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by MARTA W. ALDRICH

From elegant to over the top, light-decorated homes reflect the holiday spirit

Let It Glow! JOY

On a cold December night,

vehicles filled with wide-eyed onlookers drive slowly past the residence of Glenn and Christina Barber in Spring Hill, Tenn. (pop. 7,715), marveling at the 35,000 Christmas lights that adorn the home topped with an 8-foot-tall illuminated cross.

Curt and Amy McCarthy idle their Dodge Caravan on the street as their four children gaze at the Barber home through their minivan windows. "This is light town!" exclaims Emma, 5, as she scans the glowing displays of polar bears, trains, Santa Claus, angels, and a Nativity in the front yard.

"I like the train because it flashes," adds her sister Abby, 7.

For the McCarthy family, touring neighborhood Christmas lights is memorable and inexpensive entertainment. For Glenn Barber, such families are the reason he spends nearly every free waking moment between Halloween and Thanksgiving decorating his home in bulbs and his yard with family-friendly light displays.

"It's all about the kids," says Barber, 52. "I love the look on their faces when the cars drive by slowly and the parents roll down the windows and point at our home and tell their kids, 'Look at that! See the Santa? See the reindeer?' For that brief moment, everybody is smiling."

In the beginning

For Barber, lights are a nostalgic holiday memory of his boyhood in Houston, where he "used nails to put up the big, old-timey bulbs on the eaves of our house while

More than 35,000 Christmas lights create a dazzling display at the home of Glenn and Christina Barber in Spring Hill, Tenn.



The Barbers get wrapped up in the Christmas spirit.

my mother would decorate the inside."

His interest was rekindled some 45 years later when he and his wife moved in 2002 to Spring Hill. "I asked him to throw a few lights in the yard for Christmas," Christina says. "Once he got started, he never stopped."

Each holiday season, their modest, three-bedroom bungalow is transformed into a traffic-stopping light show extravaganza. In the process, Barber has become an amateur electrician, mapping out each year's display beginning in April, then spending a full month executing his plan in time for a Thanksgiving debut. He uses more

than a hundred 40-foot extension cords and six circuit breakers, including four outdoor ones dubbed John, Paul, George and Ringo—after the Beatles.

True, his light bill increases every December by about \$300, "but so what?" says Barber, a fiscal analyst for the Tennessee Legislature. "To me, it's \$300 worth of enjoyment I've gotten from doing it."

Barber stores everything in his attic, customized with numbered shelves that correspond to a computerized inventory of lights and equipment. "If somebody asks for mini-lights, I can quickly find them in box No. 7 on shelf No. 6," he says.

The obsession is the source of good-natured banter with his wife. "My theory is 'More is more,'" he says. "She's the one in charge of good taste." Replies Christina: "We don't have a cluttered look—yet. But I don't know how long I can keep him under control. If he sees an empty space in the yard, he thinks it has to be filled."

Holiday memories

Outdoor holiday lights came into vogue beginning in the 1950s, with large-bulb, multicolored strands adorning rooflines, gutters, windows and doors to add a look of cheery warmth to houses on dreary winter nights.

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