

# Case Study

## Common Lighting Design Flaws

There's a reason why many landscape lighting jobs look Wrong, Incomplete, or even, Not Good. It's most likely because of one these 10 Common Lighting Design Flaws.

All of these Flaws can be associated to: 1) a lack of experience performing this type of work (skill), 2) a lack of caring to do it right, or 3) a lack of education to know better (knowledge).

“Awareness” of what is considered ‘proper’ versus ‘improper’, as well as ‘good’ versus ‘not good’, is the ONLY way to curb this behavior.

**NOTE:** The photos shown in this presentation were selected randomly from a Google Image search and I do Not know who originally designed this work. They are intended only to “Aid” in this description of Common Flaws. They are Not meant to demean or cause hurt feelings.

# Case Study

## Common Lighting Design Flaws

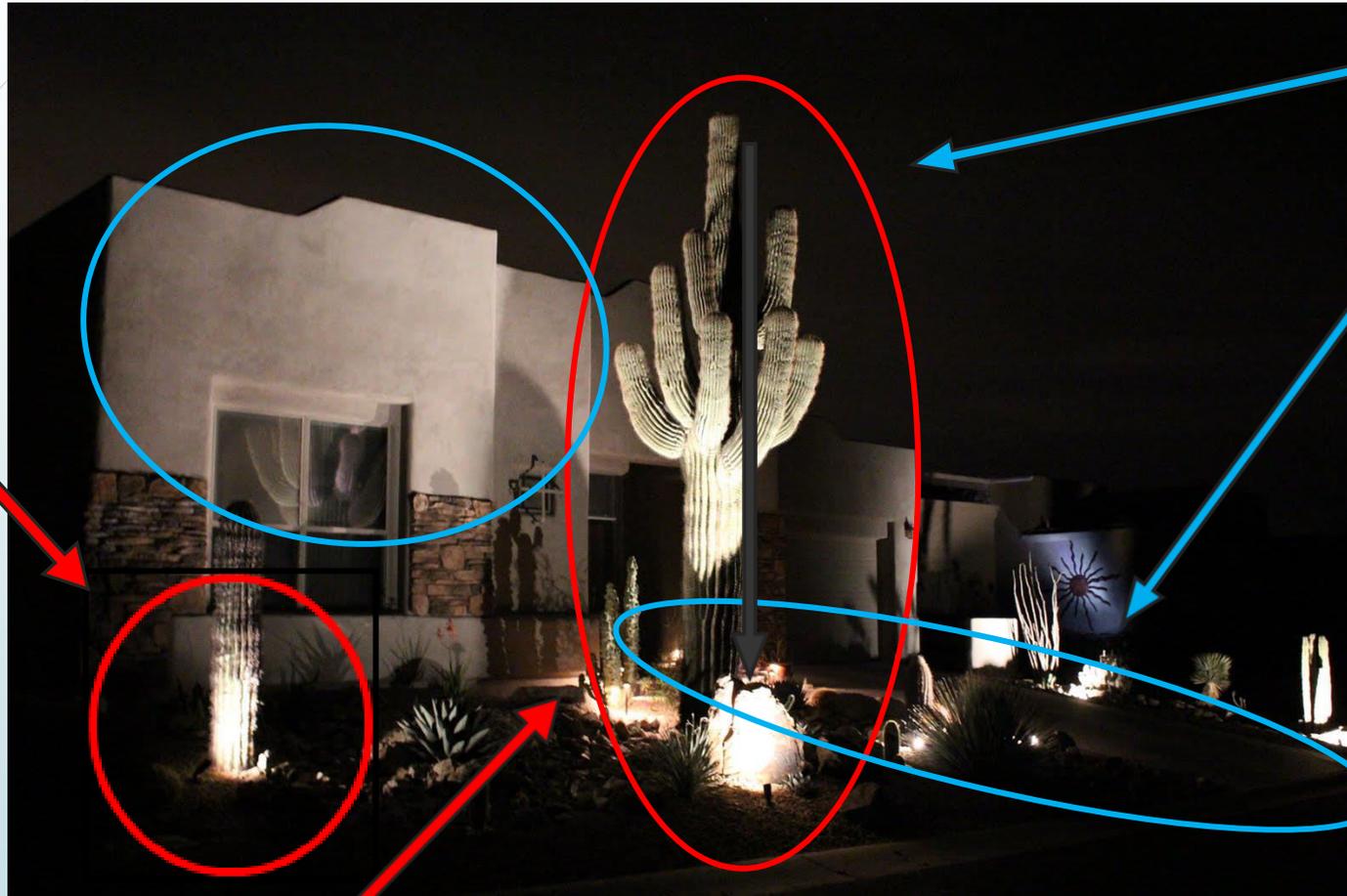
### 10 Common Lighting Design Flaws.

1. Poor Aiming & Positioning
2. Excessive Glare
3. Over-Illuminated
4. Under-Illuminated
5. Poor Composition
6. Architectural Mindset
7. Lack of Destination
8. Overuse of Colors
9. Overuse of Fixtures
10. Poor Techniques

**NOTE: Viewer must 'click' or hit the "Enter" at the start of each slide in order to advance the animation.**

# Common Flaw #1—Poor Aiming & Positioning

Fixture aimed too low on plant hitting mostly bottom



Other problems exist in this design:  
1) the lack of lighting, which leads to the front door, 2) the spill-over light from the large cactus onto the house—this has the brightest contrast and makes this side of the house the focal point, and 3) this spill-over light is shining into the room.

Fixture is used to illuminate both rock and plant behind, but a shadow is created from the rock onto the plant

## Common Flaw #2—Excessive Glare



**Rope lights, as well as strip lighting can provide excessive glare—these can be harsh as they are usually adjacent to physical objects which become highlighted.**



**Path lights, bollards, pilaster lights, etc. all normally have glass lenses at the top or sides to allow light out and into the surroundings. However, they produce a lot of Glare, which is annoying to the eye and hazardous at night.**

## Common Flaw #2—Excessive Glare

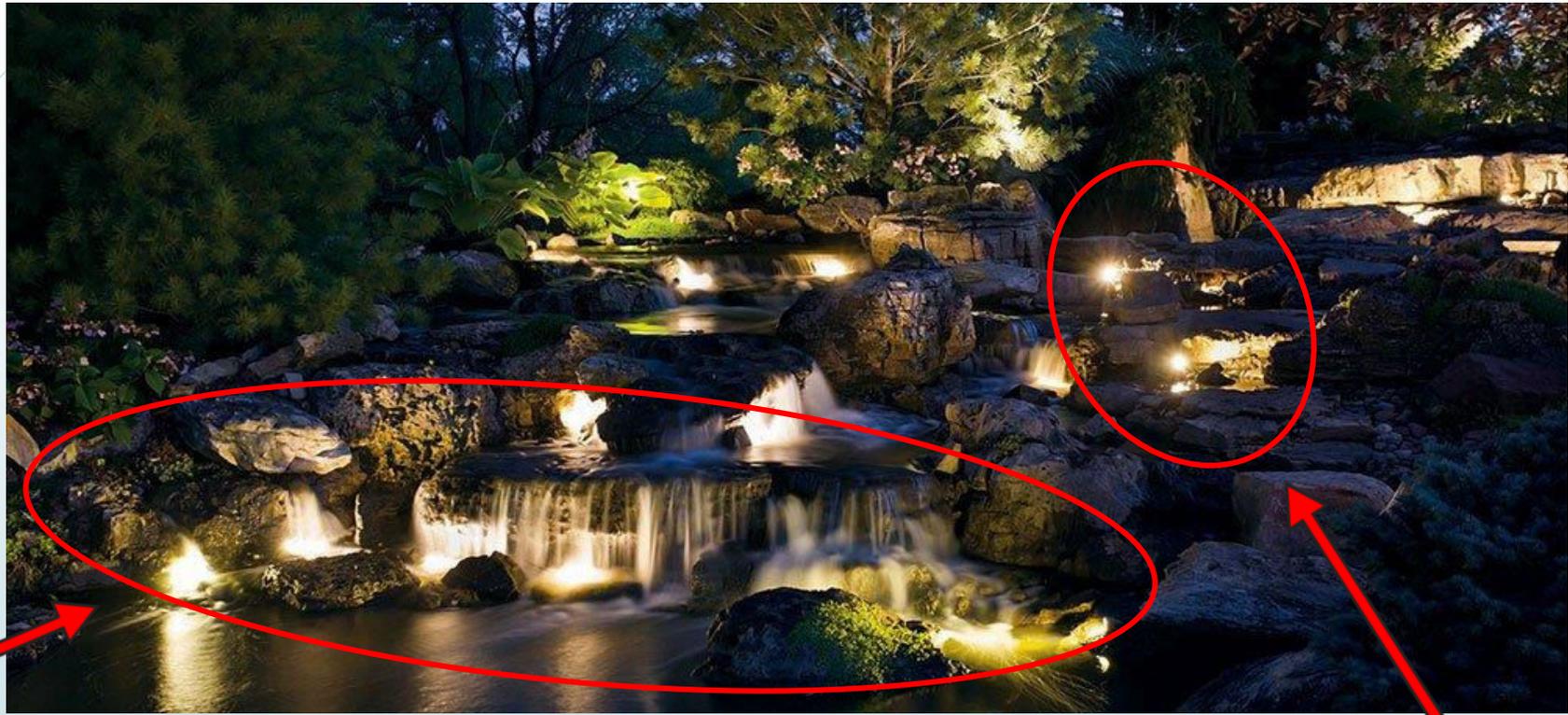


**Pole type light fixtures, again with glass heads are extremely uncomfortable to look at and they are the standard in most commercial settings.**



**Not only is this setting very glary, but it's an excessive amount of fixtures being used in this small space. One or two down lights out of the tree would have been much better.**

## Common Flaw #2—Excessive Glare



**Water greatly limits the spread of light, as can be seen here—each light creates a “hot spot”, which only develops round orbs of illumination. This does not allow the water feature to look natural.**

**These underwater lights are suppose to give a glow under the rocks, but instead they are providing direct glare to the viewer.**

## Common Flaw #3—Over-Illuminated



**This situation occurs a lot when the designer uses a flood type light source to wash the entire scene. Therefore, it looks somewhat flat and nothing really stands out.**



**Not only is this setting over-lit, it displays extra glare from each of the exposed light fixtures. Just look at the glow to the surrounding landscape—this is both uncomfortable to the eye and not attractive.**

## Common Flaw #3—Over-Illuminated

Little depth exists because each tree & plant is illuminated, so it makes it somewhat flat.

Multiple light sources provides 'hot spots' within this dense planting bed.



This combination of lighting applications seems to be, over-done—a down light in the tree, next to the pole light that washes 360-degrees around, and the up lighting of each tree?

Although this is not an extreme case of this flaw, it does show how the designer tried to do too much.

## Common Flaw #4—Under-Illuminated



The first thing most people do when they enter a space is to identify a destination point. And, even though you can barely see this here, it still is unlit and a question. Many lighting designers keep the entry door in darkness? As far as design intent, this should always be the objective for the front of the home.

This setting is definitely under-lit, as the each side planter along the walk is in darkness, as well as the foreground. This makes people apprehensive about travelling these paths.

# Common Flaw #4—Under-Illuminated

It is unclear as to the destination point. Which is the entrance to the home—on the left or right side?

This path creates questioning—the illumination patterns are distracting and it's hard to understand the terrain.

There's a little too much darkness in this setting to make it a comfortable access route. The unlit areas to the left side and right side planters will make one apprehensive in this travel. Their stress level will increase due to this.



## Common Flaw #5—Poor Composition



**This composition is primarily set at the middle ground—the background is in darkness. This dark void creates a harsh contrast, as if it's an island in the middle of nowhere.**



**Again, this example shows only light and dark. Softer transitional lighting between these subjects, and a backdrop of lighting behind this setting would greatly improve this scene. It will also make it open up where everything feels connected.**

**There is No depth to these scenes because of the missing backgrounds.**

## Common Flaw #5—Poor Composition



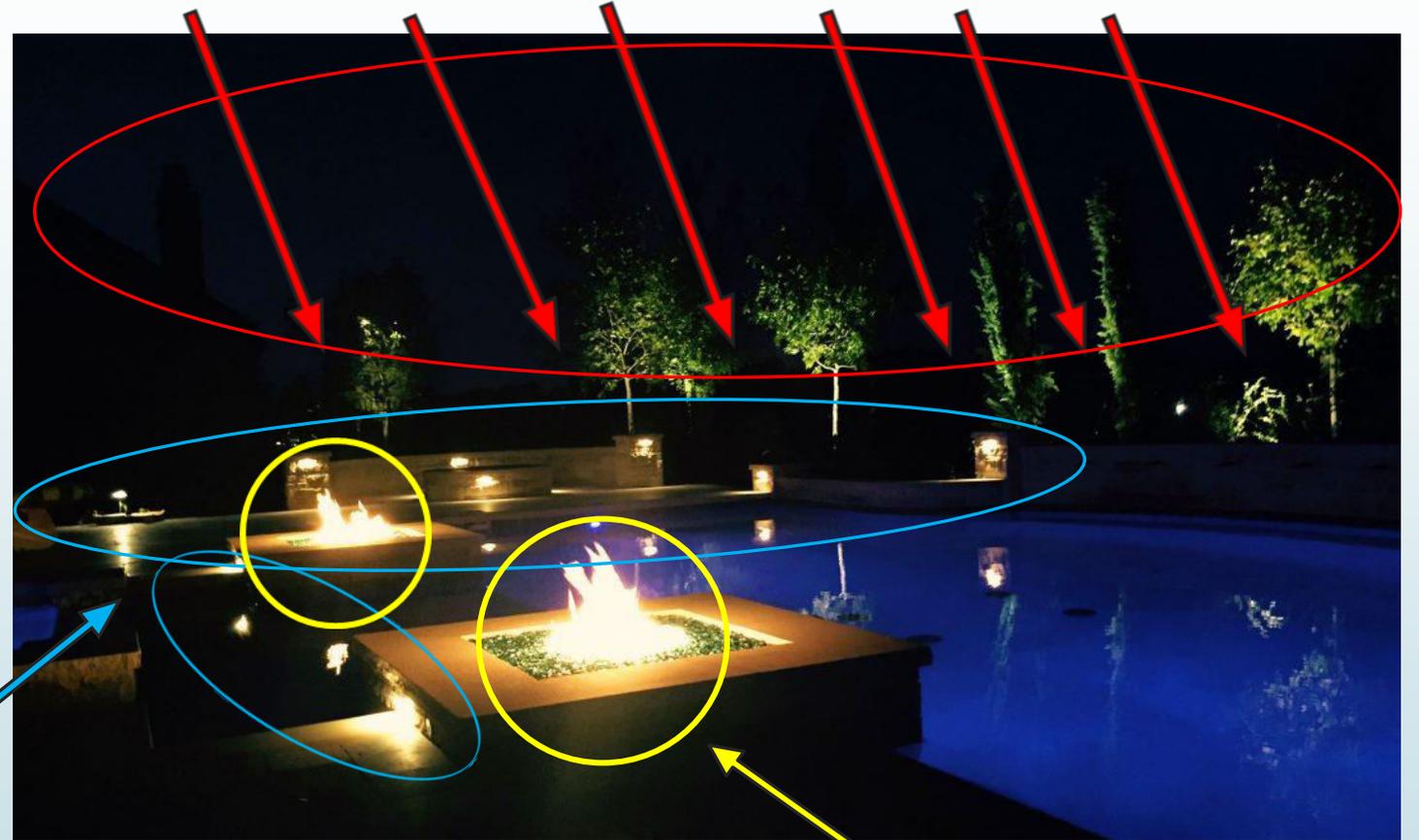
**This is another example of depth missing from the scene. The center of the space shows a huge dark hole. This setting might be trying to hide something undesirable in this area of the yard, but this should be avoided in most cases. The viewer will question—“Why darkness?” “What’s wrong here?”**

# Common Flaw #5—Poor Composition

There are several problems in this composition: Space and Emphasis. Mood suffers in this setting because of these issues and it's doesn't allow the mind to find contentment.

**Problem 1: Space.** There is No background (limited depth) in this setting—only foreground and middle ground. And because of this, the tree line up as a barrier in the darkness.

**Problem 2: Contrast and Glare.** The wall lights are spotty and not used in an effective manner. They are 'hot spots', like that of the fire pits.



**Problem 3: Emphasis.** What is the focal point? Is it the fire pits? If the viewer can't immediately identify this, then tension exists.

## Common Flaw #6—Architectural Mindset



**‘Architectural Mindset’ is a coined term, to describe when only the architecture is illuminated in a setting.**

**Realistically, this is a Composition problem as it applies to Space—there is No foreground or background.**

**The home can be nicely illuminated, but there’s no connection with the landscape or surrounding, so it becomes another harsh contrasting scene.**

## Common Flaw #6—Architectural Mindset

**Additionally, there are ‘hot spots’ on the walls, and the main staircase looks to be washed by two lights at the bottom—blasting up the stairs. This is a huge safety concern—can you imagine trying to walk down the stairs without being blinded!**



**Again, this example is flat and harsh against all the surround darkness. You can notice plenty of trees and landscaping at the foreground or front of the home, so there’s No excuse for leaving this area in dark.**

## Common Flaw #7—Lacking Destination Point



**This scene identifies a question to its destination—it ends in darkness? It poses a question—do I go straight or turn to the right or left?**

**Lacking Destination truly falls under Composition, as it's another issue related to Space. These examples only show the middle ground of the scene, and both the foreground and background are mostly in darkness.**



**Only the trees are illuminated—it begs to question, “Is there more?” “Why only the trees?” This unsettling to the viewer.**

## Common Flaw #7—Lacking Destination Point



Although there is a softly lit building as the likely destination point, it is dimly illuminated and therefore, is a question to those visiting the space. This element should have the greater level of illumination to 'lead the eye'.

Notice the poor use or choice of path lights at the perimeter planters—this makes the scene confusing, as the similar fixtures are used along the walk. One might ask, "Is that another path to follow?"

Notice also the visitors first encounter, where a question occurs—"Do I continue straight or turn?" Better lighting applications might deter this.

Also, take notice of how dark the surrounding planters are to the left and right—this provides additional stress to those travelling these paths.

## Common Flaw #8—Excessive Colors



**Color use in landscape lighting can be good or bad—there are times when it is enjoyable, festive and fun. However, if there is too much, it can look gaudy, tasteless or tacky. The best approach is to use it sparingly, and limit it to one, two or three colors. ‘Less is More’.**

**Added colors can take away the feel of elegance—the character of nature is lost.**

**Many landscape lighting designers are new to using color, and the products available allow for individual control and color mixing at each light fixture.**

**Although this is great technology, it has been poorly utilized. It’s the latest “toy” for people to play with.**

# Common Flaw #8—Excessive Colors

**Color Theory and Color Mixing needs to be considered when introducing color into a scene. Again, mood is impacted by its use.**

**Color essentially is part of Composition, as it applies to Balance, Rhythm, and even Texture. When excessive colors are used, they affect the harmony of a space and provide a sense of dischord.**

**Lighting designers should utilize a Color Wheel and understand color relationships. We ALL must remember that the artist uses color wisely.**



## Common Flaw #9—Excessive Fixtures



**There are only two reasons for lighting designers to use Excessive Fixtures: 1) limited knowledge of fixtures available, and 2) greed to make more money off of the unknowing consumer. Either way, it is bad for the profession.**

**Not only does this over-use look terrible, but it ruins the feel of the space. It affects the Composition of the project—it establishes Rhythm and Pattern, each which becomes the Emphasis (Focus) of the setting. Once it becomes the focal point, then it causes the visitor to question, “What is this?” “Why are there so many lights?”**

# Common Flaw #10—Poor Techniques



The example above shows how the designer only used up lights. It also shows how they weren't aimed or positioned properly.

**Poor Techniques is a 'catch-all' category to lump several problems.**

**This occurs because of two reasons: 1) inexperience, and 2) little care of the job. Some lighting designers and contractors only wish to install the job so they can maximize profits and run to the next job. No time is spent to adjust light fixtures or to ensure proper positioning. Many times it's left up to the crew that may not care, while the designer is off selling the next project. Some call this a, "Turn and Burn" practice.**

# Common Flaw #10—Poor Techniques



**Problem 1: The unlit front door—Lacking Destination. This causes confusion and added stress.**

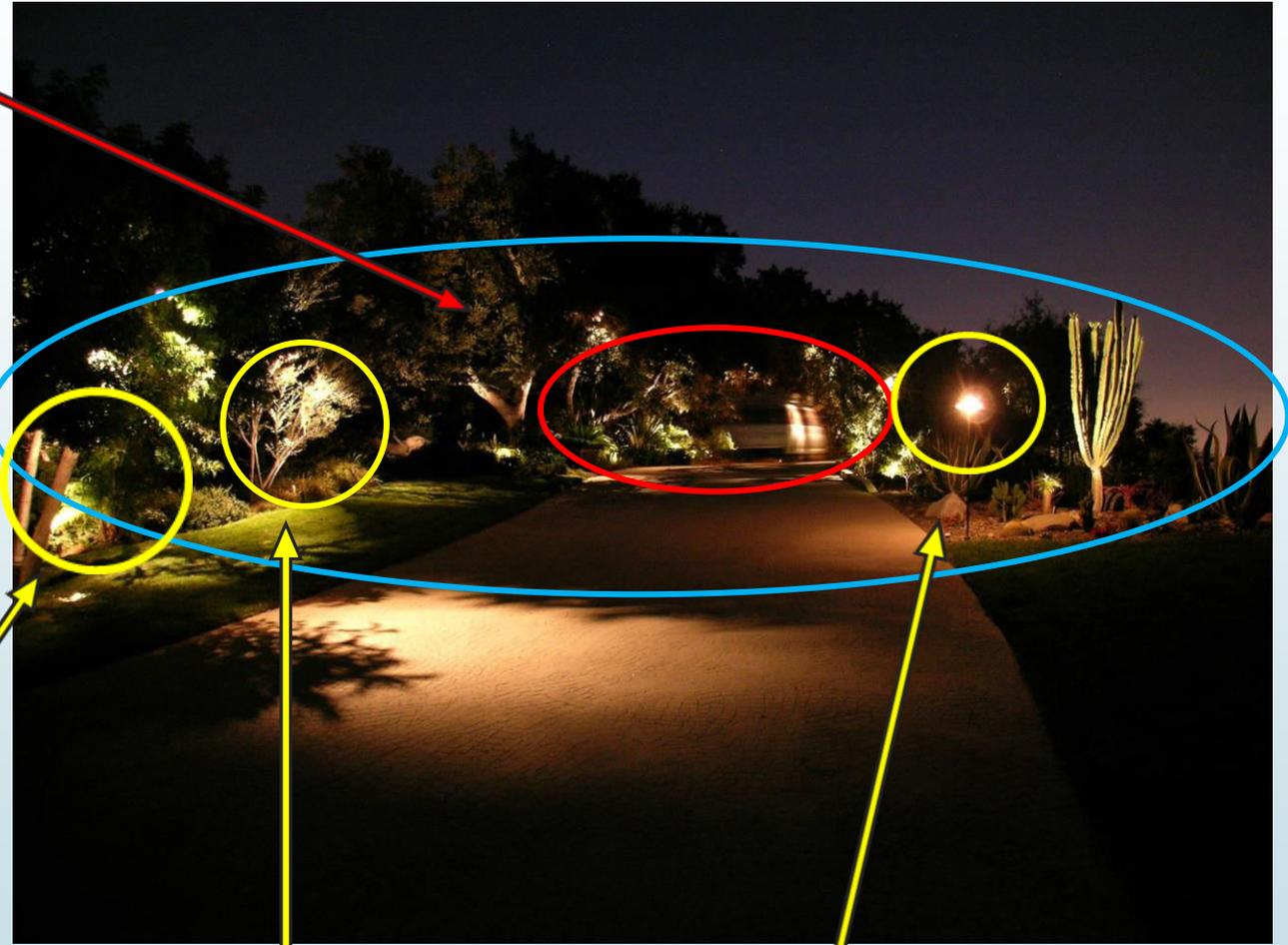
**Problem 2: No background lighting—Composition. Little to no depth in the scene.**

**Problem 3: Sporadic light fixtures & Wrong use of fixtures—Composition & Overuse of Fixtures. This adds greater confusion because the viewer is questioning, “What are they illuminating?” It’s just poor judgement to use these lights in such a manner—spotty lighting throughout.**

# Common Flaw #10—Poor Techniques

**Problem 1: Lacking Destination.** Identifying a focal point or destination is critical in movement. Although this makes sense to follow the drive, this lighting scene challenges the visitor through the added distractions.

**Problem 2: Composition.** The lighting level looks about the same and there's too much to try to organize in the mind. The eye is in constant movement, wandering the scene.



**Problem 3: Glare and 'hot spots',** which are distracting. This takes away from the setting being calming and allows the mind to question where to look.



# Final Points



- ▶ These 10 Common Lighting Design Flaws are provided **to help Educate both the Consumer and the Trade Practitioner**, as these should be well understood.
- ▶ The primary reasons for these flaws are:
  - ❑ **Lack of Education and/or Knowledge** to know better
  - ❑ **Lack of Caring**—many service providers desire to get in and out of the job quickly
- ▶ These flaws will aid to **Separate those who are “Good” versus “Not So Good”** in landscape lighting design.
- ▶ These flaws can help those newer to the lighting business to understand the impact they have on the community—this **Awareness is the key to Advancement**.



# Case Study— Common Lighting Design Flaws

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Photography by: **Unknown—pulled randomly from Google Images search**