

Light plantastic!

Now that gardens are being considered as external rooms, getting the lighting right outside is just as important as making sure guests can see properly in the living room

WORDS BY JILL ENTWISTLE

TWO DRAMATIC PRIVATE GARDEN SCHEMES BY JOHN CULLEN: NARROW BEAM LOW VOLTAGE SPOTS CREATE HIGH CONTRAST (MAIN PICTURE) WHILE FITTINGS BACKLIGHTING THE FOLIAGE CREATE ROMANTIC SHADOWING AND DAPPLING (CENTRE RIGHT). BOTTOM RIGHT: LISA ISHII'S SCHEME FOR A JAPANESE RESIDENCE UPLIGHTS THE RED PINES WITH A COMPLEMENTARY COLOUR TEMPERATURE

Technique tips:

Rebecca Weir, Light IQ

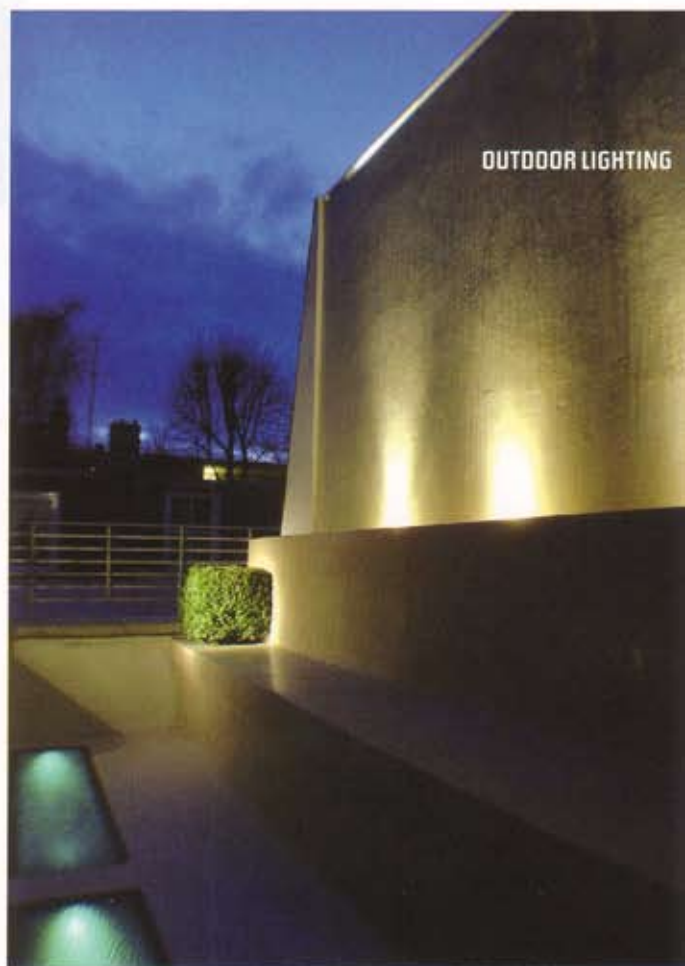
'One of my favourite techniques is moonlighting, where we put a fitting high in the tree to simulate the effect of a full moon. You notice the effect, but not the fitting. It's so beautiful and so sympathetic to a natural garden. You use a metal halide lamp, but not too cool – you don't want it too blue. Use a filter to give a softer quality and take the blue out.'

'The biggest mistake people make is trying to light planting that's too dense or has nowhere to carry it. It is very difficult to light a flower bed from within the flower bed. Light needs to have time to travel to provide a wash over the bed. Unless there is some detail or some kind of elevation within the flower bed, it is just going to look like a little burnt hot spot.'

Peter Veale, Firefly Lighting Design

'I've always loved the simple uplighting of trees or getting a moonlighting effect through a tree onto a wall, so you get the movement of the tree and lots of organic shapes. You have to ask the landscape designer what trees they have got, and which are the stand-out ones. Another nice effect is putting a light behind a tree so you see it lit but don't know how it's done.'

'The thing about functional lighting is not making it look like you have used functional industrial fittings. If you use step lights rather than floodlighting it just becomes that much more gentle and discreet. I'm a great lover of step lighting because by accenting them you can really cut down on your ambient lighting.'



OUTDOOR LIGHTING

Ever since gardens stopped being just gardens and became outside rooms, lighting them is an increasing preoccupation. From the most basic low-voltage kit at B&Q to the most sophisticated fibre optic arrangement for a concrete cascade, garden and landscape lighting has burgeoned like a leylandia.

As with interior lighting, the secret lies in integration, layering and control. Unlike interiors, gardens are subject to weather, falling leaves and soil, and are dynamic rather than static as plants grow, die or shed leaves through the seasons.

'Gardens are exactly the same as interiors in terms of how you approach them,' says Rebecca Weir of Light IQ, who works with top Chelsea landscape designer Charlotte Rowe. 'Look at what your focal point is and build up around it. Layering is important. People get bored quickly so have a few scenes, even if it's just two for summer and one for winter.'

Creating different scenes means that whatever the scheme, it must be on a control system, a point which lighting designers are adamant about and which is often overlooked in garden lighting. 'People always think you can control garden lighting from one point,' says Weir. 'For example, many people have basement kitchens but ground floor living rooms, which is a different viewpoint. It's great to be able to control the lighting from the master bedroom. And you don't necessarily need all lights on at the same time. It can be very easy to install extra controls for the garden.'

'A nice effect is to have the accent lighting outside slowly coming on as daylight fades – you shouldn't have sources suddenly starting up in different places,' says Peter Veale of Firefly Lighting Design, who has worked on a range of garden and landscape schemes in the UK and overseas.

When planning the scheme, Weir recommends looking at



the hardscaping first. 'It's easier to look at the structure of the garden and then look at the planting as secondary to that. Also, it's important to work closely with the garden designer because their plans will change. There's no point throwing in light when you don't even know what it's lighting.'

Establishing different viewpoints is also essential to creating a well-rounded scheme and ensures the perfect perspective from the conservatory isn't a glaring error when viewed from above. 'You have to make sure it works from all angles from within the property and upon arrival,' says Veale. 'You can't light from one plane – you're working in 3D.'

Less is more, according to Weir, and Veale agrees. 'It's a chance for accenting to come to the fore. I learned this deep sea diving – by day you can see everything, whereas at night you have to get closer. You should draw people to certain things with pools of light, not by washing every surface.'

This extends to the use of colour, about which most lighting designers are firm: use it rarely for vegetation and carefully in more architectural gardens. 'Using coloured lights creates an unflattering, unrealistic look in the garden,' says US lighting designer and author Randall Whitehead.

Colour temperature of white light is also crucial if vegetation is to be flattered rather than flattened. 'Matching the colour temperature and the tree species is extremely important,' says Paris-based lighting designer Akari-Lisa Ishii. She has recently completed a project near Kobe, in her native Japan. 'The lighting for the garden was meant to emphasise the beautiful red pine trees which characterised the site. We used a 250W halogen projector to produce a warm colour temperature with the lighting thrown up softly to show the red trunk and the mass of branches up in the dark sky.'

Two of the most useful fittings for the garden and



OUTDOOR LIGHTING

landscape are the buried uplight (though not in an environment which is likely to be badly maintained) and the spiked low voltage tungsten halogen spot. However, at the top end of the market there is an increasing obsession about the invisibility of fittings as well as a sort of arms race over having something that no one else has. Both preoccupations have led to an increased use of technologies like fibre optics.

Weir is currently lighting an acacia orchard using fibre optics with a metal halide source and sparkle wheel to create movement in the lighting. 'When light is too static,' she says, 'it looks fixed. That's why using water is dynamic in a garden.'

Veale is also in the process of using fibre optics to create a dynamic effect, this time underwater for a swimming pool in Fiji. Fibre optics are an obvious option for a watery environment but here they are used inside milky glass pebbles interspersed with ordinary pebbles on the bottom of the pool. 'I originally wanted to use animation projectors to mimic a sunlight effect, but it was beyond the budget,' says Veale.

Even for the professional lighting designer, the key to a good landscape scheme is experimentation. For those without extensive experience, it's crucial, says Weir.

'My advice is to wire up a couple of light fittings, say 20W and 50W, and site test them. Learn to understand how much light is absorbed by plants and how much is reflected – examine it from different viewpoints and you'll realise where the major glare is coming from or whether the beam is too wide and you're lighting something you don't want to. You have to learn what light will do for you.' **idFX**



TOP LEFT: LEDS BACKLIGHTING GLASS SQUARES PRODUCE REFLECTIONS ON THE PLANTERS AND A COLOUR-CHANGE SETTING CREATES GREAT EFFECTS FOR PARTIES. TOP RIGHT: COLOURED FILTERS ON TINY LOW VOLTAGE UPLIGHTS LET THE OWNER CHANGE THE COLOURS ACCORDING TO WHO'S PLAYING AT NEARBY CHELSEA FC. ABOVE: ICELAND 44 WALL FITTING BY GERMAN COMPANY HELESTRA. BELOW LEFT: TOP JAPANESE LIGHTING DESIGNER MOTOKO ISHII'S MOONLIGHT EFFECT AT UEDA CASTLE IN SHINSHU



SOME THINGS TO CONSIDER

- Tree uplighting is effective – but not every tree, unless the desired effect is something out of the Blair Witch Project.
- Unless the fixture is aesthetic or makes a design statement, make sure it is camouflaged or concealed during the day.
- Light pollution is a key concern. Make sure fittings have cowls or bardoors to minimise unnecessary upward light spill or intrusion into neighbouring spaces.
- Colour filters should be used carefully with vegetation as they

can create a very unnatural appearance. And colour temperature can enhance or harshen foliage according to its colour.

- Consider the seasons and how different the space will look. Control systems are essential anyway but here they can be used to create varying scenes for winter and summer, possibly switching off one circuit if vegetation has died back.
- Porches/front doors are a key area as they welcome visitors and, when well-lit, make people feel safe. Wall lights on either side of

the door are an obvious option, but if fittings can be concealed, then accenting plants in tubs can be as effective, or using buried uplights to graze up the walls.

- Lighting for areas such as paths or steps should be functional but also aesthetic – grazing with steplights rather than floodlighting or using low level asymmetric fittings to skim light across pathways achieves both objectives, for instance.
- When using buried fittings make sure there isn't a heat issue – if the

glass gets too hot it can burn, especially important where children are around. Also make sure they will be maintained and not become entombed under piles of leaves and mud.

- Lighting swimming pools internally is a common technique and is safer for gardens used by children (if to be viewed from the house, ensure that fittings are installed on the house side of the pool). However, pools can also be highly effective if used simply as a reflective surface.