



Lights, Camera, Activation!

A TRENDS REPORT FOR UPMO PRACTITIONERS

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JANUARY 2022



Placemaking

WOULDJA LOOK AT THAT?!

In the 21st century, **advancements in lighting technology** enable us to augment existing spaces with ambitious illumination; creating interactive spaces, affordable, easy-to-lift installations, rehabilitate formerly blighted or susceptible areas and go overboard with transformative placemaking. In this Trends Report, we'll dissect and examine **some select, illuminating examples** from around the globe. Those highlighted in this report were chosen for a reason, and bear in mind, the list is by no means exhaustive. There are thousands of examples to choose from.



Did you know?

NEON, a noble gas, is the fifth most abundant element in the universe, and was discovered by a pair of English chemists in 1898.

ELECTROLUMINESCENCE (EL) is purported to be discovered by English experimenter H.J. Round of Marconi Labs in 1907.

GEORGES CLAUDE, a French engineer and inventor known as “The Edison of France” introduced **neon lighting for domestic use in 1910**, but homeowners disliked the reddish glow, however the advertising world embraced its modern and progressive feel.

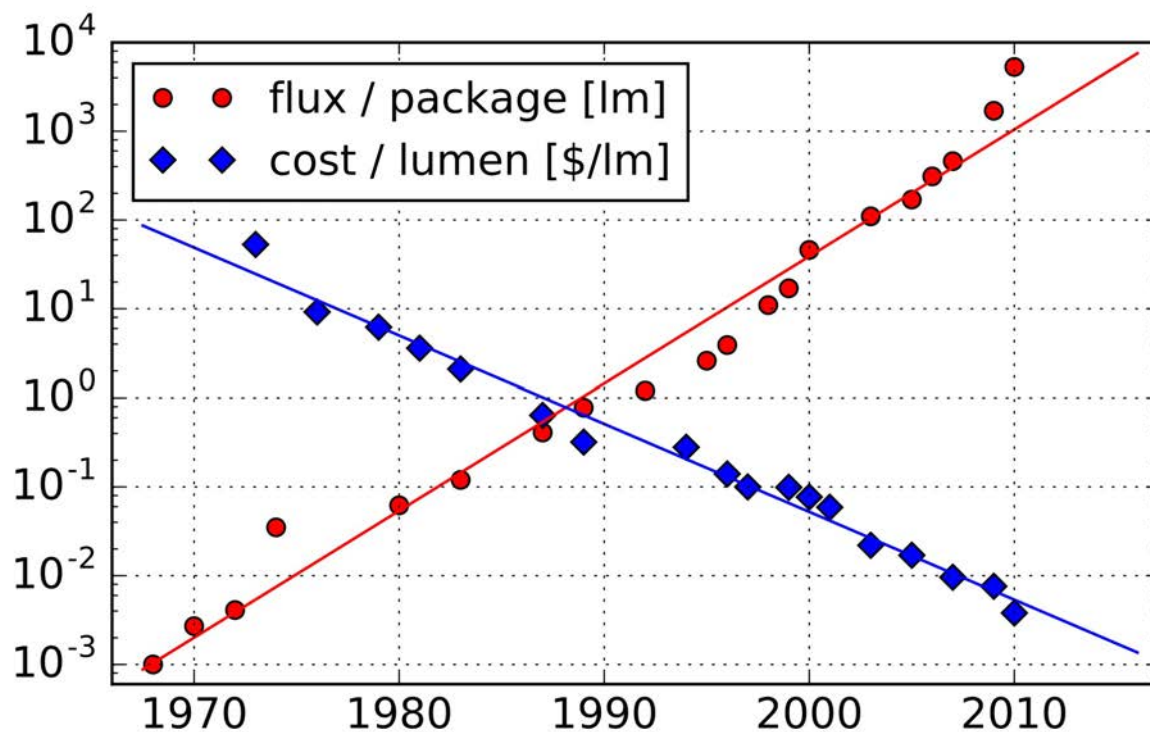
RUSSIAN INVENTOR OLEG LOSEV reported the creation of **the first LED** in 1927, but there was no practical use for decades.

Placemaking

WOULDJA LOOK AT THAT?!

Advances in EL (electroluminescence) technology continued for decades with **rapid increase** in output and a **converse decrease** in cost, known as “Haitz’s Law”. Similar to Moore’s Law regarding computing, Haitz Law was first presented to the larger public at “Strategies in Light 2000”, and LEDs were predicted to become the most efficient light source by 2020.

In 2017, Philips Lighting started **offering consumer LED lights**, three years before what Haitz’s law predicted.



“Haitz’s Law” Image courtesy of “Geek3” on Wikipedia

Why, though?

Whether incandescent, projection, neon or LED – the 21st century has seen a rapid increase in lights and lighting technology used for various placemaking initiatives. For the purposes of this paper, we've categorized the majority of these uses into the following **three placemaking categories**, and we'll explore each in further depth from the perspective of a UPMO/DMO practitioner or urban designer.

EVENTS & ACTIVATIONS

Art-installations, festivals, public events, activations, celebrations and monuments designed to add a visual element, to stimulate the senses or ameliorate an experience. These types of placemaking activations typically serve to increase footfall within a specific area with the intent of supporting geographically-relevant businesses.

INTERVENTIONS & PUBLIC SAFETY

Place-based interventions addressing formerly blighted or susceptible areas, deterrents to crime or rehabilitating at-risk areas within the public realm.

WAYFINDING

Visual indicators or cues to access and linkages between spaces and places that facilitate traffic, mobility and transportation. These efforts are sometimes utilized to unify an area, neighborhood or district in a visually cohesive way or to connect adjacent, yet disparate spaces.

Events & Activations



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[AURORA](#) is a Dallas-based public arts organization working at the intersection of art, technology and community that presents works by the most visionary artists of our time.

[Alt Ethos](#) installations in Colorado, designed as “Community spaces for play and connection”.

[CREoS](#) “interactive installations that bring communities together while increasing the visibility of your site” like “[Prismatica](#)” in Scottsdale, AZ, and “[Impulse](#)” in Downtown Norfolk, VA

[Klip Collective](#) “uses a unique synthesis of projection mapping, lighting, and sound design to create site-specific, immersive sensory experiences on behalf of institutions, brands and cultural partners”, like the “[Deck the Hall](#)” holiday light show on Philadelphia City Hall, and “[Electric Desert](#)” at Desert Botanical Garden in Phoenix, AZ.

[Georgetown GLOW](#) is a “free curated outdoor public light art experience” in Georgetown CDC, District of Columbia

On the following pages, we’ll take a **deep-dive** into two Philadelphia regional examples of illuminated events and activations:

Chestnut Hill’s “Night of Lights”

“Ghost Ship” at Race Street Pier

A nighttime cityscape with illuminated skyscrapers. In the foreground, a crowd of people is silhouetted against the city lights. A pink kite is visible in the sky on the right side. A thin white diagonal line is present in the bottom left corner.

Events & Activations



Events & Activations

CHESTNUT HILL, PA | NIGHT OF LIGHTS

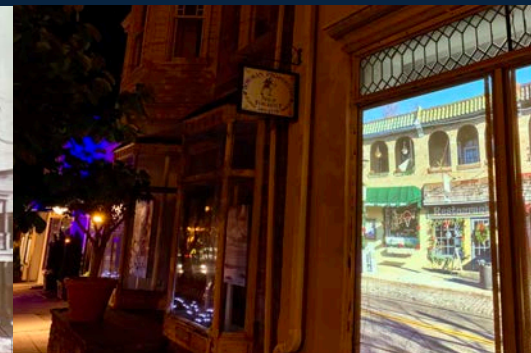
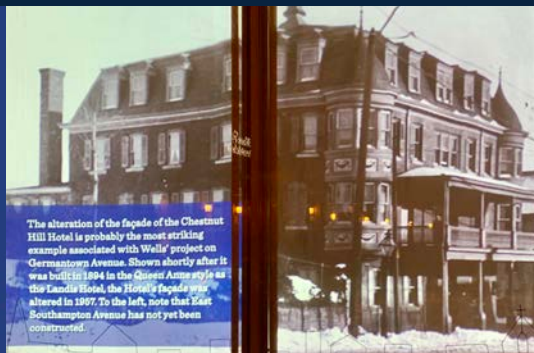
A gorgeous, garden-like district just within the county boundary of Philadelphia, PA, sits historic, quaint and charming Chestnut Hill. Founded as a village in colonial times, Chestnut Hill became part of the city with the 1854 Act of Consolidation. Today this toney “streetcar suburb” sits a mere 11 miles from Center City, Philadelphia. Known for its Belgian block cobblestone streets, vibrant indie retail and restaurant scene, and a plethora of intact, extant historic buildings, Chestnut Hill puts on an amazing light show each fall; drawing thousands from the surrounding area.

Each October since 2016, Chestnut Hill has hosted its now famous “**Night of Lights**”, designed to showcase the Chestnut Hill Conservancy’s archives, historical photography and provide a way for modern visitors to engage and learn about the revered village’s storied past.

The Chestnut Hill Conservancy focuses on preserving the area’s historic treasures through architectural preservation, land conservation and providing for the discovery and care of community heritage with a comprehensive **collection of over 200,000 images** from the 1680s onward. Night of Lights offers an inventive way to **engage the public by projecting historical images** and film from the Conservancy’s archives onto storefront windows, with neighboring buildings illuminated with a colorful cadre of lights.

The net experience is **brehtaking** to behold, and a wonderfully **immersive** way to interact with constituents and visitors, while **driving foot traffic** and increasing ped counts within the district each autumn.





Events & Activations

CHESTNUT HILL, PA | NIGHT OF LIGHTS

During the pandemic, the Conservancy was forced to pivot, yet the outdoor, socially-spaced experience lent itself naturally to complying with safety protocols. Outdoor and distanced, the event was extended from one night to take place over the course of two weekends. The Conservancy **added a mobile experience** at each installation site, opportunities for attendees to **record and share their own oral stories** and contribute to the event experience. Additionally, Community Storytellers were available to hear by phone during the event using prompts posted along Germantown Avenue. And a **mobile passport integration utilizing QR codes** helped track attendance and encourage participation by offering prizes to participants.



Bright Brothers Strategy Group had the opportunity to visit, photo-document and perform intercept surveys with attendees on opening weekend, October 2020. The feedback was florid, on-point and reinforcing, from a placemaking perspective:

"I like the colors! If I were a city planner this is what I would do. I would spend tax dollars on illuminating the town like this with LEDs."

And....

"In the age of Instagram, this will make more people come here. It's free advertising. Free tourism." – Bryan D., North Wales, PA

"We live in the city, so this gave us a reason to get out of the city and something that's safe and socially distanced and an opportunity to check out Chestnut Hill." – Brandi, V., Fairmount, Philadelphia

"It's something nice to do, especially this year." (referencing the pandemic) -- Mallory H., Mt. Airy, PA



Events & Activations

CHESTNUT HILL, PA | NIGHT OF LIGHTS

Bright Brothers Strategy Group sat down with the leadership team from the Chestnut Hill Conservancy in July 2021 to discuss the activation. They noted that objectives for Night of Lights were to:

- DRIVE FOOTFALL
- SHOWCASE THE CONSERVANCY'S ARCHIVES
- BUILD DIALOGUE WITH THE COMMUNITY ON WHAT'S IMPORTANT

AMONG OTHER AIMS, THE ORGANIZATION

didn't want this to become a festival.

FOR THIS COMMUNITY, IT'S ABOUT THE ARCHITECTURE,
THE HERITAGE AND SUSTAINABILITY.

Events & Activations PHILADELPHIA, PA | GHOST SHIP

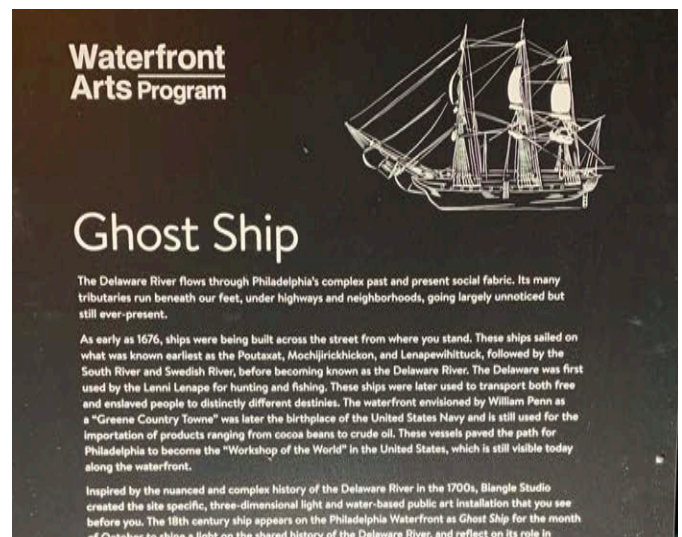
One of the most **ambitious, inventive and earned-media generating** activations we've experienced to date, has to be the "Ghost Ship" installation next to the Race Street Pier in Philadelphia. Commissioned by the Delaware River Waterfront Corporation and managed by commercial photographer and independent curator Ryan Strand Greenberg, this **three-story high hologram was projected onto water mist** underneath the Ben Franklin Bridge in autumn 2019.



Photo: Bright Brothers Strategy Group

Designed and produced by [Biangle Studio](#), this impressive installation garnered much media attention, became a "must-do" event for Instagram influencers and locals alike, and graced the waterfront with eerie images evoking Philadelphia's former shipbuilding past.

When asked what "Ghost Ship" means and why it's relevant, Mihai from Biangle Studio noted that, *"When viewed as a plug-and-play placemaking tool, the Ghost Ship performs as a multiplier, as an amplifier. A certain place might be important in itself to a local community of a few hundred people. But once the Ghost Ship is installed and powered on, the location suddenly becomes relevant to thousands of people for days on end."*



"Such an effect was observed in [2018 in Munkebo, DK](#). The jetty of this small Danish village was relevant to the local sailing club and to the occasional kids or adults who braved the cold water for a swim. When the Ghost Ship appeared, the cars that were transiting the village within sight of the jetty - and which usually just drove on to or from Odense - were now making an unplanned stop to see the artwork and ask the locals what it meant. This happened every night for two months and the project was nominated for a Danish cultural prize."



Events & Activations

PHILADELPHIA, PA | GHOST SHIP

According to the installation’s curator, Ryan Strand Greenberg, *“As viewers travel through the exhibition, they access a narrative audio tour offering a view into the historical landscape of the Delaware River. Guided by historians, artists, and archaeologists, the exhibition intends to evoke memory and engage in a multicultural and multigenerational conversation about the past, present, and future of Philadelphia and its Delaware River Waterfront.”*



**Waterfront
Arts Program**

North American Premiere

Ghost Ship

The first public art installation as part of the new Waterfront Arts Program

October 4 – November 3
Race Street Pier
Philadelphia

Mesmerizing 3D Hologram Rising Under the Ben Franklin Bridge
DelawareRiverWaterfront.com/GhostShip

ARTIST Biangle Studio
CURATED BY Ryan Strand Greenberg
ENGINEERING Pennoni
CONSTRUCTION AP Construction
PRODUCED BY Delaware River Waterfront Corporation
SUPPORTED BY William Penn Foundation
ADDITIONAL FUNDING Pennsylvania Council on the Arts



#MyPhillyWaterfront

Photo: Delaware River Waterfront Corporation



Events & Activations PHILADELPHIA, PA | GHOST SHIP

The cost of Ghost Ship is **in the six-digit range**, and not within grasp of smaller districts. However, while it may come with a hefty price-tag, executing a three-story tall, temporary public art installation like Ghost Ship has the power to impress and build your district's reputation. It can quite literally **“put you on the map”** when you think in terms of **geo-tags** on Instagram, Apple or Google Maps and other various **digital resources that are the mainstays** of how people navigate our world today. From planning a vacation, to a “girls night out” to a must-see stop-off on your way to dinner, drinks or a show in your district.

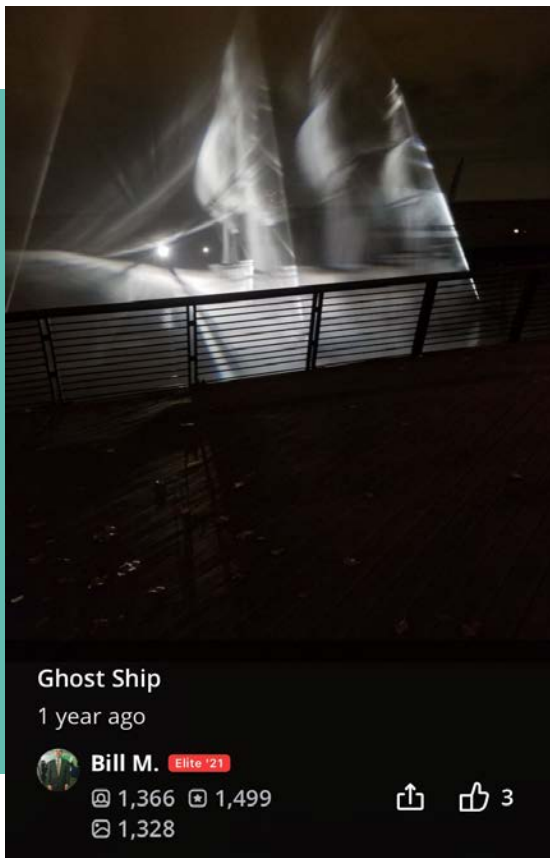


Photo: Left; Google, Right; Bright Brothers Strategy Group



Intervention & Public Safety

Intervention & Public Safety

Place-based interventions addressing formerly blighted or susceptible areas, deterrents to crime or rehabilitating at-risk areas within the public realm.

This Trends Report includes fewer examples of lighting used as interventions or for public safety for several reasons. First and foremost, this is perhaps a contentious and highly political acknowledgement.



Secondly, the main reasons touted by organizations may overshadow the “unspoken” desired effects, and their uses are therefore categorized under one of the two other headings we explore in this document.

That said, of the few examples we have witnessed or found substantiating evidence for, include:

Frankford Avenue homeless encampment replaced with LED lights, Philadelphia, PA

LED Illumination at [Train Station](#) in Stamford, CT

Lit City, Orleans Street Viaduct Tunnel in Baltimore (IDA reception, 2019), Maryland

Intervention & Public Safety

BALTIMORE, MD | ORLEANS STREET VIADUCT

Built in 1936, the Orleans Street Viaduct originally carried railroad traffic over St. Paul Street in Downtown Baltimore, MD. According to the Baltimore Sun, the bridge was built to pass over the Pennsylvania Northern Central Division rail yards and the Jones Fall Valley. By the end of the twentieth century the train yards were gone, and tunnel below the bridge was **uninviting and considered by some as derelict**. As the 1728-foot-long structure entered the new century, efforts were undertaken to **revitalize this iconic overpass** and underside.



Photo: Pinterest



Photo: Baltimore Sun/Downtown Partnership of Baltimore

Intervention & Public Safety

BALTIMORE, MD | ORLEANS STREET VIADUCT

In 2015 the Downtown Partnership of Baltimore worked with the city's Department of Transportation to **activate the tunnel with a rainbow palette of dancing, colored lights** beneath the overpass. According to Baltimore Fishbowl the lights are, "having their own party seven days a week". In 2017, the Downtown Partnership hosted its first dance party under the illuminated tunnel called "Lit City" as part of Baltimore's 'Light City'; a "...festival of light, music and innovation," produced by the Baltimore Office of Promotion and the Arts.

Intervention & Public Safety

BALTIMORE, MD | ORLEANS STREET VIADUCT

Piggybacking “Lit City” as an event that was part of Light City and the Baltimore Book Festival makes smart sense. Lit City revitalized the space for the public, and included music, DJs, dancing, an open bar and food provided by a variety of local restaurants and purveyors. This event was wildly popular, supported local merchants and ratepayers, **created public engagement and earned media.**



Photo: Baltimore Snap

Intervention & Public Safety

BALTIMORE, MD | ORLEANS STREET VIADUCT

In 2019, the Downtown Partnership of Baltimore played host to the **International Downtown Association's 65th Annual Conference & Marketplace** with the theme "Proudly Urban". The Downtown Partnership did a marvelous job of hosting the conference, and with hundreds of UPMO practitioners in attendance. The Partnership earned bragging rights by showcasing their vibrant downtown, including **capital improvement projects** like the Orleans Street Tunnel -- which was **the venue for the conference's opening reception** that year.



Photo: Bright Brothers Strategy Group

Intervention & Public Safety

BALTIMORE, MD | ORLEANS STREET VIADUCT

“Europe and Asia have long appreciated the interplay between light and architecture. It took a while for the U.S. to catchup but it’s happening in a big way. Here in Baltimore, we took a dark underpass that felt gloomy even at midday and utilized LED lights to make the roof glow with different colors and patterns. The beams line each corner of the ceiling and become more diffused as they reach the middle of the span, highlighting the natural arc of the ceiling. What was once a visual liability is now an asset, 24-hours a day that we program with photoshoots and dance parties.”

– Michael Evitts, Sr. Vice President of Communications & Brand Strategy,
Downtown Partnership of Baltimore



Photo: Human Being Productions



Wayfinding

Wayfinding

Visual indicators or cues to access and linkages between spaces and places that facilitate traffic, mobility and transportation. These efforts are sometimes utilized to unify an area, neighborhood or district in a visually cohesive way or to connect adjacent, yet disparate spaces.

There are numerous ways in which lighting and illumination are used for wayfinding. For the brevity of this report, **we focused on one success story out of Downtown Norfolk**, but many others exist.



Photo: Downtown Norfolk Council

The [Spring Garden Connector](#) project in Philadelphia. Completed in 2016 as part of a Master Plan, it illuminates a formerly downtrodden area and breathes life into several core, burgeoning neighborhoods nearby.

An electrified, neon mural called “[Electric Philadelphia](#)” now graces a series of underpasses. Formerly bland concrete now pops with color and makes [an explosive statement](#) at a series of pivotal intersections underneath I-676 in Old City.

The “[North Poles](#)” illuminated pylons along Broad Street in North Philadelphia/Temple U Campus, Philadelphia, PA

“[LA Lights The Way](#)” streetlight design competition in Los Angeles, CA

Norfolk, VA’s NEON District NEON Cube wayfinding project with WPA, Norfolk, VA

Wayfinding

NORFOLK, VA | NEON DISTRICT

According to the Downtown Norfolk Council’s website, the NEON District is, “**Norfolk’s first official arts district.**” The NEON District is home to a new wave of passion and creativity in downtown. NEON, or New Energy Of Norfolk, draws from the neighborhood’s history with the automobile industry as it moves into a new and vibrant future.”

Also, a formerly blighted area situated within the center of downtown, NEON has literally breathed new life into this previously desolate pocket of downtown, rendering it a **hub for artistic endeavors**, public space, annual events, and a new centralized focus and locus for the city’s creative set.

And it’s not a case of “one & done”. The district is a dynamic, ongoing effort supported by the city, the DNC and community partners and sponsors. With a **dedicated director** of special projects overseeing and coordinated mass efforts, big plans are underway to continue to grow this dazzling gem of a neighborhood within the downtown footprint, [as evidenced here.](#)

NEON boasts a [dual-faceted public art program](#) with both micro-grants for artists, as well as a matching grants program for property owners and tenants within the district.



Photo: Downtown Norfolk Council

Wayfinding

NORFOLK, VA | NEON DISTRICT

“Slowly rotating at the gateway into Norfolk’s arts district, the NEON Cube isn’t quite a sculpture and not really a sign but falls somewhere on the spectrum of place identity. Designed as part of an ultra custom wayfinding program to help visitors navigate the revitalized neighborhood, fabricators retrofitted a historic bus station canopy for the base of a spinning LED-lit metal box. Along with glass disc “breadcrumbs” inserted into the sidewalk and steel sign monoliths built with windows for rotating vinyl art, every element of the sign program was intended to showcase the creativity and new energy building in the district.”

– Rachel McCall, Director of Strategic Initiatives, Downtown Norfolk Council



Photo: Downtown Norfolk Council

Honorable Mention

PHILADELPHIA, PA | ONE LIBERTY PLACE

While this one could be considered wayfinding, it's **purely a placemaking play** and one of the coolest we've seen to date. Whereas all the uses of illumination are impressive in their various incarnations, this one, again from Philadelphia (we know, we know!!), really takes the cake!

One Liberty Place is part of a series of high-rise developments that made history in the 1980s. There had been a widely-recognized **"gentleman's agreement" not to build anything taller than the William Penn statue that graces city hall** at 548 ft (167m), which was the tallest habitable building in the world from 1894 – 1908. One Liberty Place made history in 1984 when it surpassed William Penn's hat and ushered in a new era of high rise building in the city.

Once again making history, in 2021 the third-tallest building in the city is now **retrofitted with zigzagging LED lighting** inside its glass-capped roof, to add iconic new illumination to the skyline of the City of Brotherly Love — but the lighting isn't static!

According to Axios, "My Liberty Lights, a new digital platform, allows **users to control the lights atop the 61-story building for 5 minutes at a time**. Users can choose between a number of colors, themes and animations — and then schedule their show to go live. The 72 new light lenses offer a host of new colors, customizable lighting sequences and more."

One Liberty Place **held a contest on its Instagram page** to allow a specific number of users access to create their own light shows and invite guests to control the look of the building to boot. Now THAT'S smart placemaking!

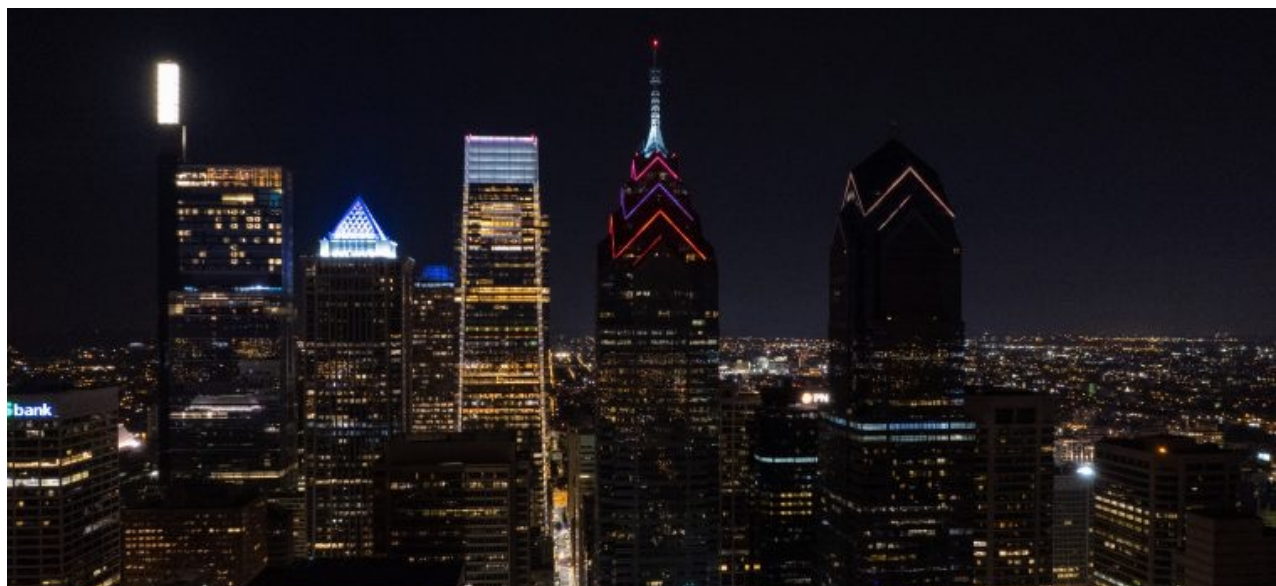


Photo: Left; Metropolis Investment Holding Inc. Right; Matk Henninger / Imagic Digital

A row of tall, modern streetlights with circular, glowing tops, receding into the distance against a dark blue sky. The lights are arranged in a perspective line, creating a sense of depth. The overall mood is serene and modern.

In Sum



In Sum

The advances in lighting technology allow us as placemakers and place branders to put our cities on the map. Whether it's a limited-time installation, event, a festival or permanent improvement to streetscaping, infrastructure and the public realm, a visual future not far off from the 1982 sci-fi classic Blade Runner is now a reality within our grasp.

WE CAN ILLUMINATE BUILDINGS, SKYSCRAPERS, UNDERPASSES AND ENTIRE DISTRICTS with easy, efficient and sustainable LEDs. We can create interactive experiences where citizens control the look and feel of our cities with dazzling interactive light shows. We can light up the night, create memorable wayfinding or simply put a place on the map — with lighting!

THE PRESENT AND FUTURE IS OURS TO SHAPE, MOLD AND ILLUMINATE in as many ways as the mind can imagine. This Trends Report serves as a sort of primer, or starter kit to get you thinking outside the box (and inside the tube), so to speak. As inspo for the UPMO and placemaking community, our hope is to publish further top-notch examples and case stories, but for now, the ubiquitous 1977 Debbie Boone mantra of “You Light Up My Life” comes to mind.



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