



Robert Webber considers how to design and specify the ideal light levels to illuminate gardens without losing the night sky

Increasingly, we are being commissioned to design in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), where careful consideration to both residents and wildlife is paramount. Last year saw the advent of the Dark Sky Initiative, an environmental commission tasked with keeping the night sky dark for our continued enjoyment of the cosmos.

I remember a few years ago being at Uluru in Australia, and I've never seen a night sky so vast; the expanse of darkness stretched across the red soil as far as the horizon allowed. Shooting stars danced across the constellations, and nothing was compromised by the pollution of city lighting. It's one of the darkest and most magical places I have ever been. The purpose of the Dark Sky Initiative is to protect the cosmos over the UK and limit light pollution in key rural areas, so we can enjoy the hidden beauty of our sky at dusk and beyond.

It's a real challenge for us lighting designers to keep on the cutting edge of technology, pushing the boundaries of bending and manipulating light, whilst being forever aware of the natural light emitted by the night stars. They are always shining, we just don't always appreciate them.

The main concerns are light levels on a vertical plain, particularly pertinent to spotlighting and recessed tree lighting. Light is invisible until it hits a particle of matter – it will keep going and going, just losing its ultraviolet range as it heads further away from earth. Our job is to capture and harness the pleasure that well-chosen lighting can



LIGHT YEARS AHEAD

bring, keeping the natural canopy of the night sky intact.

So, what can we do? Our approach is the same as it's always been: considerate highlighting of the natural features of our landscapes, with just enough light to tease out the beauty, whilst allowing the exchange of darkness to take place.

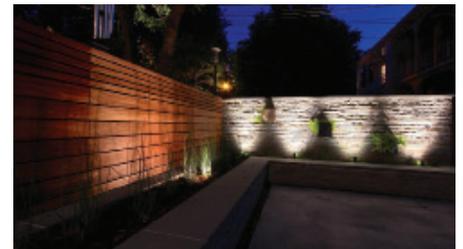
First and foremost, it's about placement, a topic which I covered in October's issue of Pro Landscaper.

Secondly, it's about choosing the right level of light to illuminate your outside space. This can change dramatically depending on the type of ambience you wish to create.

Higher colour temperatures (CT) produce much bluer, colder lighting, ideal for creating the 'Murder Mystery Hotel' lit by us in the below image. The lower CTs create lighting which feels warmer, and which is our typical light within a domestic environment.



What about the strength of the light, or the amount of visible light that we actually see? It's measured in lumens. Years ago, it was easy to specify. Lamps were measured in wattages, and the amount of power a lamp used had a direct parallel to the amount of light it emitted. If you wanted brighter, then you would simply increase the wattage. However, the higher the wattage, the higher the heat output, which causes the degradation of the light canister



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itself (that's the light fitting to you and me). Heat has a dramatic external influence on lamp life, so the hotter they get, the shorter their lifespan. That's one of the reasons why LEDs last so long – they use very little power to run, and hence produce very little heat.

So, our goal is to use the lowest wattage LED lamp possible, producing the correct amount of visible light – measured in lumens – whilst creating the right CT to produce the desired atmosphere. Master that and you can 'drop the mic and exit stage left'! It's an art form we love. We know when we hit the mark, and every day is a learning curve, pushing us further.

ABOUT ROBERT WEBBER

Robert Webber is the founder of Scenic Lighting, a specialist exterior lighting company based in Berkshire. He designs and installs garden lighting throughout the UK and internationally. Robert can be contacted on rob@sceniclighting.com or via his mobile on 07766 051 000. www.sceniclighting.com