

AH!  
SWEET  
MYSTERY  
OF LIGHT!

# “I GO TO NATURE TO BE SOOTHED AND HEALED, AND TO HAVE MY SENSES PUT IN ORDER”

John Burroughs (1837–1921)

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THERE IS A yearly average of 4,300 hours of darkness in South East England of which there might be more than 1,500 waking hours during which the beauty and nocturnal mystery of our gardens could be better enjoyed. Are we doing so? If not – why not be ‘soothed and healed’, after dark?

Our rooms are extensions of our gardens – the space will be there long after the house is dust. Windows and French doors are only membranes but, when people prefer not to close their curtains or blinds after dark, the glazing acts as a mirror. Even with a little badly selected garden lighting, room reflections create barriers. Americans often refer to those as ‘veiling reflections’. Thus our evening world diminishes and the wholesome sense of space shrinks to the illusory proportions of the rooms.

There is hardly need to state how much better and more cheerful we can feel in sunlight or in good artificial lighting (not *foulrescent* – I add).

Recently a survey found that on average many general staff enjoy only approximately 20 minutes of daylight during a working day. And we wonder why ill health abounds?

So many of our moods are influenced by sunshine or its dearth and also by what we see. Many children are frightened of the darkness beyond the room – there is often the feeling that ‘someone is looking in’ and, not infrequently, there is! This is another reason why bare roof lights or Velux windows can be ‘spooky’ at night. So, even a little well-chosen exterior lighting can prevent those feelings and give reassurance.

In the early 1960’s many felt ‘guilty’ about

having any garden lighting. Most were troubled about being thought of as “ostentatious” – not that they were much concerned with energy use. Then, almost all sparse garden lighting was by inefficient, spiked spotlights using bulky and hot 240 volt, pressed armoured reflector lamps (PAR 38’s). Many, being badly placed, shrivelled the precious vegetation and it is still common to see scorched plants, struggling to survive the injury.

Now, people are more worried about energy, but even more vexed about security. Additionally, people are now more careful of ‘safety’ – whatever that might mean. For in these litigious times no homeowner wants to give grounds for some rapacious, no-win-no-fee legal ‘parasite’ to dent their home-insurance premium with a successful claim, for instance in “failing to provide either a safe night-time approach to the front door or for other mishaps in the rear garden”. Even from burglars! Yes, burglars!

You think that a joke? A north London magistrate confided how a burglar\* fell through roof glazing. He *allegedly* injured himself and successfully sued the property owner for substantial damages on the basis that, “the area around the window was hazardous at night”! Rub your eyes! Please read that again! So did the magistrate. That, together with other daft legislation biased in favour of villainy, spurred the magistrate to conclude that it was resignation time – after more than 25 years on The Bench.

[It is not quite true that The Health & Safety Executive are trying to locate the Creator to serve

\* He didn’t qualify for “The Darwin Awards” – because he survived.



Calming



Intriguing



Captivating



Ever beckoning

a notice of intended prosecution for producing such a 'dangerous' creation.]

We find that all garden lighting, whether front of house or rear should embrace these aspects: beauty, modelling, mystery and accent; safety – with discretion; startling security – tamperproof if possible; energy efficiency – obviously; easy maintenance.

### What is needed?

Unfortunately, both for interior or exterior lighting, many believe that lighting fittings and 'pretty' pictures is the way forward to a DIY lighting scheme. "Please can you send me catalogues or point me to sources of where I can see what's available?" That's frequently heard by many a designer and supplier. It's like asking a pharmacy for their stock list. Supposing they gave it? Would the petitioner *know how to use it*? Buying paint at Winsor & Newton doesn't make a Michelangelo nor a violin from Chappell's, a Perlman! Commonsense is: first *diagnose* – then *prescribe*.

The only certain method is a *physical* examination. Because it is a given that everyone's garden differs and everyone has preferences, we always visit gardens at sunset and, when fully dark, try out various effects with portable versions of the lighting we might deploy. Only in that way can an owner see exactly, in part, what the final appearance might be.

Few stockists bother to wire equipment, test it, and carry out night trials 'in the field' or are aware of weaknesses (until the complaints start

up). Usually the vocational, competent electrical installer becomes aware of the shortcomings often when installing them or worse when called to deal with them after they have been in service.

For example, everyone is extolling LED's as the Second Coming. Extravagant claims abound. "These will save the purse, the Nation, the Earth, the Galaxy, the Universe, the Creation (if the HSE don't abolish it first).

"The life is 50,000, 100,000 hours – eternity" is the 'shout'. Bunkum.

We tested a so-called 100,000 hour, £15.00 plus 'low-voltage-substitute' LED in the most auspicious circumstances – cool location, dry,



A tantalizing pot

and vibration free. It lasted precisely 3,500 hours – and we can't remember from whom we bought it otherwise the vendor would be getting a call.

The power was abysmal – nowhere near that of a 12 volt 20 watt dichroic lamp – which would have cost around £2.50 and used only £4.90 in electricity: Total £7.40. If one had to pay an electrician to remove the faulty LED, make telephone calls to the vendor or write letters, handle the administration, p & p the failed unit to the supplier, ("sorry, we need to inspect it") and pay the electrician again to return – if a replacement arrives, the real cost is many times that.

### Know thy product

In the 'good old days' the traditional ironmonger, for instance, would also know what all of his goods were for: what tools did what, which adhesives to use for what applications, what paints to apply, and countless other "how to's".

Alas, today most lighting equipment suppliers of now, mostly Chinese-made goods, are not fully experienced in their use, suitability and durability.

### Never ask a barber whether you need a haircut

A fitting may look good in the packaging; if only that were guarantee enough for its serviceability. The paint can fall off in a matter of months or the lamp holder can disintegrate. So, often, asking a *supplier* for impartial advice can be like going in to say, Cringe Cars' showrooms and asking whether one should buy, a Ford, BMW, Mercedes, Lexus, Citroen or other? Guess what?

"We here at Cringe Motors have got *just* the car for you..." Surprise, surprise. But who can blame them?

### Beauty, mystery, modelling and accenting

The dressing of the garden with lighting is difficult – harder than good stage lighting. Oh yes... "All the world's a stage..."

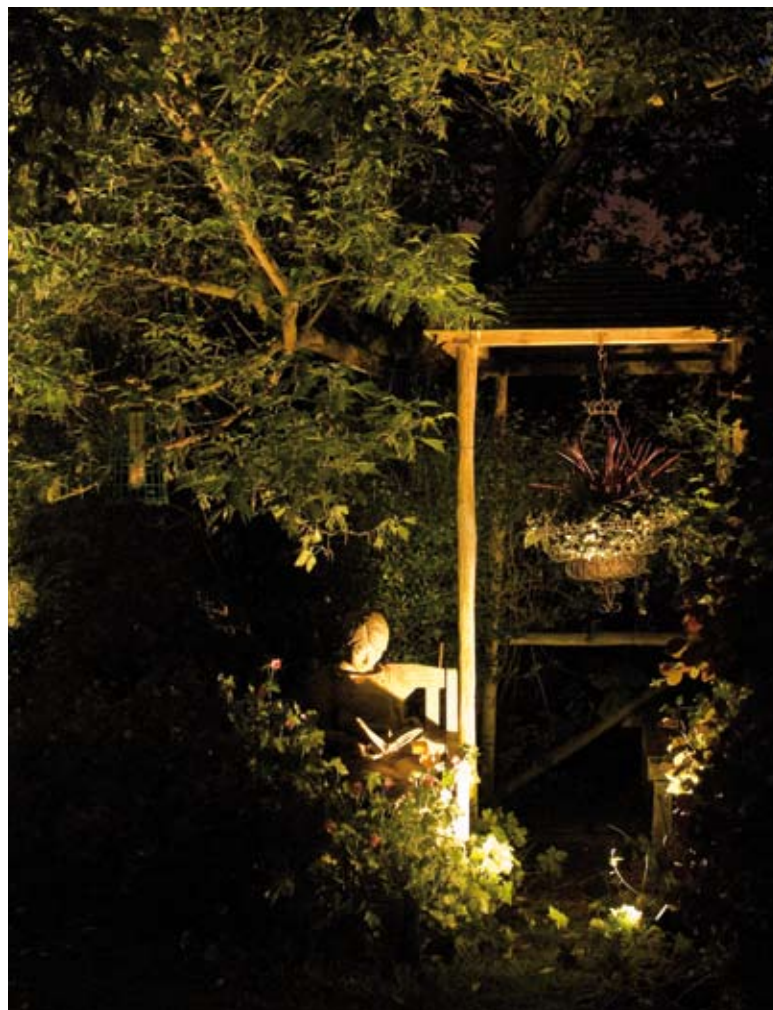
A while back we assisted Disney on location outside the frontage of a fine building in Hampstead. I told the lighting director, "You chaps have it so easy!"

"Easy?" he replied.

"Because you only have to make it look well from one view, and you don't care about blasting, frizzling and dazzling the actors, (with



Exquisite effusion



Poetical

210 kilowatts of light) but we have to make it look good from *all* angles”.

“Wow... you’re right... I’d never thought of that, never realised it.”

So, in garden and landscape lighting, the ruination of ‘beautiful’ is – wait for it – DAZZLE! Even a pen torch in the dark can be excruciating and seen for miles. Unlike cats, who can stare unflinchingly into a powerful torch, we humans do not have the same tolerance to glare or dazzle. In war, smoking on deck on board ship at night is a court-martial offence – the tiny glowing cigarette end can be seen over huge distances. Therefore, it is vital that our eyes are led to what is lit and never led to the light *source* the better to enhance the mystery and modelling of the garden. Sensitive positioning of light sources is required, hidden from usual viewing points.

### Safety – discretion

It is mostly possible to provide ‘safety’ lighting which is subtle and discreet so that it does not invade or detract from the overall effect.

### Security – efficiency and shock

Rather than the ubiquitous and clumsy halogen ‘car-park’ floods, it is very simple to have the entire garden lighting come on when the space is visited by unwelcome ‘guests’. Villains have been known to shatter obvious passive infrared activated floodlights by means of catapults, air guns and even paint ball markers before a burglary. There have been cases where the wall mounted halogen floods have caused a fire.

A while ago we designed a garden lighting-scheme in Hadley Wood and included small, inconspicuous but powerful ground-based lights targeted at the two low-height gates. We also had flowerbed lighting and discreet but effective buried uplights.

Three days after installation, actually at 3:15 a.m., the modest audible alarm and indicator came on in the rear master bedroom. The owner rose, went to the front, peeped through the net curtains, saw the entire lighting ‘on’, but seeing nothing amiss, reset the alarm and assuming it to be false, resolved to call the installer the next day. At 8:30 the following morning his wife drove

the young ones to school and saw 100 yards on, two police cars, a police van and a neighbour. Stopping, she asked what was happening and was told, “We were burgled last night.”

Clearly, a burglary was *attempted* at our client’s home but thwarted by the ‘scary’ lighting, and further up the road, where there was none, it succeeded.

### Simple maintenance

Some lighting equipment can be tricky to clean or to change a lamp so at the outset one should always take careful interest in the simplicity or complexity of maintenance. If that needs the skills of a heart-surgeon or those of a precision watch-maker to do that, something clearly has been overlooked.

Happy lighting, happy ‘soothing’, happy ‘healing’... happy times.

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Only readers of *Garden Confidential* can obtain free telephone advice from Peter Burian on 07970 107781

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