

Choosing Light Fixtures

Lighting fixtures are among the many choices we make when planning a new house or renovation. In collaboration with a talented lighting design consultant, Peter Romaniello from Connecticut, South Mountain has created a carefully selected base specification for lighting fixtures that we've chosen for their aesthetics, quality, efficiency, and of course, function.

Lighting serves distinctly different functions in a home. Task lighting puts (usually) high levels of light where we need to see a specific set of tasks we are performing. Kitchen lighting is a good example - a combination of recessed or suspended fixtures and undercounter lighting directs light to food prep and cooking surfaces.

Ambient lighting provides light for moving through the house and for non-location-based tasks, such as vacuuming. Usually task and ambient lighting fixtures are not visually striking; they recede in our visual field.

Decorative lighting, on the other hand, adds a design element as well as providing light - a suspended fixture over the dining table is a common place where the fixture itself is part of the visual design.

Finally, accent lighting is used to pick out a feature - such as a painting, or perhaps an unusually crafted timber frame structure.

The path to good lighting is to carefully combine these different kinds of lighting. Most areas of a house need to use more than one type.

LED lighting is a major advance in lighting technology that has dramatically increased light quality while maintaining the huge efficiency jump that came when fluorescent lighting replaced incandescent. In some cases, such as undercounter lighting, we use fixtures that have been designed to take full advantage of the physical characteristics of LEDs as small, point sources of light, and have the LEDs built into the fixture. In other cases, we use conventional fixtures that accept the standard screw base of most common light bulbs, and we use LED lamps in those fixtures. That strategy is both affordable and allows us to benefit with upgrades in LED technology over time (although these lamps have service lives of 30,000 to 50,000 hours, so you won't be replacing them anytime soon!) Almost any light fixture that accepts a conventional A lamp (the common incandescent light bulb) or a conventional PAR reflector lamp can be equipped with screw base LEDs instead.

As we develop the design for your home, we'll want to know your specific lighting requirements, and we'll recommend appropriate fixtures and switching solutions. LEDs have given us great efficiency with great light quality. This is a wonderful advance that we encourage all our clients to benefit from.