Lighting in a home serves both practical and aesthetic purposes. It’s easy to maneuver around a well-lit home, reducing the risk of slips and falls, and the right lighting can help homeowners create their desired ambiance, which typically changes depending on which room you’re in. When choosing lighting for their homes, homeowners must walk a fine line between appearance and functionality. A fixture in the foyer that instantly impresses visitors likely won’t prove as awe-inspiring if it’s installed in the living room. When choosing lighting for a home, some general rules about what works in each room can help homeowners make the most informed decision.

**KITCHEN**

Kitchens are often the busiest room in a home, so lighting here can be especially important. A kitchen often benefits, both practically and aesthetically, from different types of lighting. For example, pendant lighting above kitchen islands can make meal preparation easier and safer, but such lighting likely won’t work in breakfast nooks and informal dining areas in the kitchen. Recessed lighting works best in such areas. In kitchens with no island, under-cabinet lighting can be used to illuminate countertops and simplify meal preparation.

**FORMAL DINING ROOM**

Many people enjoy the look of chandeliers in formal dining rooms, and such fixtures can be installed directly above the dinner table. The interior design experts at Better Homes & Gardens advise hanging chandeliers roughly 33 inches above the table in dining rooms with eight-foot ceilings, adding three inches for each additional foot above eight feet. Darkened dining areas may be ideal in restaurants, but homeowners may want to split the difference at home and choose dimmable chandeliers for their dining rooms. This allows homeowners to dim the lights for romantic dinners but turn them up for family gatherings with lots of people around the table.

**LIVING ROOM**

Adaptability also is important in the living room, where homeowners may host anything from movie nights to book clubs to parties for the big game. It can be a tall order to accommodate such a wide range of activities, and many homeowners come down to deciding between recessed lighting and track lighting. If the living room currently has neither style, homeowners should recognize that it will cost considerably less to install track lighting than recessed lighting. Better Homes & Gardens notes that flexible track lighting provides ambient, task or accent lighting, and track lights can even be moved to change lighting schemes at any time, making them a budget-friendly option for homeowners whose living rooms are multi-purpose spaces. Recessed lighting also works well in living rooms, especially ones with low ceilings. That’s because recessed lighting is installed into the ceiling, meaning it does not take up any visual space in the room. That can help living rooms feel bigger.

**BEDROOM**

Bedroom lighting should provide enough light when getting dressed, but also be able to be toned down as residents prepare for their bedtime routines. Both portable and installed lighting can be used in bedrooms to serve these various functions. Recessed fixtures that dim can ensure there’s ample light to get dressed in the morning, but they also can be dimmed at night as residents try to get ready to sleep. Portable nightstand lights can make it easier for couples sharing a bedroom, allowing one person to stay up and read while the other goes to sleep. Homeowners have many options and many needs when choosing lighting for their homes. A professional consultation with a lighting expert or interior decorator can help homeowners find lights that provide both practical and aesthetic appeal.  SH212655
Recolor Your Kitchen And Make It More Efficient

(MS) -- A lot goes on in the kitchen: preparing food, sharing meals, spending time with a friend over a cup of coffee, helping children with homework, baking for holidays -- and much more. If your kitchen could use an update to become an easier-to-use, more pleasant room, Woodcraft has some ideas and products to help you get started. “It’s amazing the difference you can make with just a few functional and decorative changes to your home’s kitchen area. Most of these projects can be completed in a weekend.

Cabinets
If you are not ready to replace kitchen cabinets, consider changing the color and hardware. Since the current trend is for darker cabinets, select an easy-to-use dark General Finishes Gel Stain, such as the popular java or antique walnut. If you choose to remove some doors for an open-shelf look, consider using a General Finishes Milk Paint shade for the interior to complement the exterior color.

For easier door opening and closing, choose a Salice Hinge in a darker titanium finish that will complement the darker cabinets. Add Hickory Hardware Door Knobs or Pulls that come in several styles and finishes. For kitchen drawers, upgrade the slides, changing from side mounts to undermount slides with Blum Tandem Plus Blumotion Concealed Drawer Runners.

Countertop
For cluttered countertops that are home to too many small appliances and other items, consider storing ones used only occasionally elsewhere, perhaps in cabinets.

To protect your valuable kitchen knives and save counter space, follow Woodcraft product development manager Ben Bice’s example and build a knife block to mount underneath the kitchen cabinet. Bice designed the block to hold his high quality ZHEN knives. See Woodcraft Magazine Issue...
Furniture
General Finishes Gel and Milk Paint are also good choices to recolor your wood furniture in shades that match or complement the new cabinet look. Milk Paint offers an opportunity to add a splash of color on a small piece of furniture, shelving or a plant stand to brighten the look but not overpower the kitchen.
If your wood cabinets and/or furniture only need a cover-up for nicks, scratches and other damage, Touch-Up Pens, Fill Sticks and Burn-in Sticks from Touch-Up Solutions may be the answer. They come in 10 colors, ranging from light oak to black.

Lighting
Add subtle lighting with Haeffe 12-Volt Loox LED Strip Lights in cool or warm white. Ideal for background lighting, use under or around cabinets, around doorframes, and pretty much anywhere you want. Strips are flexible, easy to install and can be cut to size. LED lighting generates very little heat, uses less energy, and has a long service life.
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Concrete is a popular structural material among homeowners. One of the more affordable options for patios and other structures, concrete also can be durable and attractive. However, because no material is impervious to damage, concrete will need to be maintained, and certain problems can arise when concrete is not properly installed.

Though an excellent material, concrete is not perfect. Even under ideal conditions, concrete can crack and breakage can occur. Here are some of the common complaints regarding concrete.

• Scaling and spalling: Scaling and spalling is the crumbling effect of concrete. Very often this occurs from changes in climate, particularly freezing and thawing that causes structures to expand and contract. In areas where freezing and thawing conditions exist, masons should not overwork the concrete in an effort to keep an abundance of air in the mixture. Entrapped air will help buffer the freeze/thaw conditions. Use of chemical fertilizers in and around concrete can also lead to scaling. Chemicals can break down the surface of the concrete. This is a particular problem when using rock salt and de-icing products during the winter. Over time, something as simple as table salt can etch concrete or cause spalling. The National Research Council’s Strategic Highway Research Program has found that magnesium chloride salt blends produce the least amount of damage on concrete surfaces.

• Discoloration: Concrete should have a uniform color if the same mix is used. But discoloration can occur if water is added at the job site, the concrete is of varying thickness or if the material does not cure uniformly. Color issues can also occur if hard troweling is used on the exterior concrete.

• Crazing: This is a phenomenon when the concrete shows several interconnected fine cracks. Cracks will appear when the concrete is...
damp. Usually this occurs when cement paste comes up to the surface and then shrinks. To avoid this, masons should be careful not to finish concrete until all water has evaporated and not sprinkle water onto the concrete while finishing it. Using a broom finish also can help.

- Cracking: It can be disheartening to have a pristine concrete surface only to see cracks begin to form. Sometimes even with the best application, concrete can crack from subgrade settlement or shrinkage during drying and curing times. Utilizing flexible concrete joints to help with the expansion and contraction of the concrete can help. Also, including a low-shrinkage aggregate in the mix may alleviate major cracks.
- Staining: Staining does not result from concrete installation or finishing. Staining occurs after the fact, when liquids or other materials discolor the concrete. This can happen when fluids from a car in a driveway stain the concrete. Leaves and plant matter left on the surface of the concrete may also cause staining. The best way to alleviate stains is to prevent them in the first place. Always sweep or blow away debris. Maintain vehicles so they don’t leak fluid. Power washers can remove some stains, but it’s still best to prevent them in the first place.

Problems can arise when building with concrete, but finding an installer who understands the nature of concrete can reduce the risk of those problems presenting themselves.
No Room For A Door? Slide It Aside The Wall

(HIT) - There are many places through most houses where doors that slide rather than swing can provide space saving advantages. But genuine pocket doors that slide inside of walls can’t always be installed, due to obstacles such as room configuration or costs.

However, you still gain the advantages that pocket doors offer by using a unique hardware system from Johnson Hardware to install a wall mount door. Unlike a normal pocket door, a wall mount door is surface mounted outside the wall. Because it slides on a track, a wall mount door is ideal for locations where space required for a swinging door would be wasted.

It only takes a moment to think of how many of these locations there are in typical households. The obvious ones include baths, kitchens, halls, closets, storage or utility rooms, garage entryways, playrooms and home offices. With imagination, you will come up with many more. The ease of operating wall mount doors also makes them suitable for homes where there are disabled residents.

The Johnson 2610F Wall Mount Door Hardware makes installation an easy job. No close fitting is required, and the hardware can be readily adapted for particular installations. Virtually any door may be mounted because the hardware can support even solid core doors of up to 125 pounds.

Several quality features ensure that wall mount doors installed with the Johnson Hardware set will operate smoothly. The aluminum track has a concave, one point hanger channel for an unobstructed glide. Double wheel ball bearing hangers with swivel design hold nylon wheels evenly on track, are jump proof and never need lubricating. Track lengths are available up to 192 inches.

For help in understanding all the ways that wall mount doors can be put to work saving valuable floor area and adding decorative beauty to your home, write to L. E. Johnson Products, Inc., 2100 Sterling Avenue, Elkhart, IN 46516 or visit our web site at http://www.johnsonhardware.com.

In places where a swinging door would waste space and a door-in-the-wall can’t be installed, an easy to use hardware set from Johnson Hardware solves your problem by letting you wall mount a door. Johnson also offers Privacy Locks that can be installed in minutes—without invalidating the door manufacturer’s warranty.
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Tips to finding the right contractor

Home improvement projects tend to be costly. Because of the considerable financial investment homeowners must make when improving their homes, it’s important to find a contractor you can trust and feel comfortable with. The vast majority of professional contractors are trustworthy and willing to work with homeowners to help them design the homes of their dreams. But there are still some tips homeowners can keep in mind as they begin their search for a contractor.

• Work only with licensed contractors. Licensed contractors have been verified as legitimate by your local governing body, removing much of the fears homeowners have with regard to finding trustworthy contractors. Unlicensed contractors may not be insured or bonded, and their estimates may be lower than their licensed competitors’ because they do not contribute to unemployment. Licensed contractors often are subjected to criminal background checks as well, calming homeowners’ fears about inviting strangers into their homes.

• Ask for recommendations. Word-of-mouth is great when looking for contractors. Oftentimes, a contractor’s best friends are his past clients. Ask friends or neighbors for recommendations on local contractors, inquiring about prices as well as each particular contractor’s demeanor and openness to suggestions. Contact your local Office of Consumer Affairs to check each contractor’s complaint history.

• Get written estimates. Before hiring a particular firm, get written estimates

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from several contractors. Some contractors will charge fees for the estimate, but they must inform you of those fees before the estimates are provided. Compare estimates so you can get a better grasp of how much your project will cost. While cost is important, try to avoid choosing a contractor based on cost alone, as a good rapport with a contractor who may be more expensive might make spending a little more money worth it.

• Make sure the contract is specific. When you choose a contractor, make sure the contract he or she provides is very specific, going into great detail about the specifics of the project. This contract should spell out the materials and equipment that will be used, as well as the final cost of the project, the payment schedules while the project is ongoing and the work schedule.

• Keep track of all paperwork and pay by check. Once you sign the contract, create a folder where you can store all paperwork. Scan each document so you can store them on your computer as well. When payments must be made, never pay in cash. Pay by check and do not pay for the entirety of the project upfront, opting instead to pay at predetermined intervals spelled out in your contract.

Nerves often come into play when hiring a home contractor, but homeowners who take a careful approach to the hiring process will likely end up hiring a trustworthy contractor who does great work. FH158414

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Many people decide to upgrade from their apartments or condominiums out of a need for more space. But even after moving into a new home, homeowners may soon begin to outgrow the room they have.

Rather than looking for a new home, some homeowners consider expansion. Expanding a living space can be expensive, and a more affordable option may be converting existing basement or garage space into something more livable. Garages already are built on a foundation, have four walls and a roof overhead, so a garage-conversion project is merely a matter of turning this utilitarian area into a living space.

Before beginning the renovation, homeowners should consider the benefits versus the cost of converting the garage. For those who are planning to grow old in a house, a garage conversion can be a worthy investment. But those who intend to sell their homes rather than retire in them may learn that a converted garage can affect home value and make it less desirable at resale. Compare your home to others in the area and see what your neighbors have done. If converted garages are the norm where you live, your own renovation may fit in with others.

Always apply for the proper permits and learn the zoning laws to see if a garage conversion is acceptable in your town or city. It’s best to go by the book so that work can be done in a proper manner and be inspected for safety.

Many homeowners hope their garage-conversion projects will make their

An architect can help suggest design elements that will camouflage the original garage look and make the space seem like it was always part of the main living area of the home.
garages seem like a seamless part of the rest of the house. To do so, you will need to remove evidence the space was once a garage. Slab floor will need to be raised and insulated. Walls also will need to be insulated and finished to improve comfort and soundproofing. Many garages do not have windows, so for the garage to function as a renovated space, windows may need to be added.

One of the biggest transformations will come by way of modifying the garage door entry. Some homeowners prefer to leave the existing door so that the home still has the appearance of a garage from the curb, while others remove the garage door and rebuild the exterior wall so that it has a window or another architectural element. An architect can help suggest design elements that will camouflage the original garage look and make the space seem like it was always part of the main living area of the home. Landscaping work also can minimize the appearance of an old garage. Rather than having the driveway end at the wall of a home, shrubbery, pavers and other techniques can blend the garage renovation into the rest of the yard design.

Transforming a garage into a living space can add several hundred square feet to a home. Hire a reputable contractor and follow the municipal guidelines for modifying the space to ensure the job is done right.

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Pros And Cons To Including An Island In A Kitchen Redesign

Homeowners planning a kitchen remodel are no doubt considering whether to include a kitchen island in the new design. When the space allows, an island can be a fine way to enhance the look of a kitchen and impart an upscale appeal. Interest in kitchen islands has grown steadily for the past several decades. Introduced in the 1970s, islands became a popular place for guests to congregate and provided extra counter space for meal preparation and entertaining. The suburban migration led to bigger homes with larger kitchens. Through the 1980s and 1990s, homes grew even larger, and islands became a popular feature of kitchens across the country.

The increase in food-based programming on television has also contributed to the popularity of kitchen islands. As more people dabble with preparing their own gourmet meals, kitchen islands have become more convenient. Although there are many benefits to an island in the kitchen, there are also some disadvantages to kitchen islands. Weighing all the options can help homeowners design a kitchen layout that is functional, affordable and practical for the space they have.

**Pros**

Arguably the most significant advantage to having a kitchen island is the added space it provides. Many times islands are built with cabinetry that matches the rest of the kitchen design, and those cabinets provide storage space for pots, pans and other kitchen tools. Islands may double the storage space available in the kitchen.

Kitchen islands are also advantageous when preparing meals. Kitchen counter space can be easily gobbled up by toaster ovens, rotisserie cookers, microwaves, coffee makers, and various other countertop appliances. These appliances can take up valuable real estate that’s sorely missed when preparing meals. An island can be used solely for cooking and preparation, and some homeowners have incorporated cutting boards and a prep sink into the design of the island. Islands also can be customized according to a homeowner’s needs. Instead of simply having cabinetry beneath the counter, some opt to have a wine cooler or even a bookshelf for keeping cookbooks within reach. An additional small dishwasher or beverage refrigerator may be tucked into the design of the island. For others, the island may be a makeshift kitchen office space.

**Cons**

Expense is a leading negative factor with regard to a kitchen island. The additional material necessary and the labor involved in installation may bust some homeowners’ budgets. Stationary islands can cost several thousand dollars to install, and this is money a homeowner may be better off investing elsewhere. In smaller kitchens, an island may be impractical because of the space limitation. Islands are typically at the heart of the kitchen and may interfere with walking space or cause clearance issues when the refrigerator door or cabinet doors are open. For homeowners who find space is at a premium in the kitchen, an island may not be the best idea. However, a rolling island that can be moved into position when needed, then stored in a convenient, out-of-the-way location might be a viable option.

Depending on the complexity of a kitchen island, its installation may extend the amount of time required to complete the kitchen renovation. This can prolong the length of time needed to complete the work. Running a gas or electric line and plumbing to the island may require a major overhaul and demolition. Depending on the complexity of a kitchen island, its installation may extend the amount of time required to complete the kitchen renovation. This can prolong the length of time needed to complete the work. Running a gas or electric line and plumbing to the island may require a major overhaul and demolition.

Before homeowners engage in any kitchen renovation that may include the incorporation of an island, they should question whether a kitchen island is a practicality for their renovation projects.

Homeowners should question whether a kitchen island is a practicality for their renovation projects.

Kitchen islands are popular components of home designs. Before homeowners engage in any kitchen renovation that may include the incorporation of an island, they should know the advantages and disadvantages.
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