

# A penchant for light

**BRIGHTEN UP  
YOUR HOME  
WITH THE STYLISH  
GLOW OF  
PENDANTS**

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CTW FEATURES

**Y**ou might not be used to thinking of a lighting fixture as artwork, but today's pendant-style offerings may make you change your mind. Hanging like solitary jewels - with shades made of everything from hand-blown glass to natural stone - pendants can add a glowing, visual punch to any room's design. They also create a stylishly functional alternative to recessed cans wherever task lighting is required.

## Small scale ... big impact

Once limited to large and blocky designs - maybe you remember those adjustable-height, Colonial-style models that hung over almost every 1960s-era kitchen table - pendant fixtures have since slimmed down as lighting technologies have evolved. Older models were made to use standard incandescent light bulbs, but today's newer illumination sources are casting these once-dated fixtures in a new light.

"The movement to 12-volt lighting systems allowed manufacturers to make pendants with much smaller bulbs," says Joseph Rey-Barreau, a Lexington, Ky.-based American Institute of Architects member,



**Places, please:** To figure out the best placement of a pendant, tie or tape a balloon to the ceiling and test it at different heights. Take the activities of the room - TV watching, meal preparation, eating, sitting down, standing - into consideration when deciding.

lighting designer and an educational consultant with the American Lighting Association. "That really opened the door to creating pendants with much smaller shades."

Low-voltage systems once were limited to more sophisticated, and expensive, commercial lighting plans. But as prices have fallen and homeowners' tastes have gone upscale, fancier and more complex lighting equipment has become common in residential settings. Lower voltages allow smaller halogen bulbs, and small "mini-pendant" fixtures have begun appearing all over the house.

"The trend has been to go to

much smaller scale," Rey-Barreau says. "In fact, the larger-scale pendants aren't very common anymore - you just don't see many big ones."

Kitchen islands and breakfast bars have become common applications for newer, slimmed-down models, where their oftentimes sleek appearance can complement today's professional-looking kitchens. And in dining rooms, a grouping of pendants can be a creative alternative to more traditional chandeliers. Designers are even finding use for pendants in the bathroom.

"Most people are not used to seeing them in that application,"

Rey-Barreau says, noting he's hung them either side of a mirror to create balanced, natural light. "But they really work well."

## Illuminating options

Manufacturers are responding to this new demand with a broad range of products appropriate to both contemporary and traditional settings. Glass-shaded models, using either mouth-blown or cast glass, remain the most popular, makers say, but other options are hitting store shelves and catalog pages.

"There's definitely a trend to use a material other than glass," says Dennis Geier, director of sales and marketing for the Alfa brand of Des Plaines, Ill.-based Juno Lighting Group. "Ceramic is becoming very popular. Also, we're seeing fabrics coming in."

Even natural stone is being carved to create pendant shades. Alfa is creating a striking line of shades using translucent onyx. And, while hardware for these fixtures has tended to emphasize contemporary chrome or nickel tones, more traditional finishes now are becoming popular.

"Today, 35 percent to 40 percent of our sales are in vintage bronze," Geier says. "It helps bridge our products into a more traditional décor."

Riverside, N.J.-based Seagull Lighting also is seeing increased interest in gold and black designs, according to Eric Borden, the vice president for product management and market research.

## Focusing your choices

As pendants' popularity has grown, lighting-showroom ceilings have become crowded with options, which can make decisions difficult.

Experts suggest narrowing your choices by first considering



**Blues Brothers:** Pair a striking pendant with paint, wallpaper or curtains of a similar shade to add visual punch to any room.



Image courtesy of Sea Gull Lighting

**Shape up:** Choose a pendant that complements the room's style, as the bell-shaped curves of these mini-pendants mesh with the kitchen's traditional design.

where the pendant will be installed. Remember that, while striking colors and patterns may quickly draw your eye, these fixtures also serve a practical purpose.

"There are fundamentally two types of pendants," Rey-Barreau says, differentiating between models with shades that are open at the bottom or fully enclosed. "If you're going to use the pendant for something that needs task lighting, you want to use a more open pendant."

You can narrow task-oriented options further by determining just how sharp a downward illumination you want your pendant to cast, says Marilyn Zelinsky-Syarto, a designer and author of "Complete Lighting Design" (Quarry Books, 2006).

"Realize that the larger the shade, the more subtle the light will be that is cast onto the surface," she says. "And the narrower the shade, the more pinpointed the light will be on the surface."

Also consider the height and overall size of the room where the pendants will hang when reviewing your shade options. For example, Rey-Barreau says that elongated, elliptical shapes are great for filling high-ceilinged areas, and more globe-like designs can add eye-pleasing contrast to boxier spaces.

Placement and hanging height also are considerations when picking pendants. Rey-Barreau suggests spacing fixtures three feet apart, regardless of whether the end result is an

odd or even number. Zelinsky-Syarto says a similar distance between a pendant and the surface it's lighting will ensure comfortable illumination.

"As a general rule, the bottom of a small, single pendant should hang 36 inches above the surface," she says, suggesting homeowners try tying a balloon to the ceiling to see if that distance seems right for the intended use. "If it hangs too low, it's an obstacle and only creates small pools of light on the surface. A fixture that's too high, with the bulb at eye level, creates an uncomfortable glare."

### Pendant mania?

With these suggestions in hand, you may find yourself seeking even more locations where pendants could add their unique combination of form and function. Rey-Barreau says your options are almost limitless.

"Really, anywhere you have a work surface would suffice," he says, pausing to add yet another possible setting. "I don't know that I've seen one in the laundry room, but I'd bet that someone has one there."

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