



Uplighting sets the mood for the garden to be enjoyed well into the night.

Nighttime in the garden needn't be reserved for any special event; it should be enjoyed whenever possible. As the sun sets, the landscape is transformed into a subtler version of its daytime form. With each inch the sun moves down in the sky, the shadows shift while the colors deepen into thicker, denser shades, giving the landscape an entirely new look. Once the sun finally settles below the horizon, the memory of the daytime garden is hidden in the shadows. It is then that we give up and go indoors because our human eyes can no longer make out any details in order to enjoy the landscape or feel safe in it.

Creating security, function and ambience in the landscape can be accomplished with proper lighting equipment and by asking clients the right questions.

If you are anything like me, this scenario just will not do. If the air is sweet and warm (and the mosquitoes are kept at bay by hungry bats and frogs), then I want to be outside. I want to enjoy a meal in the evening air and a late-night stroll in the garden with all its nocturnal sounds and fragrances. If I am forced inside by rain, insects, humidity or chill, I want to gaze out into the garden while I am dutifully doing the dishes or just passing by a window in a darkened room.

Recently, I read a collection of essays by Mary Oliver and poems by Stanley Kunitz — both were landscape enthusiasts. It was within their words that I was introduced to the idea that a garden is like a good book. It is a composition of elements (words) that form an idea (story) and ultimately provide an experience. There is a lingering excitement that I get when I read a good book. It is the same when I have the opportunity to experience a well-composed landscape.

A book is made rich by its depth of content: the descriptions of place, time, characters and events. The landscape is also defined by its depth of content: the presentations of form, texture, color and illumination — whether by sun, moon or artificial means — that together offer full dimension.

The Landscape by Night

by MONIQUE PAPAIZIAN ALLEN

Lighting the landscape is not so new, but is certainly lagging behind the madness for gardening that has fueled the takeoff of this industry. Thus far, it has been reserved for commercial applications, restaurants, hotels and corporate office parks, as well as for the wealthy clients. Customers in the more modest set are left wanting, or attempting, lighting with inexpensive packaged sets that barely last a good winter, or they are going for the solar sets that offer little more than a ghoulish glow.

The good news is it doesn't have to be that way anymore. Just like the value of a well-planned design, healthy nursery stock and careful soil preparation for planting, lighting deserves focused attention and a real budget. If it is valued in this way, price should not be the sole determining factor for its use.

Lighting serves three main purposes in the landscape — safety (security), task (function) and sparkle (ambience). Each purpose overlaps and has the potential to deepen the usefulness and enjoyment of the landscape.

Initial considerations. Lighting can be either line voltage or low voltage. Simply put, line voltage is the level of electricity used to power most lights and appliances in the home, as well as the ubiquitous outdoor lamppost light. Low voltage is a lower level of electrical current dropped by feeding line voltage into a transformer that lowers it from 110 to 12 volts. This electrical shift not only makes these systems safe, but it also makes them extremely versatile and economical to run over the more energy-consuming, line-voltage systems.

Rob DiSchino, a national sales manager for Nightscaping, Redlands, CA, which supplies low-voltage lighting design and equipment, says, "The heart of any low-voltage system is the transformer." It is the transformer that determines the controllability and the safety of a low-voltage lighting setup, so going with a reputable unit is a key factor in the success and longevity of your system.

Nancy Goldstein, principal of the lighting design/build company Nancy Goldstein Design LLC, Marblehead, MA, agrees wholeheartedly and suggests that the placement of the transformer is

equally important to consider. "Sure, if it is to be inside, it can be in a plastic casing," she says. "But outside units should be stainless steel, and for my work, which is often near the ocean, we go with a marine-quality unit."

Another consideration in choosing a transformer is its capacity. How many lamps will it support? How spread out will they be? Will the system be expanded in the future? Thinking ahead when choosing this central piece of equipment will determine not only the safety and controllability, but also the longevity and expandability of the system.



A few well-placed fixtures on a front walk — not placed like a runway, but tucked into the garden — are an attractive way to illuminate the nighttime landscape for safety.



The garden at night is fit to be enjoyed when proper lighting is considered.

A quality, low-voltage system can be pricey to install, so think long term, and consider phasing in an installation so that the best transformer can be part of the picture now.

Safety. DiSchino, who has been involved with the landscape lighting industry for more than 30 years, suggests, “Start with your safety or security lighting first. These are the most useful fixtures to have in place.”

“Safety first” means be certain that all circulation in the landscape can be visible to navigate in the evening hours. For some, that may mean a few well-placed fixtures on a front walk — not placed like a runway, but tucked into the garden or along stepways so that only the illumination and not the source is seen. For others, it may mean every path, step and walking surface needs light to address active evening use of the landscape. In this case, the opportunity is presented to layer safety lighting with functional lighting and to work in more complex controls where lamps can be turned off and on or dimmed at will.

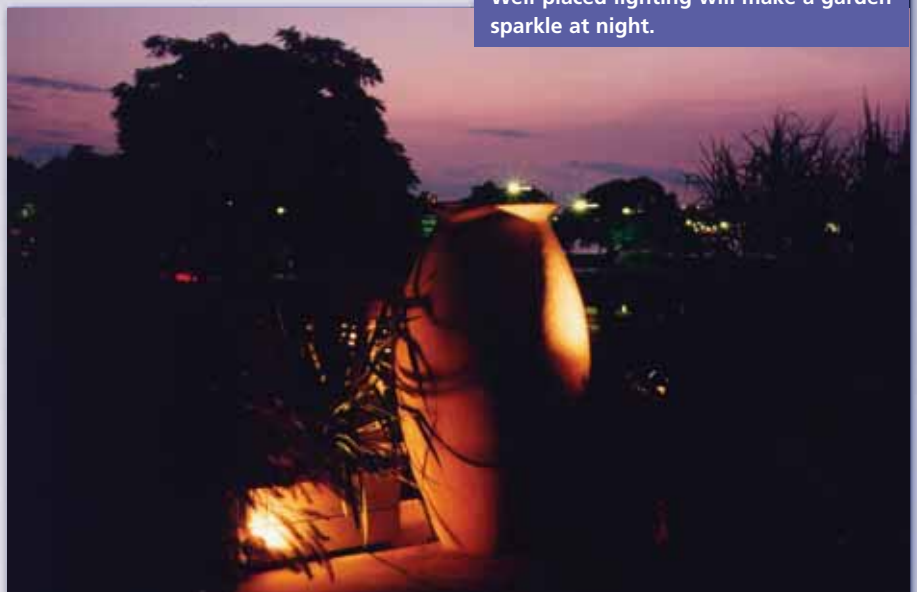
Goldstein advises, “Know your client. Ask how long they will be in the house. Notice their age: Older folks need more light for the same tasks.” She wisely points out that understanding the unique character of your client, as well as their landscape, will further drive the complexity of the system. These forethoughts may translate to more illumination or more hands-off controls.

Lighting design seems simple at first

blush, but it is important to understand why any object or area is being lit at all. What is the reason? Ask the client why they want lighting. As obvious as this may sound, it is really the central purpose that needs defining. The mistake that often happens when the “why” is not defined is that *everything* gets lit up.

“Only when you try to replicate what the garden looks like in the day will you ‘overlight,’” says Goldstein.

Task. The garden as we know it during the daylight hours fades away into the shadows of evening darkness. Lighting must have purpose in order to “read” well at



Well-placed lighting will make a garden sparkle at night.

Lighting effects

DOWN

To mimic the moon

- Showdown casting through tree branches
- Illumination of circulation

BACK

To mimic the sun

- Illuminate silhouettes of features
- Create a glow to highlight plants

UP

To highlight (does not mimic nature)

- Grazing an architectural element
- Spotlighting up a plant
- Feature lighting art

SAFETY

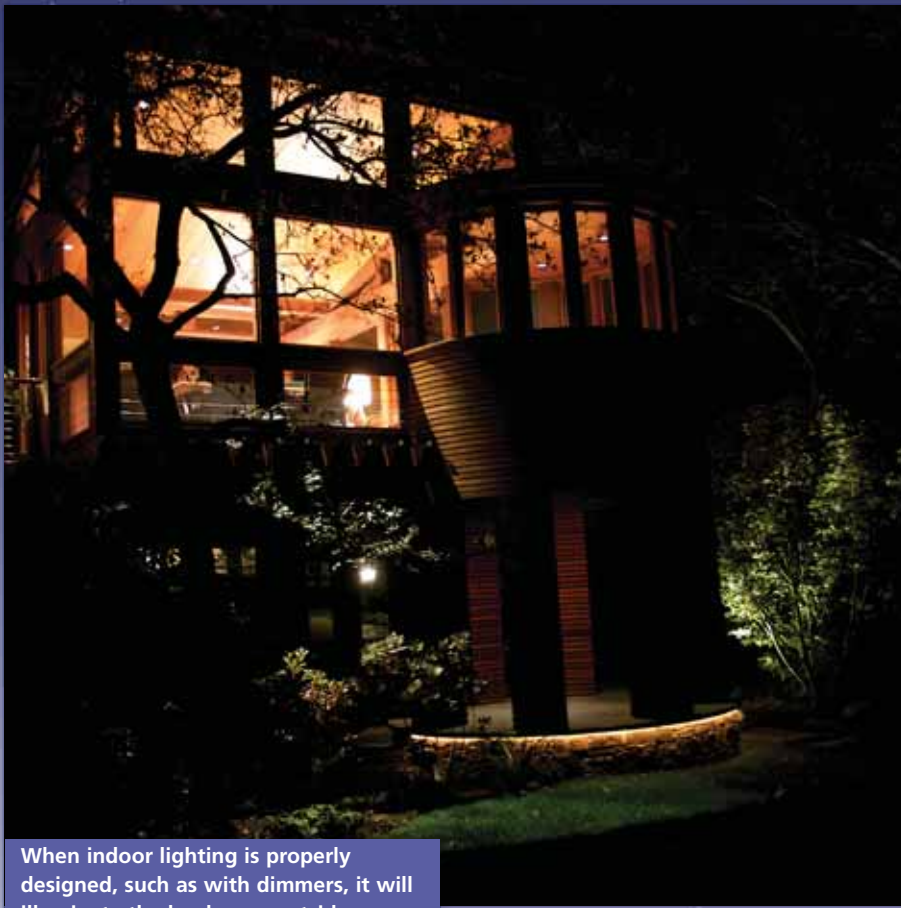
To improve land use in evening hours

- Illumination of walks and steps
- Brighten darkened areas for visibility
- Light elevation change and hazard potentials (water)

night. This purpose is achieved by prioritizing the functional aspect of the design and by overlapping techniques.

Function or task lighting means providing light so that activity may continue into the night hours with ease. Lighting from above to emulate the moon’s glow might highlight a driveway. Illumination from below to wash a patio with pools of light will add hours to sitting outside in the night air, but not the darkness. Lighting coming from under a set of stair treads not only makes the steps easy to see, but also outlines the architecture to create a wonderful evening picture.

Sparkle. Goldstein says lighting for ambience or sparkle is one of her favorite techniques; it’s like icing on the cake. This kind of lighting is necessary to take the night-



When indoor lighting is properly designed, such as with dimmers, it will illuminate the landscape outside.

time landscape to the next level. Trained in theatrical lighting design, Goldstein understands the richness of illumination that is well-placed for effect alone. Her low-voltage lighting scenes show off art that is barely noticed in the day, echoes a city skyline with grace and works with light indoors to show off architecture.



These houses sparkle in the night with the use of clever lighting.

“Successful landscape lighting satisfies safety, security and aesthetic criteria through informed use of the controllable qualities of light,” says Goldstein. To her, success means understanding all the layers that can be worked with to maximize the evening experience.

One of the hurdles faced in the residential landscape is the presence of the overly common, line-voltage lamppost fixture. DiSchino says, “A decorative colonial-style lamppost and fixture can be quite pretty as an architectural feature in the landscape by day. But the light doesn’t do much more than produce uncomfortable glare at night.” His advice is to put the lamp on a dimmer so that it can be used as a subtle decorative feature.

Goldstein jokes that poorly placed lampposts are like “glare bombs on a stick,” and she suggests that just because the fixture can handle three 60-watt bulbs doesn’t mean this wattage should be used. Try using three 15-watt bulbs to get a subtle, decorative glow, and then incorporate functional, low-voltage lamps to apply safety illumination in the most useful places. “Never rely on a lamppost for safety or to navigate by,” advises Goldstein.

DiSchino points out, “There is usually no need to tell clients that their existing lighting is all wrong — especially if they are attached to the fixtures, which they often are.” Instead, suggest that line-voltage



Low-voltage lighting scenes show off landscape features that are barely noticed in the day, but can echo a city skyline with grace in the evening.

units can be layered into the landscape as decorative elements, and offer to properly light the way with discrete, more controllable, low-voltage lamps.

Other considerations. The hurdle of low-voltage lighting is many times worse in commercial and municipal settings where the prime purpose for lighting is often security. Throwing more light around isn’t the answer, but is often the result. The International Dark-Sky Association (IDA) has a mission in place “to preserve and protect the nighttime environment and our heritage of dark skies through quality outdoor lighting.” IDA is taking its mission to municipalities all over the globe in an effort to raise awareness and implement standards for outdoor lighting that will reduce light pollution in the form of vision-robbing glare, light trespass into neighboring properties and sky glow (which reduces the ability to see the night sky and stars). Simple measures — such as proper placement and aiming of lamps, installation of shields or frosted glass and the use of full cut-off fixtures — promote better visibility and energy conservation along with the intended security.

The residential setting isn’t without its negative contributions to light pollution, especially in closely built communities. Lampposts are huge culprits in producing glare and light trespass. By dimming these lamps to a decorative level and using low-voltage lamps for safety and functional lighting, the desired illumination will be produced without harsh side effects.

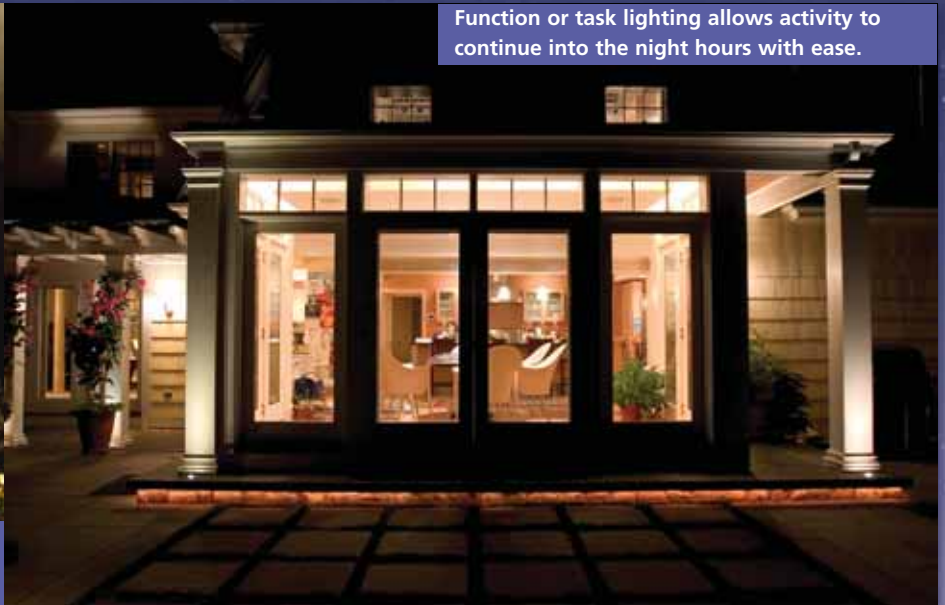


Lighting coming from under a set of stair treads not only makes the steps easy to see, but also outlines the architecture.



Nighttime lighting can draw attention to landscape features that looked ordinary by day.

Collaboration in the design of lighting systems for residential, commercial and municipal projects is where success is sure to be had. Landscape designers, architects, electricians and builders — who all hold the same goal of improving the use of outdoor environments — should work as a team to ensure a positive outcome. Goldstein says, “The most impor-



Function or task lighting allows activity to continue into the night hours with ease.

tant thing I learned in theatrical lighting is each profession, each job is important in getting a scene right.” Through the collaborative efforts across the professions involved in design and construction, superb scenes will emerge.

One interesting attribute of outdoor lighting is its value when viewed from inside a properly lit indoor space. Normally, when the lights are on indoors, all you can see is a reflection of the room in the glass: the black mirror effect. When indoor lighting is properly designed, it will not produce that harsh, mirroring effect, so the illuminated landscape outside can be appreciated. Placing interior lamps on dimmers can also have the effect of lessening this reflective quality. If flexible controls are worked into the exterior lighting design, allowing for adjusted illumination levels, this, too, will aid in appreciating outdoors scenes from indoors.



Aesthetic lighting turns this fountain into a focal point of the landscape.

A well-lit landscape can offer safety and task lighting that is aesthetically pleasing.



Landscape lighting has value in all climates and regions by extending the appreciation and use of outdoor spaces into the evening hours. Darkness may come early in your region for much of the year. Heat and humidity may keep you indoors when the sun is up. It may be a long workday that keeps you hustling rather than relaxing in a garden. When a landscape is well-lit for easy access, comfort and a little sparkle, it has the power to bring a deeper level of joy, relaxation and appreciation to all who have the opportunity to engage it. No matter the price, the value is there. With a well-planned design, sturdy equipment and professional installation, low-voltage lighting can be available on some level to every customer and garden enthusiast.

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