

How to Maximize Natural Light

Daylight savings time is just around the corner. As the days shorten, daylight hours become more and more precious, and interiors that felt complete and colorful in summer may suddenly seem gloomy and subdued. To learn how to offset the effects of short days — especially in rooms that already suffer from low natural light — we talked to 11 designers experienced in making a little light seem like a lot more.



Design by Denise McGaha Interiors | Photo by Stephen Karlisch

Place Large Mirrors Where Light Hits

Directly across from a window, a mirror bounces light around the room and reflects light as if it were a window. "I love using mirrors to create a second window effect in a space," says Denise McGaha of [Denise McGaha Interiors](#). "By placing large mirrors or even an entire wall of mirror, I feel it can double the light

in a room. As long as they reflect the natural light, the placement is completely up to you."



Design by Michael Reeves Limited | Photo by Andrew Twort Photography

Position Mirrors in Key Corners

Mirrors can brighten a room overall, but they can also draw light into darker areas of a room. "I also using folding mirrored screens in dark corners of rooms to 'bounce' the natural light around a room, while enlivening the dark corner itself,

maybe with an armchair, side table and floor reading light in front, says Michael Reeves of Michael Reeves Limited in England.



Design by LDa Architecture & Interiors | Photo by Greg Premru Photography

Experiment with Light-Filtering, Solar Shades

Solar shades let in light while offsetting glare. "If a client is looking to maximize daylight and doesn't have to worry about privacy, I would recommend solar shades in the light filtering range that works best for them, somewhere between one and 10 percent," says Dean Sawyer, an associate in the interior design

department at [LDa Architecture & Interiors](#). "Unlined linen would also be a smart choice for curtains or drapes, as the looser weave gently filters the light."



Design by Caz Myers

Rely on Glazing

Glazing windows helps to mitigate glare during hours when sunlight is particularly strong, while also enhancing the amount of light that filters through the windows. Glazing is a technology that is constantly changing; recently, scientists have created perovskite-tinted windows that darken in heavy sunlight and harvest solar power. "In large open plan spaces where we are involved in full renovation projects or new-builds, we like to introduce as much glazing as possible and in

interesting formats to create light but also give visual impact," says designer [Caz Myers](#).



Design by Sara Gilbane Interiors | Photo by Zach DeSart

Select Sheer Window Treatments

Sheer curtains are an easy way to bring light into a room. Sara Gilbane of [Sara Gilbane Interiors](#) recommends combining sheer treatments with a pattern and

bordering them with solid-hued drapery to update the look. "Sheers with a pattern are nice," says Gilbane. "The pretty pattern on them can be the interest, and then put ivory drapes on either side."



Design by Heidi Caillier Design | Photo by Haris Kenjar

Use Multiple Light Sources

To amplify the look of natural light, it's important to layer it with a variety of light sources. "We normally recommend multiple light sources, so that you can

change the lighting as needed to make it feel warm and comfortable," says Heidi Caillier, owner of [Heidi Caillier Design](#).



Design by Annette English & Associates

Decide on a Mood

When selecting light fixtures to round out a poorly lit room, it's worth considering the mood you want to achieve — a bedroom or library, for example, might get away with a dark and cozy look, while a kitchen or breakfast nook might not. "Our lighting selections start with determining the function and the mood we are trying to evoke in a space," says Annette English of Annette English & Associates, a firm based in Los Angeles. "It's important to balance both." Depending on the function of the space, task lighting is often necessary, whereas in other rooms, decorative lighting is more important to consider. An ornate chandelier might look like a fun choice for a home office, but if the client can't read their planner once the sun goes down, it needs to be complemented by other lighting choices.



Design by Tina Ramchandani Creative | Photo by Ellen McDermott

Try a Textured Finish

A light, airy color is the most obvious choice for a dimly lit room, but even light colors can seem lackluster depending on the quality of the natural light and orientation of the room. If you opt for a dark color, metal accents and mirrors can help reflect light, and textured finishes may help to enrich natural light. "The color here is from Benjamin Moore's Century collection, which is a soft touch paint," says [Tina Ramchandani](#) of [Tina Ramchandani Creative](#), describing the room pictured above. "The soft touch feature adds texture to the walls, so walls are illuminated when enhanced by natural light." Ramchandani adds, "This color is Seraphinite P5. I also love Farrow & Ball's Plumett, 272, as it has a lot of depth and richness. It's a great backdrop for art, especially Old Master paintings."



Design by Michael Wolk Design Associates

Go Glossy (with Caution)

Glossy finishes can help reflect natural light; most designers, however, recommend a mix of matte and gloss finishes to create a more interesting design that won't fall flat. Michael Wolk of [Michael Wolk Design Associates](#) in Palm Beach, Florida, compares layering glossy and matte finishes to *chiaroscuro*, a painting technique that creates contrasting shadows and spaces of light. "Using matte and gloss finishes that absorb and reflect the existing light differently helps

create the drama of chiaroscuro that Rembrandt and da Vinci used so effectively," says Wolk.



Design by Tow Studios | Photo by Peter Tjahjadi

Opt for Paint with Color

When working with darker colors, selecting paints with a color — even in a relatively neutral hue — may look better once the sun sets. Peter Tow of [Tow Studios](#) recommends using "paint tones with a lot of color in the pigment," especially if you prefer to go with a dark color. "In this instance [shown above], we were careful not to use certain brown and beige colors that may come out looking khaki or green in certain light. The color we specified is a yellowish taupe — there's some color in the paint pigment, so it does not come out looking dull in the dark," Tow says.



Design by Estee Design | Photo by Alex Lukey

Try Out Dramatic Drapery in the Bathroom

In the bathroom, dramatic, floor-length drapery can shut out the outside world when privacy is necessary, and open up to all incoming light when it's not. "I love designing window treatments for those bathrooms with large windows and lots of

daylight," says Svetlana Tryaskina, owner of Estee Design in Toronto. "If space allows, I do floor-to-ceiling panels, using sheer linen or cotton fabrics, that work best in humid conditions. Adding a delicate trim to the panels always adds a luxurious feel to space."