

**Boston was never** really a “night” city or, more specifically, an “all-night” city, mainly because public transportation shut down so early. But your “Night” issue [July/August 2007] made me nostalgic for a time when at least some parts of the city were open all night. I was an actor in the mid-’60s, and after a rehearsal or performance, my colleagues and I wanted to restore our energy and unwind over a bite to eat. The choices weren’t many, but there were a few hangouts of seductive appeal. There was Ken’s on Boylston Street in Copley Square for a steak or pretty good deli; or the great Mondo’s, popping up in various new places near the waterfront, where a generous breakfast or a heaping vinegary Mondo’s salad were offered at any hour; or, for coffee and a Danish, and glaring overhead lights, the seedy Hayes Bickford in Harvard Square (at one point “the Bick” started to close at 4 AM so that derelicts wouldn’t spend the entire night). This also meant that the surroundings were also peopled and lit. And alive. Like going to a museum at night, there was a special nighttime atmosphere. Theatrical. Artificial. Energized. A little risky, but (in those days) unthreatening. I’m glad the Museum of Fine Arts has evening hours. I’m grateful for the Citgo sign and the illuminated Bunker Hill Monument and Zakim Bridge. But I miss the allure and knowing camaraderie of the all-night bistro and the cheap glamour of the lights spilling out into the street right outside.

*Lloyd Schwartz*  
Classical music editor  
The Boston Phoenix

**It’s about time** we had a discussion about light and the nocturnal life of buildings. Never have innovations in the urban landscape had more impact on our lives than during the last century’s electrification of our cities and towns. And now it is our responsibility to engage both the effect of light and its performance in ways that nest the many complex material,

environmental, and social agendas that architects face today... and tonight. The subject is especially potent to our future here in Massachusetts. Our Commonwealth is a hotbed of academic institutions, manufacturers, and designers, all capable of taking new illumination technologies to the next level.

Driving along the new Rose Kennedy Greenway, I noticed hundreds of newly installed “acorn fixtures,” the nostalgic lampposts that have become Boston’s “Sherman Tank” standard for street lighting. What a missed opportunity. What could have been a laboratory for new lighting technologies becomes a reliquary for a lack of will to innovate.

The task at hand is a creative one that will require collaboration among architects, lighting designers, engineers, artists, fabricators, and governmental agencies. Our new administration is showing interest in supporting the Massachusetts Creative Economy, so what better forum to bring these disciplines together than to engage in developing new ways to deliver light not only to our local communities but also to the global market so we may respond to the more than two billion people who continue to live without electricity.

*Franco Violich AIA*  
Kennedy & Violich Architecture  
BSA Design Commissioner

**Announced in March**, the Boston Redevelopment Authority’s proposal to enliven the city’s evening venues with lighted billboards has rightfully provoked skepticism. Some expect that this initiative will become a social and economic catalyst for the city’s night spots. However, the success of these catalysts is inherently linked to implementing a significant density of ground-level programming that can use those graphics as active backdrops.

Shanghai’s Huang Pu waterfront sets the Bund, a strolling promenade throbbing with activity, against the glitz of Pudong’s signage and building lights. The spectacle,

lit from dusk until late evening, provides entertainment between the dinner and clubbing hours in a city whose identity is tethered to its rebellious nightlife. Times Square’s billboards are juxtaposed against massive volumes of commercial space which are open almost all night, crystallizing New York City’s 24/7 urbanism. It would be embarrassing if Boston pursued what can be no more than a superficial, Band-Aid urbanism, if these catalysts were inhibited by future timid planning schemes. For urban pulse points to throb, they need more than just signage; they need the infrastructure and planning to support and attract large night-crowds. Dense, downtown housing blocks, programmed, lit, public spaces, like winter gardens and night-markets, and public transportation that operates after last-call, must become priorities for the city.

Let’s push for further planning initiatives that create the human and commercial density requisite for making such installations more than cheap symbols of surrendering urban design to commercialism. We must ensure these night venues have the programmatic and infrastructural resolution to support vitality in our night spots. Otherwise, Boston may be embarrassed to stand among cities like Shanghai, New York, and Hong Kong, gloating over its proverbial cufflinks, when it hasn’t any pants.

*Lisa Ann Pasquale*  
Boston

**I was pleased** to see James McCown’s recent article regarding Light Boston [sidebar to “Illuminating Ideas,” July/August 2007]. As a powerful advocate for Boston’s night-time illuminated environment, Light Boston takes an active stance to acquire funding and designers for properly illuminating Boston landmarks. But all too often, this only goes as far as the design and implementation phase. It seems that in many cases the most pervasive problem, either with existing exterior

lighting or renovated lighting, is maintenance. Any electrical device, especially outdoors, is inevitably going to fail. A well-illuminated urban environment actually rests in the hands not of advocacy groups like Light Boston, but of those tasked with maintaining the fixtures: in many cases, local municipalities and often private individuals or companies as well. More than likely, money exists within the budgets of these entities for upkeep and maintenance, yet one can still see burned-out lamps and broken or mis-aimed fixtures throughout Boston, giving the appearance of a sloppily illuminated city. Let's take pride in our unique civic life and encourage — nay, demand — that our night-time environment be pleasing, wonderful, energy efficient, without glare, and seen in the way it was designed to be — with the lights on that are meant to be, and the lights off that aren't.

Dan Weissman  
Lam Partners  
Cambridge, Massachusetts

**As director** of the night photography group The Nocturnes, it was with great interest that I settled down to read the “Night” issue [July/August 2007] of your publication.

Over the years, I have observed that night photographers seem to have more than a keen interest in architecture and architectural artifacts as subject matter, so it's great to see a reciprocal study and appreciation of night photography, night illumination, and the night life of buildings in such a prestigious publication as yours. The connection between the study of architecture and night photography, I believe, is partly due to the many constraints placed upon the night photographer (long time exposures, use of a tripod, weather, extremely high contrast/low light levels, and the inherent danger associated with the night). Now, what have emerged in this discipline are basically two camps of subject matter — landscape and architecture (more accurately, structures of all sorts). This is to the exclusion of people/portraits, “macro” work of flowers or other small objects in the night, and “action (stop action) photography” — mostly what we in trade call “day photography.”

The links in your “Site Work” section provide a valuable resource for readers who wish to pursue the study of the nocturne and its magic, although I would have hoped for a few night photography sites. A list of such sites is available online, at [www.thenocturnes.com/resources/links.html](http://www.thenocturnes.com/resources/links.html)

Tim Baskerville

The Nocturnes Night Photography Group  
Mare Island, California

**I was surprised** at the comment in “Prepared Response” [May/June 2007] asking, “How useful, really, are some of the efforts?” referring to the outpouring of goodwill after Katrina, and particularly the question “... has this been truly useful to the people in the affected communities?” referring to design schools sending students.

MIT has sent several student teams to repair and rebuild and, yes, even to design a housing prototype for rebuilding after the hurricanes in the bayous of Louisiana. Our innovative “lift house” prototype [which can be seen at [http://www.trac4la.com/lifthouse.php?contentNAME=recover\\_home&color=006600&areafont=areawhite&navfont=navwhite&areaTITLE=Recover](http://www.trac4la.com/lifthouse.php?contentNAME=recover_home&color=006600&areafont=areawhite&navfont=navwhite&areaTITLE=Recover)] is almost completed and soon to be occupied, and student designs for affordable hurricane-proof shutters are now being locally built. Oxfam is now distributing the design for wider use. But equally important is what one bayou resident noted: “The most important thing is that you are here, knowing that the people throughout the country care about us.”

Educational value and real contributions are not strangers.

Dr. Reinhard Goethert  
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