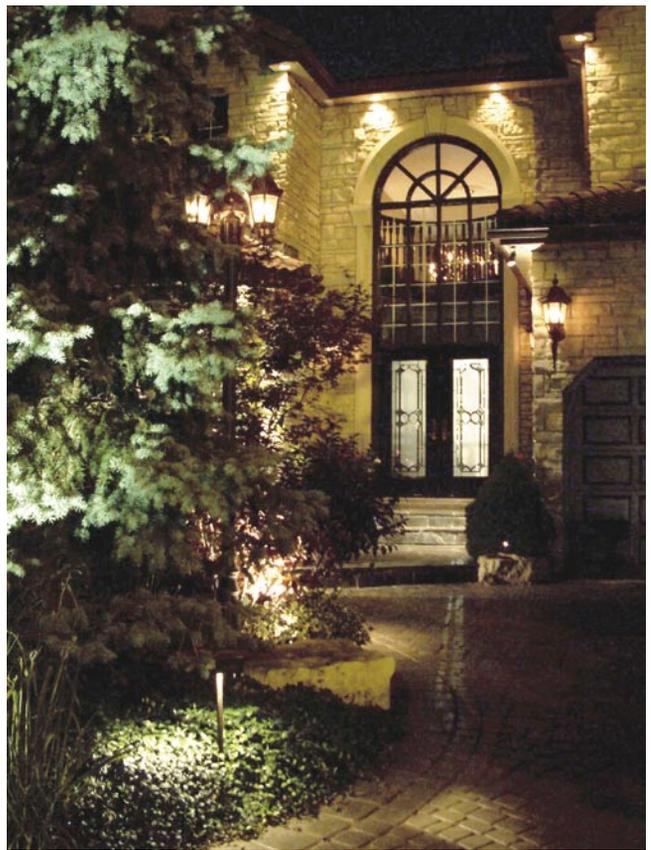


*Make the entry way your focal point by making it the brightest area. Accentuate pillars that frame the door for an elegant, inviting look.*



*Rules of thumb: reduce intensity of soffit pot lights and post lights so that effects such as up-lit trees and subtler pathlights can shine through.*

## A little light, a lot of **WOW**

Creating the perfect glow for your front yard.

By Bob Maheu, LightFX

Nothing adds more drama to a property than lighting. Let me share a few professional tips on how to use low-voltage lighting to make your front yard the most welcoming and distinctive in your neighborhood.

You will need three basic components to assemble your lighting creation.

First is a low voltage transformer. This unit plugs into a wall outlet and converts the electrical current from 120 volts to a safer 12 volts. Transformers generally come in 300-, 600- and 900-watt capacities. To determine the one that you require, add up the wattage of all the lamps you are installing. Account for plenty of additional load capacity; as your garden grows, you'll need more wattage. For example, to illuminate a three-foot Japanese maple requires only a 20-watt lamp, but by the time it matures, it will need 75 watts to light it.

The next component is 12-gauge low voltage wire, which can be buried directly underground without installing

conduit. The load capacity of wire gets lower over long runs, and you need to consider this in calculating how much wire you need. For 12-gauge wire, you can load 150 watts on a run shorter than 50 feet. At 100 feet, the maximum load is 100 watts. At 150 feet, the maximum is only 50 watts. Factor in your future load requirements for the growing garden as you plan.

The third component is the fixtures. A workhorse of landscape lighting is a little spot light called a bullet. It's used for up lighting and down lighting. Try to select a bullet where the lamp is recessed inside the fixture; this will reduce any unwanted glare.

When selecting a path light, consider fixtures that do not show any direct light such as lantern type fixtures. In an otherwise dark garden, your eye will be drawn to the source of light rather than the beautiful landscape it's meant to illuminate. Keep the focus squarely where it should be by making your landscape

the brightest part of the scene rather than the fixtures.

Wall washer lights are clam-shaped fixtures that are used for highlighting small walls and dense shrubs.

Now that we have looked at some products, let us get to the fun part, the design. When I illuminate a front yard, I always make the front entrance the focal point and work my way out. The most important thing to remember is balance both in terms of light intensity and fixture placement.

Consider highlighting your front door with a 20-watt bullet lamp, placed off to the side enough to avoid it shining directly in your eyes when opening the door. If you have a double doors you will want to place a bullet on each. If the doorway has pillars, uplight them with the same 20-watt bullets. This will frame the door while adding depth and structure to the entrance.

If you have two or more steps leading to the front landing it is a good idea to

highlight them, both for aesthetics and safety. This should be accomplished by placing another 20-watt bullet in front and to the side, aiming it only on the steps, as not to blind anyone coming down.

To allow your new landscape lighting its full impact, you'll need to dim down existing lighting such as post and coach lights to keep their intensity in balance with the new lights. This is the number one cardinal sin that everyone forgets about, including contractors. Put the pre-existing lighting on a dimmer, or put lower-wattage bulbs in the fixtures. If you have soffit pot lighting, you will definitely need a dimmer to get the intensity down to about 40 percent; they should be, at most, half as bright as the front entrance, which is your focal point.

The next thing you want to do is guide people to your front door. This is accomplished using path lights, positioning the fixtures from side to side about every 10 to 12 feet. Avoid placing pathlights in a straight line or you'll end up with a runway look. To make them blend in with your landscape, place the path lights beside a large plant or rock.

Another way to light the pathway is from above. My favorite technique is to down light from overhanging tree branches. This is accomplished by placing a bullet directly over the area you wish to light. Place the bullet as high as you can in the tree and as vertically as possible. Lighting through some branches gives a nice mottled effect on the ground.

Now lighting your landscape will bring everything together. Start by placing your up-lights. If you are up-lighting a shrub or tree with a fairly open form, place the fixture directly under it, shining up the middle. For denser specimens, place the fixture in front, close enough to create shadows and texture. For some dense shrubs, you may consider high-lighting them using a wall washer.

Unless your name is 'Griswald' don't try to light everything, less is more. Having some dark areas will increase the drama in your design.

Now for the final touch, add a few path lights between some of the areas you have up-lit to create some vertical balance. At this point you are 80 per cent there. Before you bury your wire check the positioning of your fixture at night. Once you are happy with it, play with different wattage bulbs until you feel that you have achieved a nice balance and then bury the wire. And voila! you have the nicest house on the street.n

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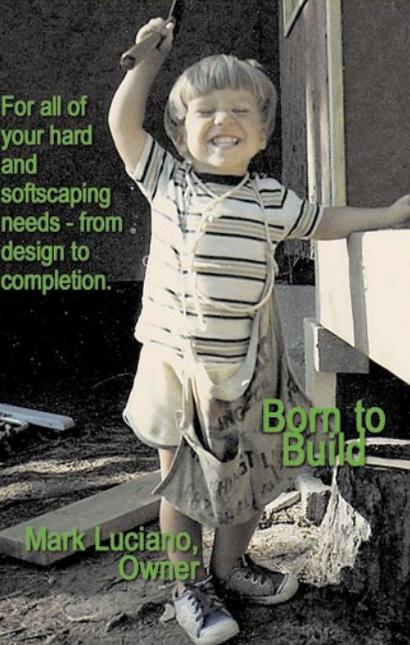
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