Placemaking at Night

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What makes a space a place? Spaces become places when they encourage people to dwell for longer than they may have planned and are comfortable and familiar yet every changing. Unbeknown to most user, the quality of light and shade in a place plays a large part in one's experience of the atmosphere within a space; it impacts on one's memories and experience of a place. Legibility, safety, character are just a few roles that light plays within a public space and if, carefully designed, common sources can provide the functional and aesthetic lighting.

Working with it every day as we do, it is easy to forget that light, in and of itself, is intangible. As designers, we are used to thinking and speaking of light and materials as a single entity. We need to remind ourselves that light and material are two very different yet interdependent entities. Without light, materials and their inherent characteristics are unseen, and without materials, light is invisible. In all of our projects, the dialogue between light, colour and material texture is constantly on our mind. We make multiple tests, checking and experimenting to find the most appropriate way in which to reveal a texture or best enhance a colour. We think in terms of visual impact and also consider the practicality of a concealing the lighting detail.

Once we believe we have the correct approach to all the surfaces and textures in a single space we take a step back to make sure the balance of the overall composition is what we were aiming for. This may mean some tuning: downplaying the effect of certain surfaces or overplaying others to ensure the space is harmonious and clearly legible, rather than confused and distracting. Often in the process, we question whether materials and textures can be changed or relocated to help the overall composition.

Vertical illumination is as important and, in some cases, more important than light on horizontal surfaces. As upright mammals, we experience of spaces in elevation rather than plan view so it is logical that we are guided by light on vertical surfaces. Luminous elevations create a stronger sense of light in the space, more than the horizontal illumination. Human-scale light creates moments of privacy within larger spaces. People gather around light; a subconscious social reaction to light encourages people to cluster together.

Light in public places plays a key role in opening up spaces. Light encourages people into public places after dark promoting a sense of both inclusion and legibility. Light energises and promotes civic pride in these places. Well considered light within public space is a place ops interaction, a place of economic sustainability and vibrancy. Visitors and resident can exist with the same space in places that are comfortable, safe and memorable.

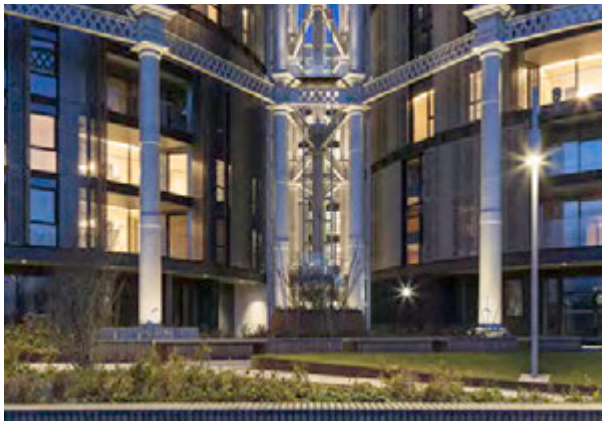
We work on a wide range of projects in varying locations and scales. This variety allows us to test and share ideas across projects that may at first glance seem disconnected but share a common focus of people's experience of space in light:

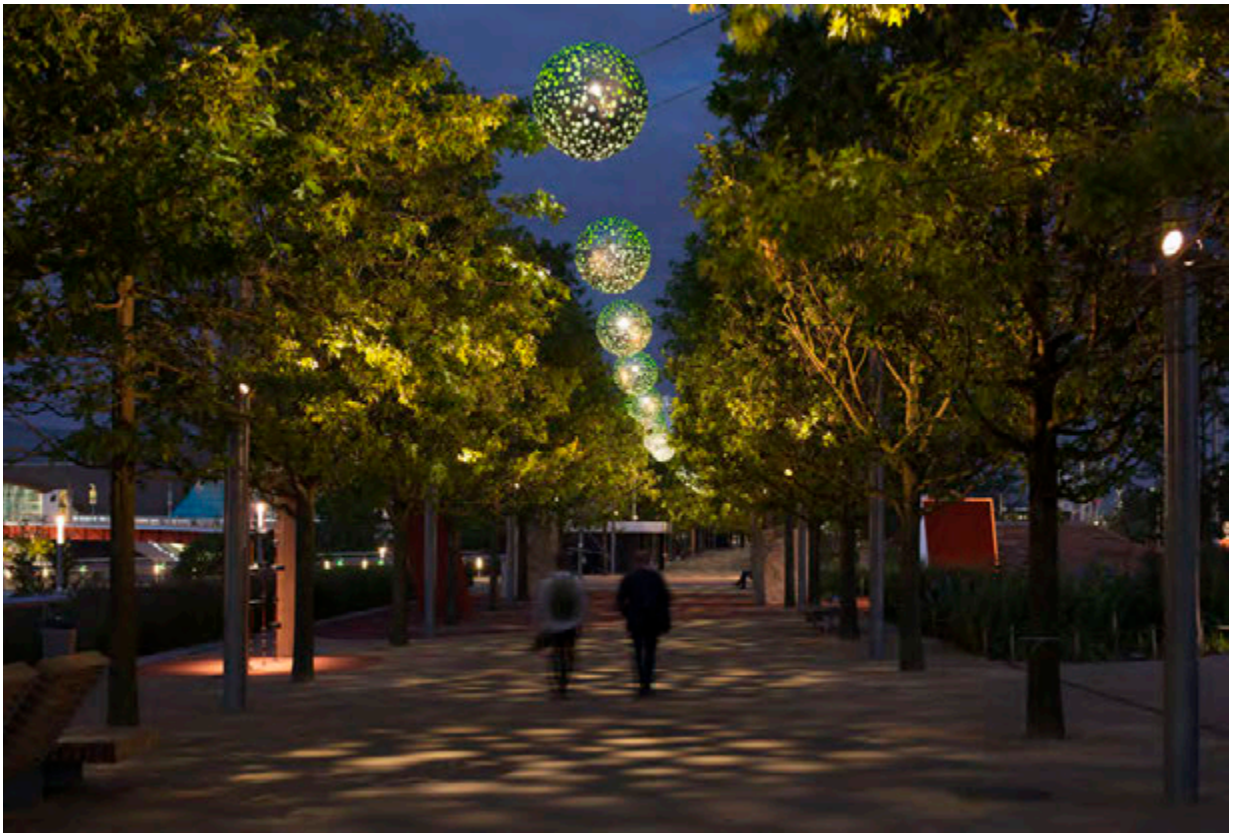
Salisbury Gardens + AOS

A dark sanctuary on the waterfront of Kowloon, a place of quiet serenity, allowing visitors a moment to admire the views of Hong Kong island skyline. Delicate lighting details add sense of refinement and urban luxury.

Gasholders London

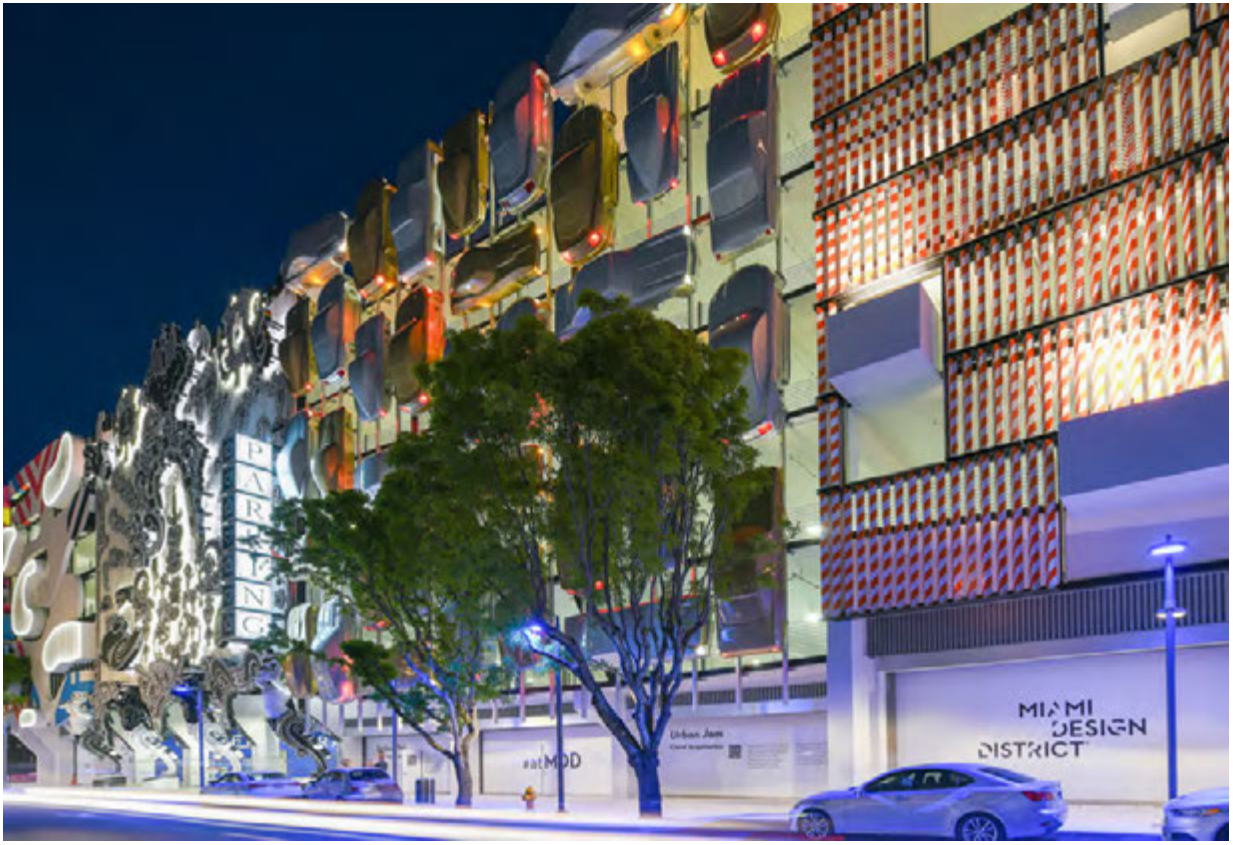
The repurposing of the historic Gasholder structures into residential buildings fuses old and new revealed by light + shade – celebrating the beauty of the industrial frames whilst creating warm, refined interior for residents.





QEOP

Light creates an enchanting, immersive experience for the park. The unique moon-like spheres suspended over the pathway create a dappled effect on pedestrians below, reminiscent of light filtering through a forest canopy creating an extraordinary space which is at once intriguing and calming.



Miami Design District

A district designed to bring together architecture, design, art, fashion and dining experiences in a cross-cultivating community environment. Light is used to identify the brand of the MDD district with gold and blue. Individual, illuminated gems provide moments of joy, intrigue and inspiration.

Keith Bradshaw:

Keith Bradshaw studied fine art before training in architecture at the Bartlett School of Architecture. Keith became a Principal of Speirs + Major in 2009. He has led many of the practice's award winning international and UK projects, including the Copenhagen Opera House, Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Mosque, Shenzhen Airport and flagship stores for Giorgio Armani in Tokyo, New York, Milan and Beijing. Noteworthy current projects include urban realm projects in Miami, Helsinki and Hong Kong and civic buildings in Rome, Oslo and Beijing.
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