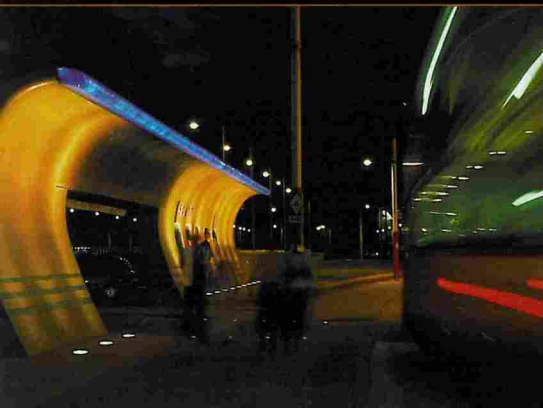


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With its ability to evoke strong feelings and change the mood of a space, creative landscape lighting is destined to have a bright future, discovers **Jane Porter**



Previous page:

Light wanders at Birmingham's Bull Ring

Above:

Dynamic LED lighting, in a glass and resin surround atop

Light is fundamental to life and has a profound effect on behaviour. Whether we're talking about a simple strand of white lights in a tree or the aurora borealis, it has the power to evoke strong feelings, such as elation and serenity. It is hardly surprising, then, that landscape lighting has developed far beyond merely meeting practical requirements to enhance safety and prolong the usable existence of a space.

Artist Peter Fink, from Art2Architecture, has worked alongside Igor Marko to produce everything from the three sculptural carbon fibre light

"Both architects and landscape architects create a hierarchy during the day using form and proportion, but the problem is that it all disappears at night," says lighting designer Graham Phoenix, director of Light Matters, who has worked with landscape architects on many projects including lighting strategies for Edinburgh, Trafalgar Square and Belfast. "The best way to re-establish that hierarchy is through lighting. It's important to consider viewpoints - whether the scheme will be seen at night from outside, as with a project we did for Princes Street Gardens in Edinburgh, which are locked after dusk; or from within, as in a public space like Trafalgar Square. When we do landscape strategies, we are looking at the major routes that pedestrians use and helping define those routes, and also what can be seen ahead, encouraging people to go in that direction. Lighting can do that very subtly, drawing you almost subliminally so that you are not aware of it."

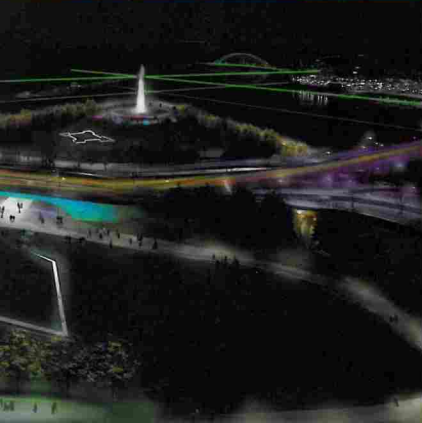
Phoenix's background is in stage lighting, which gives him a very strong visual sense of the possibilities of urban settings. "It gives you an amazing way of sitting back and looking at the contrast of elements within a space. Any landscape is just like a very large stage, where lighting can provide focus and emotion without people realising why."

from being slightly darker, giving a different experience of the space. It's very important to vary the scale and intensity of light."

Blackpool



Left: Azure Neon Body' – lighting installation by Vong Phaophonit in the grounds of the Cass Sculpture Foundation



Mary Rushton Beales, principal of the Lighting Design House, is particularly aware of this in the context of a current project – an event space and office for a charity based in an environmentally sensitive building sunk into the earth in Kent. Her brief is to enhance the site's natural beauty without adding to light pollution and disrupting the biorhythms of local wildlife. "A good control system is very important," she says. "The lights should only be on when they need to be – for example for a special event. You need to be able to keep feature lighting separate from path lighting, for example, so that you can have one on without the other. It's essential to integrate light as much as possible with the features of an external space. It should be built in, not added. The most successful schemes use two or three different techniques, such as a wash up a rugged wall and beams to enhance planting such as reeds or sculptural elements."

Landscape architect Paul Hogarth, from the Paul Hogarth Company in South Queensferry, near Edinburgh, sees lighting as an opportunity for creativity – and for giving a space a completely different character at night. "You can make a space very dramatic, or austere, or quiet, or

Left: Point Park, Pittsburgh Lighting by Art2Architecture

raunchy," he says. "Anything is possible." Local authorities are waking up to the idea of using lighting other than yellow sodium lamps, says Hogarth, which really increases the possibilities. "With the sodium lights you don't get good colour or texture rendering – everything looks a bit muddy and it's very hard to unify a space this way," maintains Hogarth. "There's just no feeling of warmth." Newer white spectrum lights can define edges and unite a space as long as the design is sound.

"Lighting is an extremely exciting tool when you know enough about it," says Hogarth. He is currently working on a scheme for Custom House Square in Belfast, where several entry points also serve as part of directional links through the city, making it all the more important to get movement right across the square. "A line of lights in the floor is an obvious way to achieve this, and it can be very dramatic in itself. Light has a very powerful effect on human psychology. The white CDM-T lights [a form of metal halide] can offer anything from warm white light to a cool, almost blue light. This has been used to produce a calming effect on people out for the night in Glasgow city centre."

Seasonal changes in lighting design can also make a significant difference. Professor David Uzzell, environmental psychologist at the University of Surrey, has studied methods of assessing the visual impact of buildings for the Building Research Establishment, taking account of lighting among other factors. "Lighting can be used to great effect if it is sensitive to seasonal variations and takes account of changes in the physical environment during the year."

Below: Metropolitan Cathedral, Liverpool, illuminated as part of the city's £1.2m City of Light project



Lighting does not always have to be serious: recent technological developments have increased the scope for light-hearted and colourful displays and effects, such as a 'wave wall' speckled with LEDs set in clear glass and blue resin for EDAW's Blackpool scheme, where the character of the resort dictated a playful approach to parts of the design. With computers controlling LED technology, the scope exists for literally millions of colour changes – but Graham Phoenix advises caution. "We tend to keep coloured lighting as a scarce resource," he says. "It's useful in entertainment areas, but other than that its use has to be very careful – there has to be a good reason for it. Features like green lighting in trees can really give lighting a bad name. You can use it very subtly – for example by using warm and cool light on a tree you can give it texture."

In the hands of artists, light and colour combinations can be very powerful. 'Life Lines' is a 54m light sculpture due to be installed this spring on Pier Hill in Southend-on-Sea. Created by artists Vong Phaophanit and Claire Oboussier, the piece reacts to wind and temperature fluctuations and the movement of people around it. All will trigger pulses of light that shoot along the length of the work. "We want people seeing the work to have a sense of surprise," says Phaophanit. "The interactive element won't be signalled. Visitors will gradually realise that they are part of the making of the work. We wanted to leave it as open as possible in terms of interpretation. The whole concept is that the site itself will create patterns of colours and light – the heartbeat."

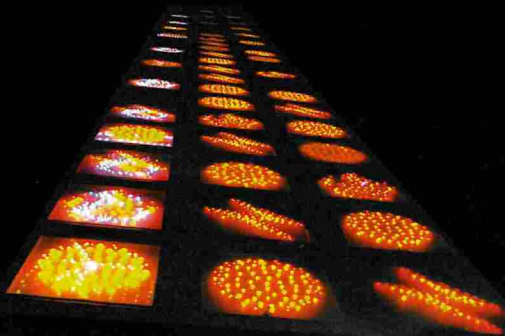
Students at Stoke Newington School in north London have worked with arts practice SODA to create a light-based installation at the school on the theme of energy. LED technology made it possible to link the RGB output of the students' video work with 45 panels installed in a 28m stretch up the side of the school's boiler house chimney. The panels are also linked to music made by the pupils, and change colour and pattern constantly. "It's a case of light responding to light," explains Matt Gould, head of learning development at SODA. "Working with light has enabled us to build something that is so overwhelming – the beauty of light is all-powerful. Light is accessible as a way of working and is a particularly good medium for collaborative work. It's something people feel they know. It doesn't require extensive explanation or contextualisation. It speaks for itself. People know it has a profound effect on us, they know what is good light and what is bad. It's a central part of all our lives, after all."

"Lighting can be used to great effect if it is sensitive to seasonal variations and takes account of changes in the physical environment during the year."

Technological developments have radically changed the way we treat the night-time landscape. The size, flexibility and practicality of LEDs and improved control mechanisms make increasingly elaborate effects possible. But a sensitive approach is more important than ever. Fink says: "Lighting can make the night-time realm become part of a greater whole. Lighting needs to work on many, many levels – and a lot of people are not taking all of these on board."

"The quality and temperature of light is fundamental in creating an identity for a place. It needs to be part of linked-up thinking about the public realm. Once you get to that level, it starts to function as part of the project, not just an adjunct."

PHOTOGRAPHS: Y PHRAGPHANNIC OBOUSSEF, SODA



Left: Interactive LED sculpture at Stoke Newington School London