

# THE DARK ART OF LIGHTING WATER FEATURES



Focusing light on key areas like water features can transform a garden, says **Robert Webber**. Here he explains how to use garden lighting to highlight any water feature to great effect

Good lighting design is everything. It can reveal the magic in your landscape and transform your garden by night. Painting with light can change the mood of your space, using colour and shadows to bring out the best of your garden.

More often than not, most gardens are poorly lit. It's obvious where the services of a quality lighting designer and installer have been employed. The two classic mistakes are **over lighting** a feature, or complete **under lighting**. Both are crimes in my book. We employ a simple approach to all garden lighting, similar to how most people approach internal lighting, without the walls to bounce the light back from:

- **Functional lighting:** to enable you to use your space for the purpose you want it for.
- **Aesthetic lighting:** to create mood and feeling. It's the soul of a good design.
- **Feature lighting:** to help accentuate the key features of the garden. Sculptures, water features, feature trees etc.

## Getting started

Water fractionates light. That is to say it helps to carry the light. So a small amount of lighting can create dramatic effects. This does depend on the colour of the light you are using. We tend to use either a 'colder' white light for a more traditional feel, or an ultra blue LED for a contemporary feel.



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Some water features may look the same, but their lighting requirements are different. Having a good brief from either the garden designer or the client is essential, as is consultation.

During consultation, pictures help bring words to life, and often we will mock up an effect for the relevant parties to see. It's good to have a constant flow of information back and forth of what's required and achievable.

## The rules to follow

In principle, there are a few rules to employ when looking at lighting a water feature:

- **Think feature.** Is it the main feature in the garden? If so, light it well, to the detriment of other areas if budgets are a constraint. This is particularly the case if it is architecturally designed. It becomes a piece of artwork that can be enjoyed from inside the house when the garden isn't used.
- **Think colour.** A water feature is one of the few places we will use a different colour light in the garden. Water carries any colour well, unlike green foliage and trees. That's all to do with colour temperature, which I'll talk about in another article. Simple clip-on lenses can be added to most lights to change the colour.
- **Think maintenance.** Often water features are fully self-contained. This means accessing a light for maintenance can involve draining away thousands of litres of water. Plan the design so lights either have long-life LED lamps or the lights are easily accessible.
- **Think installer.** There are not many specialist external lighting contractors around. You need to make sure it's installed both safely and it has longevity. A minimum of a year guarantee should be applied to all garden lighting and a certificate of compliance with the current Institute Of Electrical Engineers regulations given as assurance.
- **Think fun.** We love the creative aspect of garden lighting. It can be a complete mix of dreams, expertise, approach and challenges. Mix them all together and you have a cocktail of light that can bring a fresh presence to any outside space.



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**1** Called 'The Cradle', this feature fills and empties to simulate human breath. A complex DMX controller controls the single pump and five lights in complete symmetry. The lighting intensifies as the cradle fills with water and disappears as it reaches empty.

**2** A bright white weighted light shines up under the cascade from the rill, and a warmer white light illuminates the pool below. These were wired to two separate circuits so that when the rill was not in use the stillness of the pool still created mood.

**3** Bottle wall

## ABOUT ROBERT WEBBER

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