

Outdoor lighting

By Richard Bischoff
Photos by Dennis Anderson
Lighting design by Randall Whitehead

Artful illumination
turns your garden
into an evening oasis

HomeBuyingGuide



A cheery dining area by day (above) becomes a warmly lit, intimate retreat by night (left).

When it comes to outdoor lighting, the options used to be few and far between: There was the light where the walkway meets the street, the light by the front door, a security light by the carport or garage, and whatever you could find to light the backyard so you wouldn't trip over the kids' toys.

Today, you can use creative lighting techniques, regardless of your budget, to create a sense of ambience as well as an environment that increases your home's beauty, curb appeal, security and, in the process, an entire new room — your yard — with well-placed lighting fixtures.

Now is an opportune time for homeowners to utilize the latest in energy-efficient lighting technology to create a welcoming environment inside and outside the home, says San Francisco lighting designer Randall Whitehead. "My whole goal is to sex up energy-efficient lighting," he says. "People back away from me when I suggest using fluorescent lights. There's a visceral disgust for lights that look like soft-serve ice cream, but if I use a light that doesn't make the humming or buzzing sound that people associate with fluorescent lighting, and hide the light inside a fixture so the homeowners don't see it, they're OK with it." Whitehead, who has nearly 30 years of lighting design experience, also likes to use long-lasting LEDs, which use lighting to accentuate plants and other garden features.

Extend your canvas

The Chinese concept of "borrowed landscape" is a favorite of René Bihan, principal managing architect with the SWA Group in San Francisco. "You can use light to change the scale of your space," Bihan says. "For example, uplight a large tree as the only object and it suddenly becomes a large sculpture; gently wash light over a neighbor's wall to expand the feeling of your landscape. By utilizing this technique, you can use other elements to make your landscape part of the larger surrounding environment."

Create an outdoor room

Without outside light, windows and French doors become what Whitehead calls "black mirrors" at night. Creative outdoor lighting "helps you to expand the space inside your home," he says. "You can make interior spaces look larger by creating a lighting scheme that allows you to look out into your yard at night."

While both Whitehead and Bihan appreciate the need to conserve energy and incorporate green principles, they also feel that solar lighting is not a stand-alone solution. "Solar lighting has not lived up to its promise," Bihan says, "but it's very good as part of a family of lighting. You can use a floodlight to illuminate a fig tree in your back yard, put twinkle lights around the edge and use little



solar lanterns on the path. Then, put everything on a timer.”

“Using solar light outdoors might make you feel more green,” Whitehead adds, “but the collectors that are used by most of these products do not store enough energy to provide good light at night. You might be better off using energy-efficient light sources instead. Use textured or frosted lights to hide the lamps inside, and mount pathway lights in your trees to create a dappled moonlight effect.”

Art and light

If you have a little stimulus money coming, consider leaded-glass light-sculptures, such as the ones created by artist Adam Kurtzman. “This is the ultimate in indoor/outdoor lighting,” says James Bacci, gallerist at ArtHaus in San Francisco. “The lighting portion of the sculpture is in the base. If you want to install the sculpture outside, you simply lift off the glass, and place it on an outdoor fixture.” Kurtzman’s artwork is priced from \$3,600 to \$7,500. The good news? You can maximize your investment indoors or out.

Lighting your outside spaces can and will create a whole new ambience for your living environment. Better yet, you can find lighting solutions for all budgets, and keep your energy bills at a minimum in the process. And don’t tie yourself down to one idea. As Bihan says, “Lighting is like furniture — you can move things around. You don’t need to light everything. Light should be balanced with dark. For a good theatrical effect, the quality of dark is as important as the lighted space.”

When it comes to lighting, it helps to know there are four basic types:

- **Decorative:** Used to create a visual experience, this category includes examples such as lanterns.
- **Accent:** Used to highlight objects such as trees, water features, plants and statues
- **Task:** Used for illuminating work areas such as a barbecue.
- **Ambient:** Provides a gentle fill and softens harsh shadows.

Resources

ArtHaus
414.977.0223
www.arthaus-sf.com

SWA Group
415.836.8770
www.swagroup.com

Randall Whitehead Lighting, Inc.
415.626.1277
www.randallwhitehead.com

The Light Works
408.370.0177
www.thelightworksstore.com