MERIDIAN

Cities After Midnight

The architecture of the night economy

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Part architecture review, part nocturne, the September issue explores how lighting, transit and public space define the night. It visits depots, bakeries and rooftops across eight cities.

Architecture | Priya Raman

Architects of the Night Shift

Designing cities for the people who work while the rest of us sleep

At 3 a.m. the Rotterdam tram depot hums with a different kind of life. Cleaners move between carriages, a canteen serves hot soup, and a small garden glows under amber lamps installed for the workers who tend it.

The depot is one of a handful of projects led by the planner Anouk de Vries, who argues that cities have long treated night as an absence rather than a place. Streets are lit for safety but rarely for pleasure, and transport thins just when it is most needed.

Safe, warm and seen

Her checklist is deceptively simple: reliable transit, lighting that reveals faces rather than glare, and somewhere open to sit. These, she says, are the architecture of dignity.

Cities are beginning to listen. Several have appointed night mayors, and zoning rules once designed to suppress nightlife are being rewritten to support the people who keep the lights on.

> *“A city that only designs for the day is a city that forgets half its citizens.”*

The challenge is cultural as much as technical. To build for the night is to accept that a city never fully rests, and to ask who we are building it for.

Architecture | Daniel Okafor

Light as Infrastructure

How a new school of lighting designers is reshaping the streets we walk after dark

For most of the twentieth century, a good street light was a bright one. Cities competed to erase shadows, flooding avenues with cold white glare that made nights feel safer on paper and stranger in practice.

Lighting designer Mirela Kova■ spent a decade questioning that assumption. Her studio in Zagreb now advises municipalities across Europe, and its principles fit on a single page: less light, better aimed, warmer in colour.

Darkness is not the enemy

Shielded fixtures keep light on the pavement and out of bedroom windows. Sensors dim lamps when streets are empty and brighten them as pedestrians approach, cutting energy use by more than half in pilot districts.

Ecologists have welcomed the shift. Artificial light disrupts migrating birds, pollinating insects and the circadian rhythms of humans, and cities that dim thoughtfully report a measurable return of wildlife to their parks.

> *“We spent a century learning to light everything. The next century is about learning where not to.”*

The result is not darker cities but more legible ones, where light guides rather than shouts. It is infrastructure in the oldest sense: something that quietly makes shared life possible.

Thank you for reading Meridian.