



LIT
OUTDOOR LIGHTING

HOMEOWNER'S GUIDE

— CURB APPEAL AFTER DARK

Lighting the *Front* of Your Home.

The design language professionals use to make a house look like it was finished on purpose — and the common mistakes that make a home look smaller, flatter, and forgettable.

BY LIT OUTDOOR LIGHTING

Family-owned, Covington-based. Transforming curb appeal across the Northshore since 2021.

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The front of your home is the first impression you *control*.

Every night, your home tells the neighborhood who lives there. What shape it's in. How finished it is. Whether it's cared for. Most of that message gets broadcast after dark — exactly when most homes have nothing to say.

A properly lit home looks 30% larger, reads as more cared-for, and commands attention in ways a daylight photo never will. It's the difference between a house that blends into the street and one people slow down to look at on their way past.

This guide is the design language professionals use to light the front of a home. It works whether you're investing in a focused accent lighting plan for one tree and a facade, or a full property transformation. The principles scale. What matters is that every layer works together — instead of one harsh fixture trying to do the job of six.

WHAT YOU'LL LEARN

The four layers of a professionally lit facade. How architectural, canopy, ground, and path lighting stack to create depth. The most common curb appeal mistakes. And a simple exercise you can do tonight to see your own house with fresh eyes.

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Eight chapters on *curb appeal.*

The principles behind every well-lit home, the techniques that make them work, and the mistakes that quietly undo everything else.

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PLUS — HOW TO TALK TO A LIGHTING DESIGNER

Why the front of your home deserves its own *plan*.

Most outdoor lighting gets installed reactively. A porch fixture burns out. A security light gets added after a break-in three neighborhoods over. A path light gets stuck in the ground because someone tripped. None of these are design decisions. They're repairs.

A proper curb appeal lighting plan is something different entirely. It's a **composition** — like arranging furniture in a living room or hanging art on a wall. The fixtures have jobs. The beams have reasons. The whole thing is read together, not one fixture at a time.

What the human eye actually sees

When you pull up to a home at night, your eye doesn't process individual lights. It reads the overall image — the depth, the shape, the story. A home lit with one floodlight reads as flat, harsh, and unwelcoming, no matter how beautiful the architecture is in daylight. A home lit with layered zones — even modest ones — reads as deliberate, cared for, and expensive-looking, even on a modest property.

A floodlight makes a home look *illuminated*. A lighting plan makes a home look *alive*.

The scope scales, but the principles don't

A focused curb appeal plan might mean two uplights on a specimen tree, three fixtures on the facade columns, and four path lights along the walkway. A full property plan might mean all of those plus architectural washes on the dormers, moonlighting from the canopy, hardscape lighting in the retaining wall, and entryway accents. Both plans use the same principles — the full plan just has more layers working together.

This guide is about those principles. They're the same whether your project calls for a focused, strategic start or a full transformation.

The four layers of a properly lit *facade*.

Professional curb appeal lighting is never a single line of fixtures aimed at the house. It's four distinct layers, each doing a specific job, stacking to create depth. A facade lit with all four layers reads as finished. A facade lit with only one or two reads as incomplete — no matter how much was spent.

1 Architectural

The house itself.

Uplighting on columns, washes on facades, accents on dormers and gables, downlights at the entryway. This is the layer that reveals the home's architecture and tells the street what style it is.

2 Canopy

Trees that frame the home.

Uplighting or moonlighting on front-yard trees — live oaks, magnolias, pecans, crepe myrtles. The canopy layer adds drama and vertical scale, and keeps the facade from feeling isolated against the dark.

3 Ground

Beds, hardscape, and the base.

Uplighting on shrubs and landscape beds, grazing on brick or stone walls, accents in planters and retaining walls. This is the fill light that ties the house to the earth and prevents the facade from "floating."

4 Path

Leading the eye home.

Path lights along the walkway from driveway to door, step lights at entry stairs, subtle markers along the drive. The path layer guides the eye — and real visitors — toward the front door.

THE PRINCIPLE

Layers stack. Depth reads as finished. A facade with only the architectural layer looks like a billboard. A facade with all four layers looks like a home. The more layers working together, the more "expensive" the home reads — regardless of the home's actual size.

The architectural layer: lighting the *house* itself.

This is the most visible layer — and the one most often gotten wrong. The job of architectural lighting isn't to make the facade bright. It's to reveal the architecture that already exists.



Uplighting columns and architectural verticals

Narrow-beam fixtures at the base of each column, aimed straight up. Creates the dramatic vertical pull that makes a facade read as tall and substantial. One fixture per column — always.



Washing flat facades at an angle

Wide-beam fixtures set away from the wall, aimed at a slight upward angle across the surface. Rakes light across brick, stone, or siding — revealing texture without creating harsh shadows.



Accent lighting on dormers, gables, and rooflines

Individual fixtures dedicated to secondary architectural features. A dormer lit correctly makes a two-story home feel taller. An unlit dormer disappears into the night and the home reads as shorter than it actually is.



Entryway lighting — warmer and brighter than the rest

The front door is the focal point. A subtle downlight or pendant at the entry should read noticeably warmer and slightly brighter than surrounding fixtures. This is where the eye naturally ends up — make sure the destination is inviting.



Never: a single floodlight doing it all

Flattens every feature. Harsh shadows. Reads as utilitarian, not architectural. The fixture under the soffit that came with the house is almost never the one to keep.

The canopy layer: trees that *tell* the story.

Every front yard has at least one tree that deserves its own fixture. For Louisiana homeowners, this layer is often the single most dramatic element in the entire curb appeal plan.

Moonlighting — the signature Louisiana technique

Fixtures installed **high in the canopy**, 25 to 40 feet up, aimed downward through the branches. Light filters through leaves and Spanish moss the way moonlight does on a clear night — dappled, soft, organic. For homeowners with mature live oaks, pecans, or magnolias, this is the technique that makes people stop in the street.

Moonlighting requires proper installation technique. Fixtures must be mounted without damaging the tree's cambium. Cables need slack engineered in to allow for branch movement. Done wrong, it fails within a season and can injure the tree. Done right, the effect lasts for decades.

Specimen tree uplighting — the opposite technique

Wide-beam fixtures at the base of feature trees, washing the trunk and canopy from below. Equally powerful, and appropriate for trees that don't have the canopy mass for moonlighting. Crepe myrtles, Japanese maples, smaller magnolias, and palms all light beautifully this way. The texture of the bark becomes its own feature.

A well-lit tree isn't landscaping. It's *architecture*.

The composition rule

The canopy layer should **frame** the architectural layer — not compete with it. Trees on either side of the home create visual parentheses that make the house itself the focal point. A single oak lit dramatically to one side of an unlit facade steals the show.

The ground layer: what ties the house to the *earth*.

Without the ground layer, a lit facade looks like it's floating. Disconnected from its own yard. The ground layer is the quiet fill that makes the whole image feel complete — and it's where most amateur plans fall short.



Uplighting on shrubs and landscape beds

Small uplights tucked within planting beds, washing upward through the foliage. Azaleas, boxwoods, camellias, holly — each shrub becomes a sculptural element instead of a dark mass.



Grazing on brick, stone, and textured walls

Fixtures mounted very close to the wall, aimed straight up, casting light that skims the surface. Reveals texture that's completely invisible at night without it. Particularly effective on brick facades and stone veneer features.



Hardscape glow in retaining walls and planters

Low-voltage strips tucked under coping, seat walls, and the undersides of architectural hardscape. Invisible during the day. At night, creates a quiet ambient glow that ties the yard together without drawing attention to individual fixtures.



Accents on urns, planters, and statuary

Small directional fixtures on the decorative elements homeowners already invested in. A pair of urns flanking the front steps, lit at dusk, turns modest landscape accents into focal points worth the rest of the composition.



Never: overlighting the ground layer

The ground layer is support, not the star. If the beds and shrubs are brighter than the architectural features, the composition reads as bottom-heavy and amateurish. Keep this layer at 40–60% of the brightness of the architectural layer above it.

The path layer: leading the eye *home*.

Path lighting is where most homeowners instinctively start — and where the most common mistakes happen. Done well, path lighting guides the eye and real visitors toward the front door. Done poorly, it creates an airport runway effect that quietly undoes everything else.

The runway problem

The most recognizable amateur lighting look in America is the **identical path fixtures spaced three feet apart** in a perfectly straight line. Walk through any neighborhood and you'll spot it immediately. It reads as artificial, overdone, and slightly suburban in the worst sense. Professional path lighting does the opposite.

How it should actually work

Spacing varies. Fixtures are placed where the walkway changes direction, where steps happen, where planting beds transition — not on a rigid grid. **Fixtures are often small and low.** The goal is to illuminate the walking surface, not to announce themselves as objects.

Brightness is restrained. Path lights should be the quietest layer in the composition, not the loudest. If you notice the fixtures more than the path, something is wrong. **Fixtures disappear into the landscape.** Mounted within planting beds, partially hidden by foliage, positioned so the light is visible but the housing isn't.

You should see the *path*. You shouldn't see the *fixtures*.

Steps, transitions, and decision points

The places that genuinely need light are transitions — steps, changes in walkway material, turns in the path, entry stairs. When in doubt, light the transitions generously and the straight runs sparingly.

The eight most common curb appeal *mistakes*.

Every one of these is something we've seen on homes across the Northshore — sometimes on beautiful homes with otherwise excellent landscaping. Avoid all eight and you'll be ahead of 90% of installed plans in the area.

01 One floodlight trying to do everything

The single biggest mistake. Flattens every feature, creates harsh shadows, reads as utilitarian instead of designed.

02 Blue-white light temperature

Anything above 3000K reads as hospital lighting. 2700K warm white is the only appropriate color for residential facades.

03 Path lights on an identical grid

The runway effect. Fixtures should be placed by intent — at transitions and decision points, not on a three-foot grid.

04 Unlit trees next to a lit facade

The facade floats without canopy context. Trees on either side of the home frame the composition — leaving them dark wastes the framing.

05 Fixtures visible before their light

Path and uplight fixtures should disappear into the landscape. If the first thing you see is the housing, the placement needs work.

06 Overlit ground, underlit architecture

Bottom-heavy composition reads as amateur. The architectural layer should always be the brightest layer in the plan.

07 Glare into the street or neighbors

Poorly aimed fixtures create unwanted glare. Professional installation aims beams carefully, uses shielding, and respects sight lines.

08 Installing once and never revisiting

Landscapes grow. Trees mature. Beds expand. A plan installed five years ago often needs adjustment — a quick re-aim, not a full replacement.

Before you call anyone — a *driveway* exercise.

Here's a five-minute exercise to do tonight, before you start pricing anything. It's the same process we walk through with homeowners on every consultation — and it'll tell you exactly what your home needs.

1

Pull out of the driveway at dusk

Drive about 100 feet down the street — however far you'd need to drive to fully see the front of the home. Stop. Turn around. Look.

2

Ask: what's the first thing you see?

If the answer is "the porch light" or "the neighbor's floodlight leaking over," that's the problem. The first thing someone sees should be the home's architecture — not a single bright point.

3

Look for the four layers

Can you see the architecture? The trees? The landscape beds? The path to the door? Every layer that's missing is a layer of depth your home currently isn't using.

4

Identify the "hero" feature

Every great curb appeal plan has one element that's the star — the specimen oak, the signature entryway, the brick facade, a pair of columns. What's the one element that, if lit properly, would transform the whole view?

5

Take a photo. Text it to yourself.

Your phone camera sees almost exactly what the human eye sees at night. Compare it to daylight photos of the same angle. The gap between them is the opportunity a proper lighting plan fills.

— A NOTE FROM THE TEAM

Your home is already *beautiful.* Let's make it **impossible to miss.**

Most of the work is already done. You chose the home. You shaped the landscape. You planted the trees. You maintained the facade. Lighting is the finishing layer on everything you've already built — the difference between a home people pass and a home people notice.

We'd love to walk your property and show you what the four layers could look like on your home specifically. Consultations are free, include a full design conversation, and come with no expectation. We've designed curb appeal plans for homes across the Northshore, from compact cottages to sprawling properties — and every single one starts the same way: a walk around the home, identifying what's already beautiful and what's waiting to be revealed.

The best time to do it is when the light is just starting to fade. That's when the opportunity is most obvious.

Melissa & Jonathan Kujawski

BOOK THE WALK

Schedule a *free* consultation.

CALL OR TEXT

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