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PLUS! Expert Tips on Flooring and Lighting

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LEFT: Vertical frosted-glass panels with mirrored fronts appear to hover in this contemporary vanity light system. **M Series Cabinet and Reflexion Light in polished chrome**, prices vary, Robern, 800/877-2376, robern.com

BRIGHT IDEAS

Lighting sets the scene in any bath—and looks good doing it.

written by **KATIE STUHLER**

LIGHTING SERVES MANY PURPOSES.

It eases the transition from asleep to awake, guides you in your daily grooming routines, and helps you unwind after a long day.

A single fixture doesn't do you or your bathroom's decor justice. To ensure adequate lighting, you need a variety of sources that provide illumination in three layers: ambient, task, and accent. "Thinking in terms of layers gives you the flexibility to address a variety of needs," says Mary Beth Gotti, manager of the GE Lighting Institute.

However, bathroom lighting isn't all about function. Fixtures, especially vanity

lighting, also finish the look of any design scheme. "Light fixtures are art," says Marie Lail Blackburn, certified master kitchen and bath designer and owner of MLB Design Group in Seattle. "There are so many beautiful choices out there. The choice is very personal."

These days, lighting applications—not just the fixtures—are catching the eye of designers and homeowners alike. You'll find mirrors and medicine cabinets aglow with integrated fluorescent or LED bulbs, and whirlpool tubs that embrace chromatherapy—built-in lights that change from calming cool hues to energizing warm tones to influence your mood. "Master bathrooms are a retreat where you go to relax, revive your spirits, and refresh yourself," Blackburn says. "Lighting plays a huge role in creating a peaceful atmosphere."

Read on to learn how to cast the right amount of light—and style—in your bathroom.

LIGHTING BUYING & PLANNING GUIDE

Layer it on

Blend ambient, task, and accent lights for perfect illumination day or night.

AMBIENT LIGHTING

is the base layer that brightens the overall space and lets you move about safely.

ACCENT LIGHTING

highlights particular elements of the bath that you want to show off, such as intricate tilework or a beautiful glass bowl sink. "You need layers so that your lighting isn't flat or sterile," says Susan Arnold, a lighting designer at Wolfers Lighting in Waltham, Massachusetts.



TASK LIGHTING

sheds light on specific activities you do most, from shaving to showering.

Add drama to your decor with chandeliers or pendant lights. Be sure to check local building codes that dictate the height and placement of fixtures above bathtubs.

75

In a medium-size shower with light-color tiles, aim for the equivalent of 75 watts of incandescent overhead lighting. If your shower is large or dark, you'll need more light.

Beyond incandescents

Standard incandescent bulbs are moving out of the spotlight, while newer lighting technologies—fluorescent, halogen, and LED lamps—are quickly stealing the scene.

FLUORESCENT LIGHTS use just 25–35 percent of the energy used by incandescent bulbs to cast the same amount of illumination, and they last 10 times longer, according to the U.S. Department of Energy. Traditional fluorescents are tube-shape or circular; the newer, miniature versions, called compact fluorescents, screw into light sockets just like incandescents. Because they contain mercury, take special care when disposing of them.

HALOGEN BULBS look and function much like their standard screw-in counterparts but are typically more energy-efficient, last longer, and are dimmable. “They radiate a brighter, whiter light that makes colors pop,” says Mary Beth Gotti, manager of the GE Lighting Institute.

LIGHT-EMITTING DIODE (LED) LAMPS are an emerging technology. They typically consist of small bulbs grouped in clusters. Energy Star-qualified LEDs use at least 75 percent less energy than incandescents. And you won’t have to replace them often—Energy Star-qualified models last a whopping 25,000 hours if they’re used three hours daily. Plus, they produce very little heat and are less prone to breakage than conventional bulbs.

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Every bathroom is a personal space, so it's important to make your lighting plan personal, too. You don't want it to look like you just walked into a store's bathroom.”

—SUSAN ARNOLD, LIGHTING DESIGNER

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LIGHTING INSPIRATION

Flip through dozens of bathroom lighting ideas at bhg.com/kbibathlighting. You can print and save your favorites!

SHADOW-FREE VANITY GROOMING

TAKE SIDES. To fully illuminate your face, plan for the equivalent of 75 watts of incandescent lighting on each side. If your mirror is centered above the sink, mount fixtures “just a few inches to the left and the right of the mirror—as close to your face as possible,” says Patricia Rizzo, DesignWorks program manager at the Lighting Research Center in Troy, New York. “The bottom of the shade housing the light bulb should sit just above eye level.” If your mirror stretches the width of the vanity, you can mount the fixtures directly onto the mirror, though this will likely cost more.

SEEK LIGHT FROM ABOVE. Side lighting is best for minimizing shadows, but if it’s not possible, place a fixture, such as a horizontal bar with multiple lights, above your vanity mirror. This fixture should provide the equivalent of 150 watts of incandescent lighting and be long enough to spread light evenly over your face. Mount it at least 78 inches above the ground and make sure it clears the mirror, “unless the shades are meant to drop down over the mirror,” Rizzo says.

CONSIDER LAMPSHADE OPACITY. Fixtures with milky-white diffused shades are your best bets for smooth, even illumination, Rizzo says. Steer clear of fixtures with clear glass shades, which hinder light distribution, as well as fabric shades. “Fabric shades can vary from light to dark, so the number of watts won’t help as a guide if the light being emitted from the fixture is greatly diminished by the shade,” Rizzo says.