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# Night light that won't outshine the stars

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By JAN TYLER Special to Newsday



Photo credit: Handout | The owner of this Dix Hills house had lighting installed to create an intimate atmosphere that doesn't intrude on neighbors or wipe out the beauty of the night sky."

## Photos

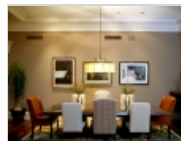


With "moonlight-effect" fixtures mounted high on the side

Travelers to mountainous or sparsely populated areas of the world often return to Long Island with glowing reports of night skies so clear it seemed they could almost touch the stars. It's a phenomenon rarely seen here because of overlighting and the misdirection of unshielded lighting. Such light pollution floods night skies, causing glare that diminishes the appearance of stars and planets.

But that will change in time due to the growing awareness of the Dark-sky movement. Coined by astronomers decades ago, it's a

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worldwide effort to save energy and eliminate light pollution by using low-voltage bulbs in fixtures aimed downward at the ground. Statutes are already in place in many Long Island towns for implementing and enforcing new Dark-sky compliant codes for exterior lighting.

For new projects, landscape lighting contractors now have their pick of many stylish Dark-sky-friendly fixtures. And existing fixtures can be easily and inexpensively retrofitted with snap-on shields. "This can mean that neighbors will no longer irritate each other with light trespass: invasive dawn-to-dusk security floodlights," says East

Hampton resident Susan Harder, a longtime advocate of the Dark-sky movement and founder of [darkskysociety.org](#).

Harder was drawn into the cause when her house was "invaded" by light from neighboring homes and she realized that a simple shield costing \$10 snapped onto their fixtures could solve the problem.

"Using Dark-skies compliant, energy-efficient light fixtures is just common sense," says Gordian Raacke, executive director of Renewable Energy Long Island, a watchdog group that monitors energy use. "They make sure that the light hits the area you want to illuminate instead of needlessly wasting energy by illuminating the night sky."

But a glance at the Long Island gardens, driveways and entryways shown on these pages proves that Dark-sky lighting is not exclusively utilitarian.

"Homeowners can walk outside and be caught up in the spell of a magical mood where garden features are softly accented under a starry sky and virtual moonlight filters from their trees," says Tom Rodler of Goldberg and Rodler Landscape Design of [Huntington](#).

## Light show

Rustic steps that lead to a spa at this [Huntington](#) home are illuminated with path-lighting fixtures. "The severe slope had made our backyard almost impossible to use," says the owner. "But now it's a wonderful place for the family to step outside at night as well as in the daytime because the low-voltage lighting system makes it safe even to walk up the rustic steps to the new spa. Nothing glares in your eyes or into the sky." He credits landscape designer Lenny Mirabile of Autumn Leaf Landscape Design of [Huntington](#) for the transformation, which tamed the rocky hillside by slicing it into a series of tiers anchored by a brick patio. Low-voltage Dark-sky fixtures illuminate the walkways and steps and accent the native laurels, evergreens and boulders that dot the slope. Fixtures aimed away from the patio as well as from the night sky are hidden in the plantings, where they cast pools of soft light on the foliage. "It's like a light show that we enjoy all year long, even from inside the house. We love the way the light washes over the retaining walls. It's like painting with light, and low-voltage lighting uses one-third of the energy of traditional systems," says the owner.

## Curb appeal

The owner of this [Dix Hills](#) house had Dark-sky type lighting installed in front of his family's home because he says he "wanted a low-key but welcoming entry with plenty of curb appeal, and we wanted our home to give something back to the neighborhood, especially at night when some places start to look like baseball parks with all those floodlights." He adds that After Dark Landscape Lighting of [Deer Park](#) created an intimate atmosphere that doesn't intrude on neighbors or wipe out the beauty of the night sky but still provides safety on the walkways with soft lighting. "And the low-voltage bulbs have cut into our electric bill as a bonus," he adds.

## Moonlight effect

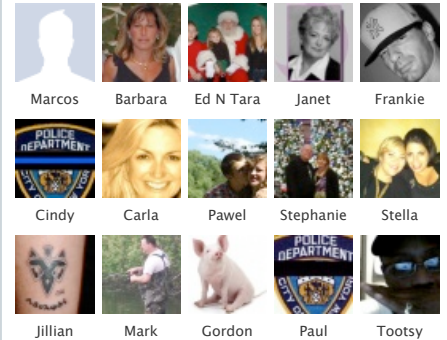
[Melville](#) residents Tom and Cindy Bevilacqua pooled their skills to upgrade the rear deck of their home into a series of outdoor spaces. "That turned it into the most inviting spot on the property," says Tom. A lighting designer and owner of After Dark Landscape Lighting of [Deer Park](#), he installed low-voltage Dark-sky systems exclusively throughout the complex. With "moonlight-effect" fixtures mounted high on the side of the house above the dining area, he set the mood for alfresco dining under the stars. Cindy, an interior decorator, used earth-tone fabrics, table settings and accessories that complement the soothing atmosphere. An elegant outdoor chandelier paired with overhead fixtures casts a mellow glow over the cozy seating area under the shelter of the pergola. Pendants and under-counter lighting make it easy to work in the serving section with its barbecue and bar while, steps away in the garden,



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unobtrusive lights line the stone path to the koi pond and waterfall. "It goes way beyond being just a deck now," Tom says. "It extends our boundaries from the inside to the outside and up to the night sky."

### Soft light

In daylight, this sprawling [Laurel Hollow](#) compound takes on the ambience of an upscale resort where guests unwind under the sun. But at night, says the owner, "it's like a storybook garden all lit up with moonlight and candles." The pinpoints of low-level light may resemble candlelight but they are elements in a hardworking system for bringing function without glare into the secluded landscape that was designed for entertaining. "Spread out over almost two acres, this was a perfect project for using Dark-sky fixtures; the owner says it's like going green with light," says Tom Rodler of Goldberg & Rodler Landscape Design. "With conventional lighting, the place would have seemed like an amusement park. But now the infinity-edge pool, the barbecue, bar and dining area, the pergola with its stone fireplace, the bocce court and the extensive plantings and lawns all connected with bluestone pathways are bathed in soft light, making them easy and safe to navigate at night when much of the family's entertaining takes place."

### Dimming the lights

1. When replacing old light fixtures, look for Energy Star-rated, Dark-sky-compliant models that are designed to direct light to targeted areas.
2. Use outdoor-use-rated compact fluorescent lamp bulbs no more than 100 watts.
3. Try [starrynightlights.com](#) for fixtures.
4. Make or purchase metal shields for existing fixtures
5. Use motion detectors instead of floodlights to save energy.
6. For more information, call [www.darksky.org](#) or [darkskysociety.org](#).
7. Contact local building departments for local codes.

### Dark-sky bright lights

Some Long Island landscape lighting companies that do Dark-sky lighting:

- \* Goldberg & Rodler, Huntington, 631-271-6460, [goldbergandrodler.com](#)
- \* After Dark Landscape Lighting, [Deer Park](#), 631-274-0048, [afterdark-lighting.com](#)
- \* Autumn Leaf Landscape Design, Huntington, 631-424-5544, [autumnleandscape.com](#)
- \* Direct Concepts, [East Islip](#), 631-678-6206.
- \* Illuminations, [East Hampton](#), 631-324-6673, [illuminationsbysean.com](#)
- \* Araiys Landscape Design, [Southampton](#), 631-283-1131, [araiysdesign.com](#)
- \* [Matt Murphy Events Lighting](#), [Southampton](#), 631-287-7026, [mattmurphyeventlighting.com](#)

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