



# LANDSCAPE LIGHT ARTISTRY

Perhaps you have never considered landscape lighting and may even consider it frivolous, but to me landscape illumination is essential to every beautiful al fresco living space.

**L**uminosity tells the story after dark by providing a visual harmony between house and landscape. Plus, current studies prove outside leisure areas are used most often into the evening. Therefore, a well thought-out lighting plan provides a magical world of drama and mystery that also extends the use of any and every outdoor living space.

## LIGHTING TECHNIQUES

- **Up-lights:** These are the most common landscape lighting methods, but beware of using just one lighting technique. Up-lights are used best sparingly on trees with interesting branch structure, leaf texture or bark. They can be installed closer to the trunk of a tree, or farther away and to shine into the canopy.
- **Path lighting:** The second most commonly used fixture is the path light, and it's rarely done well. Best used to accent favoured plant life; think of them as providing gentle hints for where to go next. Don't use them as an outlining tool or as an airstrip. Less is more, thus incorporate them sparingly.
- **Down lighting:** Sometimes called moonlighting, this is my favoured lighting style. In areas with large trees, this effect provides a subtle, dappled look that makes path lighting often unnecessary. For the result to be successful, the fixture needs to be installed 30-to-40 feet high in the tree to achieve the most natural look, and to keep it hidden.

- **Grazing:** Grazing is a lighting effect used most to wash the front of the house with illumination by accenting interesting textures, structural elements and roof lines. It also works well in conjunction with the next two effects.
- **Shadowing:** By shining a light on the front of a tree, a shadow is created on the house behind. But be careful to keep the shadows from looking obviously distorted, giving a spooky effect.
- **Silhouetting:** Opposite to the shadow effect is the silhouetting technique, where the light is placed behind the tree, making only its dark outline visible.
- **Spot lighting:** Spot lighting is appropriate on any focal point, such as an arbour, garden art, statue or fountain. Be careful of light shining directly in the eye from all common vantage points.
- **Hardscape lights:** Hardscape lights are an indirect way to accentuate pillars, seating walls and stairs. These lights must be installed when doing your stonework and cannot be retrofitted easily, so choose carefully!

## LIGHT COLOUR & STRENGTH

- When selecting a light fixture, focus on the light the fixture emits and not the fixture itself. The best-illuminated scenes have no

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visible fixtures. Be aware of the light colour the fitting emits. A **kelvin** is a unit of measurement describing the hue of a light source. Natural moonlight has a slightly cool tone and a kelvin rating of 5,500. Firelight is at the other end of the spectrum with a warm yellow of 2,000 kelvins. Combining the cooler light of the moon with the warm glow of fire is always a winning combination.

- A **lumen** is a unit of measurement describing the light contained in a certain area. The higher the lumen output, the brighter the light. In the landscape, subtle lumen output (usually 400 and below) per fixture is best. Be aware of any street lights near your property as all luminosity will appear brighter when contrasted to a darker backdrop.

## LIGHT POLLUTION

- Light pollution is the result of outdoor lighting improperly shielded, allowing light to be directed into the night sky. Poorly planned lighting can also cause light trespass into unwanted areas, such as a neighbour's windows. In the past 100 years our sky has turned from a black star-lit one to a dull orangey glow, disrupting circadian rhythms and hormone balances of all living organisms. The International Dark Sky Association was created in 1988 to guard against sky-glow, and since then, many cities worldwide

have joined. Be universally responsible to the environment when developing your lighting strategy by following these rules:

- Keep up-lights to a minimum and never shine them straight up into the sky. Choose fixtures with cowls or purchase the optional cowl to direct the light. Choose down-lights instead wherever possible.
- Don't install bright or unnecessary lights. Amazingly, studies prove that security lighting has no effect on crime at all. Keep the lighting subtle and select a lower lumen output.
- Install a timer. Set your timer to reflect how you use your outdoor space. You can even choose separate weekday/weekend cycles.
- Choose LED. An LED system will cost more initially but the return on your investment is quickly felt as it uses 80 per cent less energy than a halogen or incandescent bulb.

Outdoor lighting is the final but often forgotten step in many landscaping schemes, yet is the fastest to complete and also has the biggest impact. Why leave your gorgeous outdoor space invisible after sunset? Don't you dare forget those fascinating, enchanting and captivating outdoor lights! **OH**

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PHOTOS COURTESY OF KITTLER LIGHTING



*A well thought-out lighting plan can provide drama and extend the use of your outdoor living space*

