

Outdoor Lighting: The Illuminated Garden

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Ah, spring at last! Once more there's all the excitement of growing things, the sounds of birds, the smell of buds. Once more the yard, lawn and garden become a veritable wonderland, an enchanting vista that may be enjoyed not just during daylight hours but as part of the evening scene as well. How? With lighting, of course.

There are several schools of thought as to what constitutes good yard and garden lighting. The first is what I would describe as the *"marker light approach"* in which the aim is to develop pools of light from architectural or some other fixture (though preferably not a fixture of the "cutesy" kind such as the one I've seen depicting a frog under his umbrella). This marker light technique creates paths and trails going off in various directions and often results in a sort of airport or cityscape look. You'd almost expect to see a flow of airplanes or cars moving along those light-delineated paths.

Variety of "Marker Lights"



Another approach – and one I strongly recommend – is the *development of "scenes."* The idea here is to "paint a composition" with light to be viewed from a specific vantage point. In this approach the scenes are developed one at a time.

Let's see how we might go about building a garden composition. First, select a

focus point – oh, say, that large oak tree over there and let it serve as background. Against this backdrop, we will want to add accents – smaller objects such as selected bushes, flowers, sculpture, benches, perhaps even a waterfall. Creating a garden composition of balance, counterpoint and surprise is clearly a large and complex undertaking, but the basic concept behind it is not that complicated. And that is to select a few specific objects and light them in context with each other to produce a composed scene of an enchanted garden at night.

So how shall we light this scene? No, not by climbing through the branches of our oak tree and attaching fixtures hither and yon. Instead we locate a spot in the ground under the tree where an in-ground fixture can be placed to shine an up-light on the overhead canopy. When properly placed and shielded from the intended viewing angle, this set-up results in a soft and interesting illuminated background onto which smaller accents can be added.

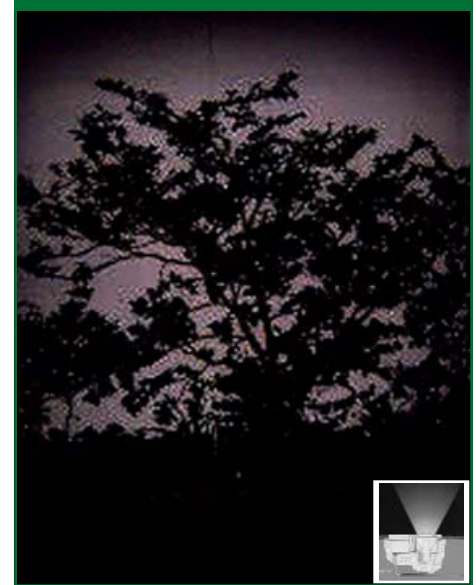
Trunks with canopy not quite in leaf, but nevertheless dramatic!



This single in-ground unit works at its optimum when it is lit with high-intensity discharge metal halide lamping. A lamp as small as 100-watt gives more than enough pleasing light with a high efficacy of 7,000-plus lumens and an average lamp life of 10,000 hours.

For smaller objects – bushes, flower, sculpture, walls, etc. – there are small, above-ground fixtures equipped with ground stakes and cords to permit flexibility in placement.

A 100-watt, high efficiency "burial" unit lights a white brick wall to silhouette camelia



The secret to exciting garden lighting, however, lies not so much in the light source but in the placement and pattern of the light. All too often, the unthinking approach is to aim a wide beam at the garden, rather like using automobile headlights to flood the scene. A far better technique is to go under, behind or above each object one by one and throw "grazing"

light to create exciting highlights and shadows that carve forms from the darkness to produce patterns that we would never see in the daytime. In this manner we build a composition of selected pieces, item by item, to make a total scene. And scene by scene we create night time vistas that add a new and magical dimension to your yard and garden. ■

About the Author

Bill Joel received his B.A. from Brown University with creative design courses at

the Rhode Island School of Design. He did further studies in interior and lighting design at the New York School of Design and Pratt Institute.

A professional member of AID-ASID from 1963 to 1993, Bill received a Fellowship from ASID in 1978. In 1992, he became one of the first Certified Interior Designers of the Commonwealth of Virginia. His work experience includes residential, commercial and institutional remodeling and new structures, as well as a number of feasibility studies, all with an

emphasis on effective, energy-conscious, quality-lit environments. For more details, consult *Marquis Who's Who in America*. Bill has also served as a member of the FIDER Board of Visitors and Accreditation Committee, Foundation for Interior Design Education and Research; set and lighting designer for the Richmond Forum and Barksdale Theatre; and guest speaker on various radio and TV spots. Bill may be reached at Rich@RichArtCo.com.

Nandena and Azalea
lit from below



Crabapple daring
to be dramatic

