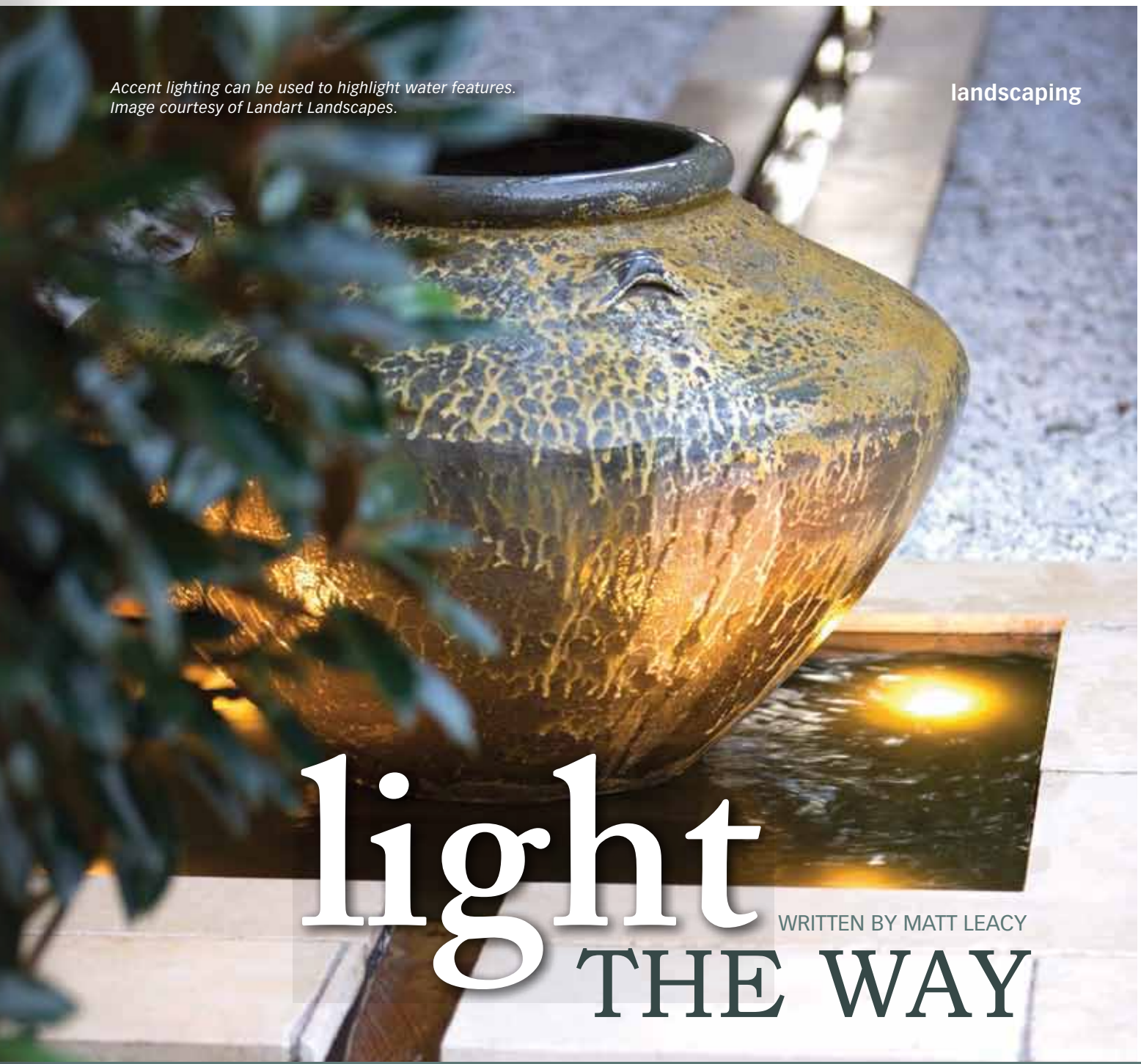

Accent lighting can be used to highlight water features. Image courtesy of Landart Landscapes.

light THE WAY

WRITTEN BY MATT LEACY

“ Good garden lighting creates and sets the mood, providing a beautiful and inviting ambience...

Adding garden lights to your landscape is like having peanuts with your beer or good cheese with your wine; you can live without it but why would you? They are so much better together. Good garden lighting creates and sets the mood, providing a beautiful and inviting ambience that enables you to enjoy your outdoor space no matter what time of day it is.

The common practice in most households once darkness descends is to retreat to one corner of the garden. This usually has a big spotlight attracting loads of bugs and creating the feeling of being centre stage in a vast auditorium, unable to see into the impenetrable blackness. Or, perhaps you stumble from the darkness of the driveway to the inadequate weak spot of light around the front door area. In many residences, neither of these options is particularly inviting or attractive.

I have had many years working with clients and falling in love with garden lighting design. Although there is an art to designing aesthetically pleasing as well as functionally practical lighting, it is something you can do at your place. ►

If you are tempted to have a go at doing it yourself, here are a few things to consider before you get you started.

01. SWITCHING > Consider the most practical location of controls – this is commonly termed switching. This would usually be at your back or front door. You can have multiple switches to light all or a selection of the different areas of the garden, or you can focus on just one or two. Make sure this component of the works is carried out by a licensed electrician.

02. FRONT ENTRANCE > Lighting up the front entrance is important both for security and to create a good first impression for visitors. Soft boundary lighting that illuminates the front gate, a well-lit path leading to the front door combined with soft spots to provide depth throughout the garden works really well.

03. TASK LIGHTING > Think about the functional elements on your property that will need task lighting, such as the BBQ or letterbox and house number. Lighting any changes in level is important for safety but can also create real interest in the garden.

Well-placed garden lighting creates a beautiful and functional outdoor space. Image courtesy of Landart Landscapes.

Extend living space outdoors with garden lighting. Image courtesy of Landart Landscapes.

> *Hanging lights not only help set the mood, but create a feeling of intimacy and can be a great way of getting people outside to explore your garden.*

04. TRANSITIONAL SPACES > Think about the transitional spaces between different zones, like the BBQ area to the pool or entertaining area. There are many options for illuminating these, like strip or linear lighting, step lights or in-ground lights.

05. HANGING LIGHTS > Hanging lights not only help set the mood, but create a feeling of intimacy and can be a great way of getting people outside to explore your garden. Hanging lights from trees is great for entertaining or sitting areas, as they direct the light downwards and minimise glare.

06. ACCENT LIGHTING > Accent lighting is paramount to your success. Consider any features that you want to highlight, like an interesting or textured wall, feature trees, statues or water features. The size of the individual focal point will dictate the type of fitting and output you need.

07. SOFT BOUNDARY LIGHTING > Some soft boundary lighting spotted throughout shrubs or trees will provide depth, drawing the eye deeper into the garden and maximising the beauty of your entire property.

08. LOW-VOLTAGE LIGHTING > There are two types of lamps used in low-voltage garden lighting; halogen and LED. LEDs are becoming more widely used and will eventually replace all halogen lamps. LEDs are available in a range of colours including warm white, which has the same effect as a typical halogen lamp light colour. Unlike halogens, there is no delay in warming up with LEDs.

09. YOU GET WHAT YOU PAY FOR > Whilst the short-term benefit of cheap fittings is tempting, I recommend structuring your lighting design so that you can purchase good quality fittings to suit your budget now, with scope to add more as time goes by. This way, you end up with quality fittings that will last without a massive initial outlay.

10. MINIMISE DISRUPTION > Location of transformers and power points needs to be thought out to minimise disruption to existing garden features and to ensure they do not become a feature in themselves. Try to locate these items on the sides of the house or in pool filtration areas adjacent to existing power points. Somewhere away from pets and children is essential too.

11. JOIN PROPERLY > Ensure that all joins are soldered, heatshrink joined and then taped with electrical tape before they are buried. This approach will keep moisture out of the joints as well as keeping them safe.