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## Research & Editorial

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## Illuminations: Evening Lighting Events that Boost Business

By John Stone, lighting designer, and Erik Skindrud, regional editor



Outdoor lighting is more subtle in the twilight hours before total darkness. But even then it helps create a safe, welcoming feeling in the low-light winter months, when homeowners often return after dark.

Professionally-designed outdoor lighting can transform any landscape. In many cases, the payoff (for a relatively modest investment) can be visually stunning. A skilled designer can host an evening lighting event to show prospective customers (and design collaborators) what lighting designers have to offer.

Portland-based lighting designer John Stone got the idea for his own events through the International Academy of Architectural and Landscape Lighting, or IAALL. He held his first modest one back in 1998 to present ideas to planners mulling a job at Portland's Chinese Garden.

"We were talking about lighting and people were saying they're worried about it looking too much like Disneyland," Stone recalled recently. "With lighting there's nothing better than bringing people out to see it. I can talk to you about it all I want but then it can seem like a snake oil sort of thing. With a set-up—even though it's temporary—you can see what it looks like and we can even tweak it a little if we want to."

### Lighting Collaboration

On Dec. 4, 2004, JP Stone Contractors held what Stone has dubbed an "Illumination." The event introduced local landscape architects and design professionals to the company (and to the academy's design ideas). It also introduced about a dozen guests to the latest in low voltage landscape lighting concepts and technology.

The event was held at the home of Freddy and Roger Lunt, a client of landscape designer Jodi Pellegrino of Blue Hen Design Studios. The Lunts recently moved into the home in the Mt. Tabor neighborhood in Portland and had Jodi design some landscape improvements. The hardscape and drainage was installed by JP Stone Contractors and the landscape was installed by Gardenscapes, Inc. A wood garden arbor was built and installed by Dana Dokken of Bridge City Arbors.

Close to a dozen landscape architects and other design and construction professionals were at the event too. Lighting is a highly-specialized field and most landscape architects (unless they are lighting designers themselves) prefer to use specialists for the outdoor lighting components of projects.

"We like to use a contractor that has a lighting designer on staff," said landscape architect Marianne Zarkin,

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who attended December's event. "We still get involved with the general outlines of the design process, but we don't have the specific knowledge about fixtures, transformers and the other hardware that outdoor lighting requires."

Also at the Illumination, landscape architect Gretchen Vadnais knows the process, having worked with Stone on a "large estate residence" lighting plan. For the project, she first conferred with Stone on the plan. Then the pair set up an installation with portable hardware to check out the theory, inviting the client to walk through and offer their reaction.

"From start to finish, it can take a week, maybe a little longer," Vadnais said. "It is not a time-intensive thing."

The home for the big event was selected because of its central location in an area well-populated with landscape design people. It also afforded a good opportunity for lighting as the residence had no such improvements but had some excellent elements to highlight in a lighting project.



The designer added his own touch by removing the shade from the path light at center, allowing it to throw more light across the patio. A small lit Christmas tree also helps illuminate the covered area.

## Theory And Specifics

"We like to develop what we call an 'evening portrait of the home' rather than simply 'light up' attractive elements and solve security and egress issues," Stone says. "We will solve these security and egress issues and take advantage of attractive elements in developing the complete evening portrait."

For the Illumination, the theme Reflections of Light was selected. Approximately 100 low voltage lights were installed in an above-ground installation intended to leave no question about how the home would look after a permanent installation. Designers can give a homeowner a very close approximation of what the home will look like using this technique. When a final job is completed some fixture changes are made and more mounting and lens accessories are used to fine-tune the system. The outdoor demonstrations are very helpful because words will not do the lights justice and there few lighting projects to point to as precise examples.

The point of Illuminations is to teach designers what is possible using landscape lighting. Along the way, however, planners and guests can have a little fun.

"The way John does it is kind of unique. It's like a big party," site designer Pelligrano said. "He's got tables of food and lots of hot and cold drinks. He lights up everything there."

Pellegrino helped plan the demonstration's layout, which was intended to wake up what is, in the daytime, an elegant but understated older house. A total of six transformers manufactured by Unique Lighting were used with numerous fixtures. All were placed to develop the evening portrait as well as to provide adequate light for walking about the property and to enhance security—without creating the impression of a dangerous neighborhood.



Contractor and lighting designer John Stone held another demonstration at a more modest, tract-like home in Jan., 2005. Light reflected off walls is the dominant theme in the absence of big trees or unruly shrubbery.

## Placement: Light By Light

One important spot turned out to be a large cedar tree in the front yard in which the team mounted five Lunar fixtures to filter "moonlight" through the branches. The placement created a beautiful light-and-shadow pattern on the ground while illuminating the front walkway without using traditional path lights (conspicuously) along the walkway in the lawn. Several Pulsar and F125 fixtures were also used to uplight the tree. The configuration ended up giving the front yard and entry walk adequate light to negotiate entering the house without overwhelming a visitor.

The house itself was treated with F125s uplighting some of the shrubs and textured walls. In addition, Stellars (another fixture trade name) were mounted on the roof to pick up the roof texture and highlight the chimney.

Further into the yard, a large flowering cherry, a Japanese maple and numerous other shrubs were illuminated using primarily F125s to develop an inviting glow to the whole yard and driveway.

The patio area where the social event was held had planting beds filled with colorful grasses and groundcovers which were lit with several different path lights placed for their color-enhancement effect, while casting enough light to promote conversation on the patio. Also, metal handrails along a stairway from the house to the patio had several Viking fixtures attached, which lit the stairway and contributed to the patio ambience. This area was the central focus as most of the yard can be viewed from the patio—and a propane heater was provided to take the edge off the crisp December air. A hearty hot soup, snacks and beverages contributed to the mood of the evening. Even the covered area of the patio was lit with low-voltage, using a fixture hanging from the ceiling.

A separate cutting and perennial garden behind the garage, while substantially out of season in early December, was lit with F125s hidden in shrubs and Probes lighting the wood garden structure constructed by Dana Dokken, who was also in attendance.



Night lighting brings out subtle colors in the winter landscape in this photo from the December lighting event. Light directed upwards highlights the dramatic limbs of the site's cherry (left) and Japanese maple (right) trees.

## Final Thoughts

The broader theory that determines where lights go on a specific job has two goals. One is practical. The other is more creative and atmospheric. Many amateur jobs take the more predictable route—lining path lights along a walkway, for example. Through the IAALL, and other educational sources, designers like Stone learn to be more subtle.

“We like to focus on how the job looks when it’s finished,” Stone says. “We want to do it for art’s sake first, but we also want to think about how the light will look at 11 p.m. when people are out walking the dog. We want to plan for security’s sake—without the area looking like a prison yard.”

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