens to be LED, great, but I’m not specifically searching for LED sconces. But I am working on a bathroom right now that has a chandelier with LEDs.”

LED ADVANCEMENTS

Advancements in LED lights have opened doors to design, and in some cases, have changed the way designers create spaces. “LED lighting really changes our design when we specify color kinetic LEDs, which cycle through different colors of the visible light spectrum,” says Southam. “This creates drama. We can also run LED strip lighting behind hard-to-access transparent walls and backsplashes due to the extensive life span of an LED. They are also excellent when specified in hard-to-reach areas such as coves with glass panels or very high ceilings, again due to lamp life.”



Photo: Jody Gross Photography

LED lights are featured throughout this kitchen designed by Alison Freeman, including LED modular undercabinet lights. The upper, single-shelf glass door cabinets feature disk lights. Both are direct wired. Elsewhere in the project, she used linear lights for taller, multi-shelf glass door cabinets, which were placed vertically just inside the left and right edges of the face frame of the cabinets, running from top to bottom.



Tim Benkowski used LED lights to backlight this bar, which features floating panels on the seating side with a textured laminate as the background. The back of the bar features interior lighting between the stacked cabinets to further illuminate the bar.

Bright, too, has played with multi-color LED lights, using them in a game room/bar area. “We underlit the lip of the bar with multi-colored lights,” she says. “The homeowner absolutely loved it!”

While LED lighting has not really changed Lober’s designs per say, she indicates that it has increased the brightness in areas that were previously either dim or would get too hot with halogen lights. “Now when I create something interesting, I think about how I could accent that area with lights,” she says. “In the past, I would not have thought that because of

the heat or size factor.”

Kane, too, appreciates the options that LED lights offer. “They give me different ways to illuminate a space,” he says. “They give me the ability to give a spot of light in a creative way, and to illuminate a spot that might otherwise be dark. Now we can light anything.”

“Lighting really is an important part of kitchens and baths, and poor lighting is a common complaint from homeowners regarding their old kitchen or bath,” Lober notes. “But good lighting creates drama, and highlights where you want the eye to go.”