

*Details powered by Genesis*



# REFLECTIONS AND LIGHT

By Kirk Bianchi and Janet Lennox Moyer

**T**HESE LAST 25 YEARS, MY friend and photographer Michael Woodall has been compositing multiple exposures into one image to get these surreal, better-than-life photographs

of my projects. These images capture the mood and spirit of the space, but in reality, because of the less-than-desirable quality of pool lighting available to date, you could not recreate the exact scene as photographed in real





Photo courtesy Michael Woodall

This beautiful opening image shows the pool light subdued and balanced within the scene. This is not what it looks like in person! Unfortunately, the balancing of pool lighting and background lighting had to be done in photoshop. The actual pool lighting is significantly brighter. In person, the limited offering provided by standard pool lighting is overwhelming to the eye, and it takes away from the background lighting.

Note the use of fiber optic stars in the sunshelf. This is what Jan and I feel is the only way to light a shallow area. Shallow water pool lights and submersible LED strips are too close to the floor, so they create intense hot spots. For instance, in this example, you can see that the pool light is too close to the stairs on the left, so they are very bright. In front of the sunshelf is a bench, and the two pool lights shine intensely on the bench and create intense hotspots that draw the eye undesirably. Imagine if lights were placed in the 9-inch-deep sun shelf! You need breathing room between the surface to be illuminated and the fixture itself, to give space for the light to diffuse and spread. In shallow circumstances, you have much less room to work with than these imperfectly placed pool fixtures that are in deeper water. Better to not light a sun shelf at all, if fiberstars are ruled out. Rhonda Sheerin at Fiber Creations, Phoenix, Ariz., is my recommended contact to learn more about those.



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life. To achieve this balanced look, Mike would get one exposure with all of the pool lights on, and he would overlay this shot in a layer in photoshop (along with the other exposures where the pool light was off), and he would adjust the opacity of the brightly lit pool layer

down, so that the pool illumination appeared to be subdued. This, in turn, allowed the pool interior to match the glow in the sky and, most of all, allowed the reflections and the environment around the pool to prevail and not be overpowered by a brilliantly lit pool.



All photos on pages 34 and 36 courtesy George Gruel

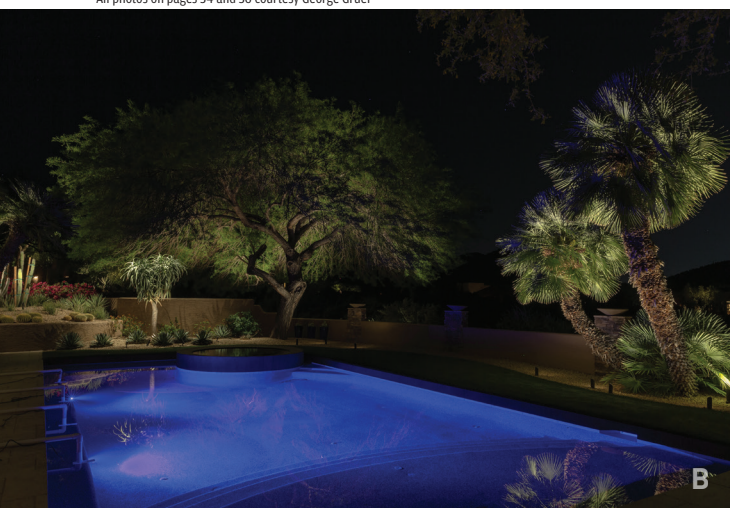


Photo B above features the same scene with standard non-dimmed 15-watt pool lights (too bright) set to deep blue, 12-foot spacing (too wide). Photo C below features the same scene with standard non-dimmed 15-watt white pool lights with 12-foot spacing. Note: This is a dark interior pool, Pebble Sheen Turtle Bay. A light interior pool will MOST DEFINITELY benefit from dimmable lights.



As a result, all the elements in the scene felt balanced as a whole. This makes for a beautiful photo of the space, but until recently, we've not had the ability to recreate the beauty of his photo as presented here in a real pool.

Just a few weeks ago, I would have told you the best way to enjoy the visual experience of pool lighting for most occasions is to shut them off. I would have said only use pool lights when you have to, for swimming times or a pool party scene. For the majority of times, when a beautiful backdrop for outdoor living is desired, the focus should be on designing a great landscape background as the focal element; then, do a thorough effort with lighting the landscape. This, in turn, creates stunning reflections in the mirrored surface of the unlit pool, as in photo A at the top of this page.

The photo above depicts our go-to approach until now. In fact, this image ran in an AQUA Magazine story a couple years ago. The procedure was to design a well-landscaped backdrop, then light it well, creating stunning reflections in the pool. In this scene, it's not clear where the pool ends and the turf area begins. Downlighting the turf from the large mesquite tree or a custom light post hidden in the palms would cast soft diffused light across the turf to give it differentiation.

That approach worked well to create this tranquil scene which would not seem out of place on canvas, hung on a wall. But when lighting with standard non-dimmable pool lights, they can be too bright and overpower the scene. See photographs B and C at left. In fact, this pool could have used another light in the middle to take care of the dark void between them. (These 15-watt lights are 12 feet apart.) But this would have made the pool all the more brightly illuminated, as if it needed more? Note the light at the shallow end is creating a hotspot on the floor that the deep end light does not have. If this were dimmable, that could all be corrected.

Unfortunately, the reflections go away when the pool lights are on. The beautiful reflections are the best part of the scene! The blown-out vessel floor isn't what we're trying to show off here. The pool itself is not the "subject of the painting." Where the light is bright, that is where you are leading the eye, and there goes the observer's attention. What is the subject



Photo D above displays four lights set around 40% for a romantic mood and atmosphere. For photo E below, we dialed the lighting up to about 60%, to what we call the “pool party” level. At this level, there’s plenty of light in the pool, and yet, it does not overwhelm the background. The backdrop is still the main focus, and the reflections are still distinctly enjoyed in the pool surface. Everything is balanced.



of this viewing angle? The landscape in the background. In the hierarchy, THAT is what should hold the most illumination.

A few weeks ago, the culmination of Woodall’s photoshop magic and better-than-life imagery compelled me to ask, what about these dimmable pool LED light fixtures that are now available? Could we dial back the pool lights so that Woodall’s balanced scenes could actually be realized? Jan Lennox Moyer, the lighting designer that I have been working with for the last few years, was skeptical about the possibility, but we thought, let’s find out! We agreed to do an experiment, just in time for this article, at one of our previous projects to see what could be achieved. We paid a visit to the residence that we had worked on a few years prior with Red Rock Contractors, and photographed for the AQUA Magazine article “Metamorphosis.”

To Jan’s delight and mine, using new techniques and

equipment, the experiment was a success! See photos D and E above. By dimming 3-watt lights on a tighter 6-foot spacing, we were able to get an even light across the pool floor that accentuated the character and dimensionality of the pool without overwhelming the scene or creating hot spots on the floor. And most importantly, the reflections were only slightly diminished at the more desirable, lower settings. Jan’s mantra of “less wattage, more fixtures” works in pool lighting, too, for exactly the same reasons.

Going forward, this is a game changer for me. I’ll be using dimmable fixtures exclusively. The subtle pool lighting that has eluded me for decades, paired together with the exquisite reflections of the landscape lighting, now that is a home run! ~

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