

# Tips for Dramatic Landscape Lighting

by Constantine G. Pergantis

Landscape lighting has become very fashionable. Gone are the days of driving down dark streets to find your house using only the headlights of your car or an infrequent street light to guide you. Today, starter homes to mansions are dramatically illuminated with lighting.

There are a variety of lighting techniques to make your home look just right and to avoid having it look like it's for sale or the "runway" effect we all dislike. Glare is your enemy. And, in most cases, less is more.

To accomplish a quality lighting job, most designers use the following techniques:

- **Up lighting** is the most common way to light up trees to show the trunk and branch structure. Dogwoods, birches, and maples are most conducive to up lighting—as opposed to pines and hollies. Lighting the corners of your property will help extend your view. Lights should shine up in between windows—rather than at them.
- **Down lighting** from taller trees creates a moonlighting effect and focuses more on the grounds than the individual tree. The key to down lighting is the higher the better.

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- **Cross lighting** utilizes two or more fixtures to fully enhance the tree. In most cases, wider and lower trees should be viewed from multiple perspectives and will need to have shielding in the fixtures.
- **Silhouette lighting** allows an interesting or not-so-beautiful tree to be enhanced. By illuminating the wall, house or fence behind the plant or tree, the eye focuses more on the details of the tree—rather than the tree itself.
- **Path lighting**, in many cases, has been overdone. A common mistake is to place too many lights on one or both sides of the path, or to use a visible light source which creates glare. Path-lighting fixtures can either be pole mounted along a path, or recessed or sur-

face mounted in a retaining wall. Many path lights have adjustments so you can change the diameter of the beam spread. Driveways or paths that are surrounded by trees can have up lighting on the trees so the ground will have residual light.

Once you've grasped these lighting techniques, you should examine your yard and decide which areas are most important. Areas to illuminate can include some or all of the following: driveway, path, house/façade, trees, sculptures, statuary, ponds, waterfalls, deck, patio, gazebo, walls, pool and spa. Bear in mind that landscape lighting will appear differently in winter than in summer. Many people find landscape lighting looks more interesting when there is little foliage or when it's snowing.

## Outer Space

Last, but most importantly, is using the proper luminaire with the best lamp to get the job done just right. In addition, the color of the fixture should be considered so it will blend into the landscape during the daytime. Designers strive to hide the fixtures by day and to create the impression that the light source is emanating from somewhere else (other than the actual source) by night.

Thirty years ago a homeowner's landscape-lighting options included a floodlight for the trees, a pagoda for the driveway and paths, and that was about it. Today, there are many specialized fixtures, and even more lamp sources, to choose from. Homes can look like show places without breaking the bank. In the past, the fixtures were made of steel and would corrode over time. Aluminum and PVC have

replaced steel. Copper, brass, and bronze are quickly becoming more common. Incandescent lamps have been replaced with halogen, fluorescent, and xenon lamps. LED's, which have mainly been used indoors for specialized applications, are slowly making their way outside.

To spark your creativity, spend some time on the Internet and think about homes you've seen in the past. Finally, consult with a lighting professional to ensure a lighting plan you can be proud of.



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