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Publisher Name Here | 2012 Issue 3



THE OUTDOOR LIVING ISSUE

Destination: Patio

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This Little Yard of Mine, I'm Gonna Let It Shine

Invest in some flattering lighting to enhance the visual appeal of the great outdoors after the sun goes down

By **BETTINA CHANG** | CTW Features

A perfect storm of economic, weather and industry conditions have made 2012 the perfect year to consider outdoor lighting. “In the last eight to 10 months, it seems like people are focusing more on outdoor lighting,” says Greg Yale, a landscape lighting designer based in Southampton, N.Y.

Yale adds, “It’s also in large part due to great weather, so people

are focusing on the outdoors ahead of time.”

In addition, an explosion of innovation and design provides a wide variety of outdoor light bulbs and fixtures for homeowners. “The marketplace has opened up to accept different and innovative design ideas,” says Joe Rey-Barreau, education consultant for the American Lighting Association and an associate professor at the University of Kentucky’s School



Mark Lohman

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of Interior Design.

The Perfect Bulb

In particular, light-emitting diodes (LEDs) have become effective replacements for incandescent or halogen bulbs that were previously used in outdoor fixtures.

LEDs last longer (up to 50,000 hours, compared to 3,500 hours for an incandescent), are waterproof and energy-efficient. They're looking a lot nicer now, too: "They have matched the Kelvin temperature that I use in my lighting designs," Yale says.

That's an essential point, because the color temperature of a bulb (measured on the Kelvin scale) can make the difference between finding a bulb with the perfect warm glow or taking a frustrated trip to the hardware store to exchange a bulb that casts an eerie blue light.

"Today, when you go to the store, you almost need a degree to shop for a light bulb," Rey-Barreau jokes. New labeling requirements make it a tad easier – look for the color temperature scale on the "lighting facts" label,

and find a bulb between 2700K and 3000K for that warm glow, he recommends.

LEDs can provide a large amount of light from a small space. "A single LED is only about one-sixteenth inch square," Rey-Barreau says. "They are used in groups, mounted on a platform, so the fixtures can be small but produce a phenomenal amount of light," perfect for use between the slats of a railing, the corners of decks or on the risers of steps.

Fixture Fix

Innovation hasn't stopped at the bulb itself. Lighting fixtures and lamps for the outdoors are getting more attention from designers.

"In the U.S., we've been very traditional and colonial [in style], especially outdoors," Rey-Barreau says. "There's a trend to really weird-looking or interesting shapes now."

Sandra Soria, a design professional and author of "The New Front Yard Idea Book" (Taunton Press, 2012), agrees. "The fun part is that you can match a light to your architecture,"

she says. A Victorian home, for example, can have beautiful reproduction lamp posts in the front yard to enhance the façade. Ranch homes with mid-century design go best with stainless steel fixtures and modern shapes.

For homes with an earthy brick feel, Soria suggests taking advantage of metals that get better with wear. "They will put on a weathered patina that you can only get with the help of nature."

Common Pitfalls

Labeling is important for more than just bulbs. For those who want to save cash and hassle by installing solar-powered lights, "check out the boxes when you buy because they will tell you the light requirements in a similar way as when you're shopping for plants," Soria says.

She recommends solar lights because, "unlike any other lighting, they come in their own complete little package. There are no trenches, wires or transformer to install on your house." They are constantly improving and changing, so choose

carefully. Metal lights are more durable than plastic, and larger lights tend to have more solar panels that can collect and store more power.

Soria also warns against over-lighting a house, and Yale agrees. He uses minimal lighting in low wattage for his own designs and cautions homeowners to be mindful of this common mistake.

"If you turn the light switch on and look outside and you see a group of light sources that are egregious to the eye, then you've done something wrong," he says.

Rey-Barreau suggests that homeowners test out their lighting plans with a portable lighting kit from a local lighting showroom. The low-voltage kit makes it easy to test different light bulbs and angles at night before the installation process.

Last of all, Yale recommends that fixtures are mostly hidden from view. "If there is shadowing and silhouette and washes of light against the landscape without knowing where the source comes from, you've done a really good job," he says.

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Lighting Priorities

For those on a budget, it's important to prioritize areas to light in the front and back yard.

1 Code-required lights: The National Electric Code requires all entryways to a house or garage to be illuminated on the exterior side, says Joe Rey-Barreau, education consultant for the American Lighting Association.

2 Path lights: Enhance safety and security with mushroom lamps or other close-to-the-ground lamps. They illuminate driveways, sidewalks and steps and are considered essential by many homeowners. "They can have an aesthetic quality, but their main function is to light horizontal areas," Rey-Barreau says.



Illustration 2011 by the Taunton Press, Inc.

3 Accent lighting: Lights that are mounted in or on top of the ground that shine up are called accent lights, which are intended more for aesthetics. Rey-Barreau suggests to highlight unique and beautiful elements of the exterior, such as trees with interesting bark, eye-catching groundcover or architectural elements of the façade.

4 Entertainment lighting: Candles, string lights, fire features or outdoor lamps add style to outdoor areas. People increasingly are interested in bringing the outdoors in, which is evident by the number of living-room-type table and floor lamps that can be used outdoors.

5 Overall security lighting: Some people might find these optional, while others consider them essential. High-intensity bulbs that cover broad areas can be mounted in the eaves of the house at the roofline and connected to motion sensors to provide a layer of security for a home. The lighting can help visitors and passers-by or startle would-be intruders. "It makes you feel safer," Rey-Barreau says.