

# LIGHTING UP THE GARDEN

**ILLUMINATING OUTDOOR SPACE IS MORE THAN AN ISSUE OF PRACTICALITY. AS CLEVE WEST REVEALS IN THE FINAL PART OF HIS SERIES, THE SIMPLEST SOLUTION COULD TRANSFORM YOUR GARDEN INTO A NIGHT-TIME WONDERLAND**



Whether it is aesthetic or functional, lighting – if used sensitively – can add a whole new dimension to the garden that perfectly encapsulates the notion of ‘the room outside’. As ever, forward planning is essential, and while it’s possible to add lighting to an existing garden, new projects should include plans for this element even if it’s not going to be installed immediately. On a purely functional level lighting has obvious uses in front gardens where security is an issue or where paths and steps need negotiating. A simple porch light on a timer or sensor may be all that’s needed, though these can be annoying if pedestrians in the street activate the lights every few minutes. In the back garden, paths to sheds, outhouses or anything that will be used regularly may need directional lighting, but there’s no need to illuminate everything. A terrace may need light for cooking and entertaining, but generally speaking light should be subdued to create a calming atmosphere. If security lighting is needed here it should be on a separate circuit that can then be conveniently disabled when not required.

The difficult part is knowing what deserves highlighting and the effect you are trying to achieve. In daylight everything is lit so how you perceive the garden relies on the elements that have already been covered in

this series and how well they have been put together. At night, lights give you more control on how the garden is viewed. In effect, it becomes a stage set that, depending on the drama you want to create, can be manipulated to achieve simple or complex effects limited only by your imagination and budget.

## HIGHLIGHTING FEATURES IN THE GARDEN

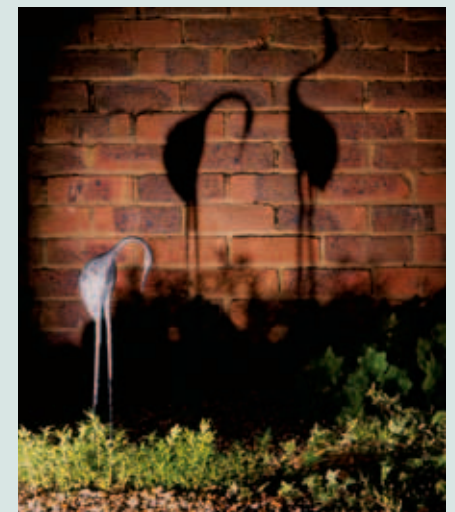
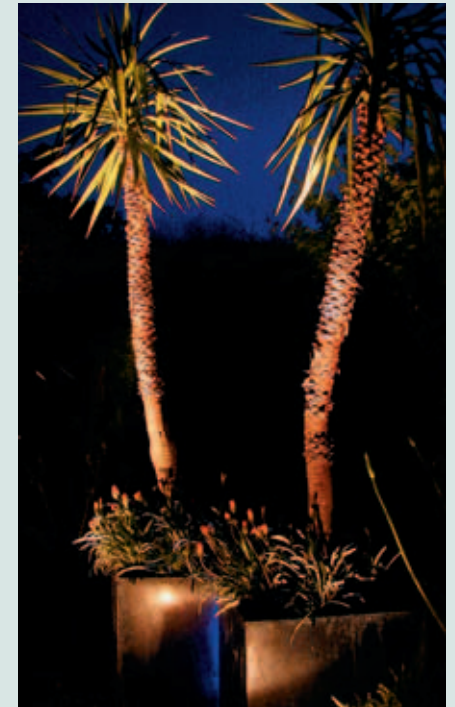
Up-lighting a tree is predictable and perhaps a little over-used, particularly on trees that are hardly worth the attention. Having said that, there are cases where the effect can be staggering. While one tree might look good, several (preferably of the same tree) can look even more effective, but this is largely dependent on the placement of the trees in the first place. Taking it to the extreme, a group or block of trees might be used sculpturally to complement or contrast with imposing architecture and, if well-lit at night, will create a powerful sense of place. For example, blocks of birch designed by Dieter Kienast and Günther Vogt look striking against the austerity of London’s Tate Modern. This is accentuated even more when, lit up at night, the white stems help to create intimate space in



**RIGHT, FROM TOP: LUCIANO GIUBBILEI’S DESIGN SHOWS SUBTLE UP-LIGHTING OF SCULPTURAL TREES. HALOGEN SPOTLIGHTS CAN HIGHLIGHT PARTICULAR ELEMENTS.**

*Jerry Hamer, Cleve West*

# ELEMENTS OF GARDEN DESIGN



a potentially oppressive setting. Other obvious features such as pots, architectural plants and water features may benefit from soft lighting, particularly where there is repetition of form. Disparate objects can lead to a disjointed sequence of highlights with too many elements competing for attention – creating annoying spotlights instead of harmony. This might be a result of the design itself lacking cohesion (for instance, too many focal points) and is a useful lesson in restraint, but often it's a case of not enough lights in the first place. Softer lighting picking up other elements around your intended subject will diffuse the harshness of the spotlight, helping the subject to 'sit' more comfortably. Consider, too,

using more than one spotlight, especially if the subject is large. Light from different angles again helps to soften the overall effect by bringing more than one plane to life. Uplighters placed obliquely to screens, hedges and walls accentuate and exaggerate textural qualities that would be lost using lights placed perpendicular to the subject. Anything in-between will cast dramatic shadows on these moving elements, static or vertical depending on your choice of subject. Light in or around water opens up possibilities for many different effects. Perhaps the most dramatic is where light picks out a plant, tree or sculpture situated in or close to water where it will be reflected.

**ABOVE: A DESIGN BY PHIL NASH, WITH TUNGSTEN AND FLUORESCENT LIGHTING, ACCENTUATES THE TEXTURAL QUALITIES OF THE PLANTS. OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: OIL**

Submerged lights need to be focused on something specific and carefully disguised to stop them looking as though they've fallen in accidentally. Hidden light under a shelf of running water can produce a magical glow, as can light behind a waterfall, making it sparkle.

**TYPES OF LIGHT FITTINGS**  
There are many different types of light fittings, each with their own characteristic, and unless you are going to buy a small range of lights to experiment

**CANS ON BAMBOO POLES. DRAMATIC UPLIGHTING. UNDER-STATED SILHOUETTES CAN BE ACHIEVED BY ILLUMINATING INDIVIDUAL OBJECTS. HOME-MADE PAPER LANTERNS.**

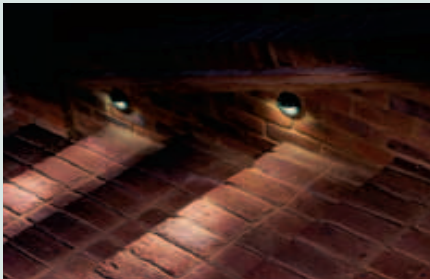
with it's always worth getting an expert to show pictures or demonstrate what can be achieved. Low-voltage halogen lamps are probably the most common lights used, ranging from tiny spotlights to floods powerful enough to illuminate buildings and trees. They usually make up the bulk of garden lighting where directional light is needed. Fluorescent strip lighting (240v) behind a screen or wall can be useful for introducing ambient light to the garden. The light reflected from the

surface material back on to plants will give a soft wash effect. Coloured lighting needs to be used deliberately and purposefully if it is not to look like some sort of 1960s psychedelic experiment. However, modern LEDs (light emitting diodes) have shown us how colour can be used and controlled in many different and subtle ways, combining well with materials such as glass, Perspex and metals in contemporary gardens. LEDs are less powerful than halogen lights and are therefore used to create softer effects on steps, under benches and pool edges. They are useful for subtle glows between containers or along a path where restraint is called for. Emitting a very low heat, and cool to touch, they are

particularly useful where floor lighting is needed or where there is a danger of contact. They can also be submerged in water and their long lamp life (100,000 hours) means they are extremely low maintenance. Fibre optics are different in that they operate from one 240v light source that is then transmitted along silica-based fibres to the application. Often seen as pinpoints of light in walls and paving, the malleable nature of the fibres makes it an innovative, if expensive product. It can also be safely used in water and is particularly useful for lighting waterspouts or left to flow in a stream, creating an illusion of submerged fireflies. A colour wheel at the source can produce any number of different effects.

Opposite: Derek & Rommie; This page: Derek & Rommie; Clockwise from top left: Phil Nash, Justin Williams

# ELEMENTS OF GARDEN DESIGN



**Tips for installation**

- Address lighting issues at the design stage – for example, lights for steps are much easier to install during construction, and armoured electricity cable for lights can be laid in suitable conduit under terraces and through walls to keep wiring safe and out of sight.
- Keep the source of the light hidden – there is always a risk that lighting can become irritating, shining into the eyes of those using the garden, as well as next-door neighbours. Light pollution is a problem in cities and may even affect rural districts where lights aren't so common.
- During installation it's always worth installing more transformers than you actually need so that extra lights can be added if necessary. Also, a generous length on the cable will allow lights to be repositioned as plants grow or where a change of emphasis is needed. A dimmer switch is also useful to control light intensity.
- Pay for good-quality lighting. Quality lights tend to be unobtrusive, simple and robust, whereas cheap imitations are less durable and, more often than not, over detailed – often detracting from the garden itself in daylight.
- Regardless of how easy it might seem to install modern light fittings, make sure you always employ a qualified electrician when dealing with mains electricity.

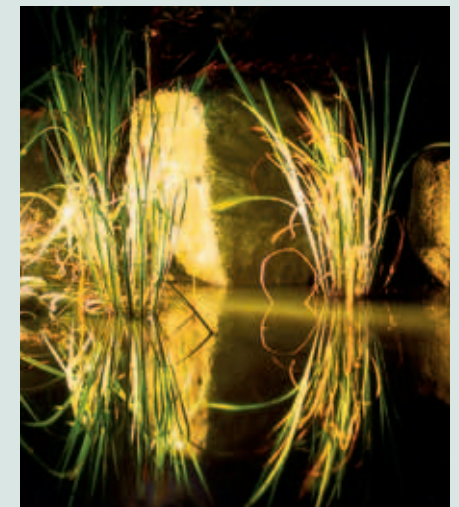
THIS PAGE, FROM TOP: RECESSED LED LIGHTING IN A GARDEN BY BONITA BULAITIS. SPOTLIGHTS FOR DECORATION AND SAFETY. CLEVE WEST'S 2001 CHELSEA GARDEN WITH BLUE FLUORESCENT STRIPS.

CLEVE'S ORIGINAL CHELSEA PLAN. OPPOSITE: PATRICK CLARKE'S WATER AND LIGHT FEATURE IS SIMPLE, BUT EFFECTIVE. ILLUMINATED POND PLANTS GIVE SPECTACULAR REFLECTIONS.



**Design and installation**

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Opposite: Derek S. Rowland; Cleve West; Joany Williams; This page: Cleve Nikolic; Joany Williams