
HOUSTON★CHRONICLE

With Underwater Lighting, Night Just Right for Fishing

Lou Grandolfo, Pat Murray and I stood on the upper-level deck of a Tiki Island home one night last week and stared, slack-jawed, into the green, hypnotic glow cast by two underwater lights on the bottom of West Bay. There was a slight ripple of the surface and, just beneath that rippled surface, at least 200 speckled trout.

Night fishing is an excellent alternative to prime fishing spots or driving half the night to beat the sunrise. All the better, devices on the market now make the activity more pleasant and more productive.

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a shad comes along.”As if on cue, a fat shrimp kicked to the surface among all those hungry mouths. Bad move on the the shrimp’s part. One speck, backlit so that its every move was plainly visible, wheeled 180 degrees within its own length and took a vicious but errant swipe. The shrimp hopped, skipped – and landed right in the gun sights of yet another trout. That second fish did not miss, and the shrimp vanished in one of those trademark “pops” feeding trout make when they slurp a meal off the surface.

Traditional nighttime fishing lights offended the two with the way they flooded nearby homes with unwanted illumination. That, and the way they attracted hordes of gnats and mosquitoes, and the way they sucked thousands of watts of electricity. We left that first house, which faces the open bay, and slipped up on another set of lights in one of Tiki Island’s interior canals.

The big fish idled over the warm bulb, which heats to more than 100 degrees, about two feet beneath the surface and waiting patiently for the baitfish they knew would be drawn to the glow. A menhaden skittered out of the shadows and, as was the fate of that shrimp outside the island, was taken almost immediately.

Enough was enough, Murray and I grabbed fishing rods. It took him only two or three casts with a Corky suspending plug to draw a strike from a trout of nearly 20 inches. I countered with a fly

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rod, throwing a Clouser minnow, and scored a fish only an inch or so smaller.

Notably, after those two fish were caught, it was several minutes before any trout reappeared in the lights. Murray, who also lives on the island and fishes regularly at night under old style lights, said the fish's retreat into the darker water was typical.

"They'll go away if they here you walking up," Grandolfo said, tapping his foot heavily on the wood dock. At the sound, visible trout sunk slowly but surely from sight. After we stood quietly for a minute or so, they reappeared at our feet, one by one, and resumed their feeding activity.

I talked with Grandolfo again Thursday afternoon. He was amped with excitement over a sighting the previous night, beneath the same light from which Murray and I caught those trout.

"There was a school of reds in there," Grandolfo said, "Must have been at least a dozen of them, all at least 23 or 24 inches long. A mullet about six inches long showed up." Same thing happened to the mullet as to the menhaden and the shrimp, only with a lot more violence, Grandolfo said, because the fish were big reds and not little trout.

Grandolfo's rigs are built to standards beyond what the government requires of underwater lights. They light at dusk and shut themselves off at dawn. A ground fault interruption (GFI) outlet is required at the installation sight. All of which is great news for waterfront homeowners, a group that does not include me.

One of this system's greatest attributes – the non-necessity of illumination above the surface, which reduces insect problems – also can be a hindrance. A few public piers on the coast have installed his lights, and others are in various stages of negotiation for them. Worth a look wherever you can find them. Count on some lost sleep. For information on the Aquatic Attractor underwater light, call Lou Grandolfo at (409)933-4438.