

The Morton Arboretum Illumination 2021 - Experience Narrative

It is year nine of Illumination, and as every year since its inception, we will embrace The Morton Arboretum's core mission to be The Champion of Trees.

For this season, we are reframing the guest experience to reflect visitor feedback, and are exploring new experiences, as well as refreshing visitor favourites...and we're back to a walking experience!! Holiday season 2021 will be a contrast to 2020, and we will return to the beloved walking version of Illumination.

As we gather together at the holidays, no matter whether close to those we love or comfortably distanced from those we do not know, shared experiences will be essential to bringing much needed celebration and joy as we start to put the pandemic behind us.

So what do we have in store for 2021?

As our guests arrive they are excited, expecting both new experiences and what by now are firm family favourites and traditions...and they won't be disappointed! Once again, we're bringing the new, the fresh and the unexpected to our guests.

Our guests journey begins in Arbor Court, and the evening air is filled with festive music – some of it a little traditional in tone, some of it more contemporary. Traditionally wrapped lit trees surround the space, while hot chocolate and other treats in the Visitors Centre tempt.

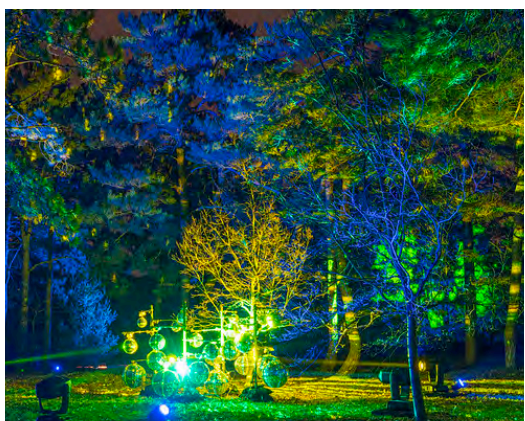
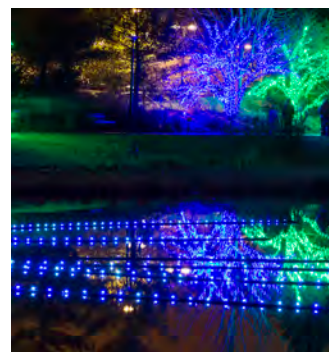
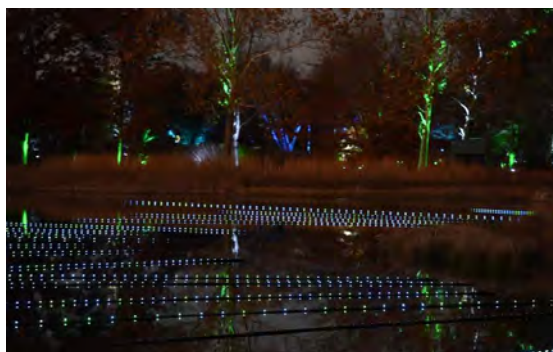


As they leave the Sycamore room, our visitors immediately see something new - gone is the large and somewhat mysterious tent of previous walking years, and in its place, a celebratory photo op. Perfect for group photos or selfies, this branded, lit photo opportunity provides a great spot for guests to commemorate their visit to Illumination. The design of the piece brings creative elements from the experience to come into Arbor Court, including the LED grasses and a bold Illumination logo.



Moving towards the trail, our explorers find something new for 2021 - an entrance experience, that frames the beginning of the Illumination experience. Above their heads, guests delight in a floating, gossamer like cloud of lit silver mylar, activated by the wind.

Entering the trail, for 2021 we once again utilise the popular route that first takes our guests around Meadow Lake clockwise, past 'Meadow Lake Magic'. As in 2019, 'Meadow Lake Magic' expands the experience further around the lake, extending from both the Peninsula and Promontory Point to mesh together like roots. 'Meadow Lake' is literally controlled by nature. Wind speed, direction and water temperature are used to activate the axis of a 'pixel cloud', creating an array of ever changing, organic, nature controlled visuals.



Moving past the popular and much photographed Peninsula, our guests are invited off the main trail to explore the popular 'Woodland Wonder'. As they enter this secluded grove, our visitors find a magical place, transformed with thousands upon thousands of points of laser light and enlivened with an ethereal anticipatory soundscape. As they look around in wonder, the vista changes, as dozens of ornament like, gently rotating mirror balls are illuminated, transforming the space into a sea of moving points of light. Mirror balls will be at ground level, as in 2020.

After giving guests a few moments to enjoy, the lighting reverts to the myriad of laser points of light. These two vocabularies of lighting will ripple back and forth in kind of a visual duet, subtly underscoring the communication between the trees that is going on under the guests feet – the trees are speaking.

Our guests continue their journey around Meadow Lake, and as in 2019 turn left and walk across the landscape, lit with our shadow casting bamboo fixtures. They rejoin the tramway, then head to their right. This wide, expansive promenade allows guests to proceed at their own pace, free from 'traffic jams', able to easily pass strollers, or not be rushed by our more fast paced visitors. Lighting enlivens the harbour on both sides of the walk, while Meadow Lake twinkles in the distance.



As our guests enjoy the walk, the roadway is lit with iconic leaf patterns from the Arboretum collection - this is the first of three distinct areas with this treatment, each iconic and distinctive - three area's we call 'LeafWalks'.

Moving down the walk, our guests next find a grove of trees beautifully lit in vibrant colour. Projected onto the trees are also the Illumination logo, and recognition of our generous sponsors.



Continuing down the tramway, our guests next encounter something new for 2021, the second encounter with our 'LeafWalk'.



After section two of 'Leaf Walk', to their right our guests are treated to a stunning, iconic Honey Locust. Standing in beautiful isolation, is our 'Champion Tree' – the centre, the focus, the axis around which 'Illumination' rotates. This tree, like the equally iconic oak of Morton's logo, is thrown into silhouette by brilliant up lighting.

This lighting punches into the night sky, echoing the lighting from the Peninsula and just as with trees in nature, there is a dialog, a communication, a back and forth between the lighting on our Champion Tree, and the lighting on the peninsula. It is as if our trees are communicating, using light. Colour will ripple and dance, skipping from the 'Champion Tree' to the Peninsula and back, engaging in a visual dialog.

The 'Champion Tree' is a visual beacon, and an icon, speaking to the rest of Illumination almost like the conductor of an orchestra – a living, breathing orchestra of trees.



As our guests enjoy the 'Champion Tree', to their left they see 'Symphony Woods', and in the distance 'Ornament Hill' – more of this to be discovered on our visitor's journey. Beyond, the expanded 'Meadow Lake Magic' twinkles as glistens in the night.

This year, 'Symphony Woods' retains everything that has made it a beloved visitor favourite, with refreshed music for 2021, and back to being enjoyed as an 'in person' not 'in vehicle' experience.

But as we've come to the musical heart of Illumination, let's pause our journey for a moment and discuss music. By now, guests to Illumination 2021 will be aware of one significant change, and an important learning from our driving experience in 2020 - music - A LOT more music! Rather than sporadic and sometimes conflicting musical vignettes, the audio for Illumination has been reimagined and woven into an always present, coherent and immersive soundscape. The soundtrack is continuous through the experience as in the 2020 driving version of Illumination, but unlike last year, breathes and ebbs and flows throughout the walk. In some areas the soundtrack will be deconstructed into bells, chimes, and elements of the full score.

In other areas it will be presented in its full auditory majesty, and no where more so than at Symphony Woods. But wherever the guest roams on the trail, music is omnipresent, and provide acoustic 'connective tissue' throughout the experience.



Moving along on their journey, our audience take a brief respite and stop at the warming tent. Inside they find a more welcoming atmosphere this year, with swagged 'bistro lights' bringing a little style and visual warmth to match the physical warmth they feel, at the mid point of their journey.

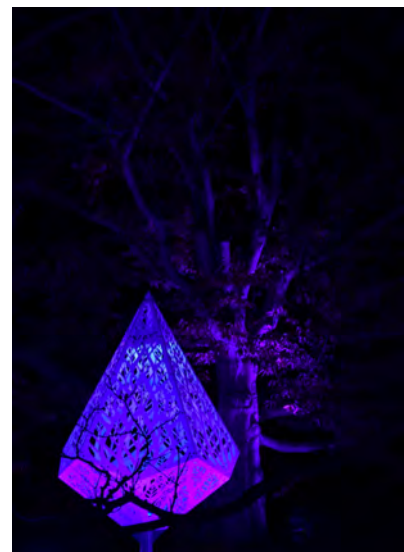


Leaving the warming tent behind, as last year our visitors continue their journey, and discover a new location for the bespoke and popular HYBYCOZO installation 'Crown of Light'. Surrounded by lit natural arbor, the site provides a new vista on the installation, and underscores the exploration of the organic, and the made.

Created by renowned artists and Lightswitch collaborators HYBYCOZO, these bespoke 'made just for Morton' pieces are laser cut perforated steel, with patterns that evoke nature, harmony, arbor and Morton's key message of being The Champion of Trees.

Light from within these pieces beam out into the night sky with brilliant, vivid colour, moving above the enchanted visitors, while subtle, elegant filigree patterns of light dapple the ground below.

But the lighting is not simply a random display of colour – more observant guests will notice two programming notions.



First, the five 'trees' of our display cycle as a group through colours drawn from the four seasons of nature – the crisp, vibrant greens of spring become more muted and restrained with hints of yellow for summer, then transition into the beautiful amber, scarlet, gold and purple of fall, before turning to the bronze, dark purple and browns of winter, then cycling back to spring again.

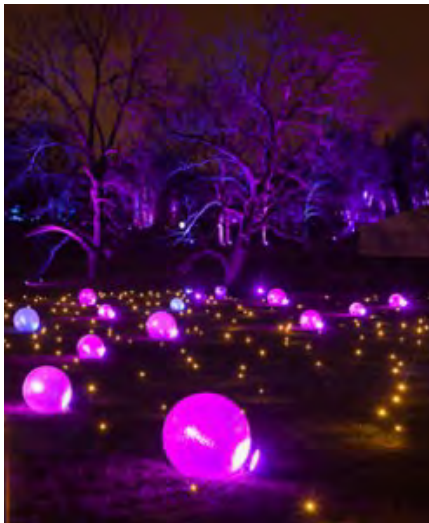
Second, this colour progression will be led by the large center 'mother tree', as colour ripples out from her suggesting the passage of sugars from larger trees to smaller that occurs in nature.

Also along the tramway is section three of our 'Leaf Talk', with a different representation of iconic leaves from the Arboretum collection.



To the left, facing the lake, is the stunning, lit Daniel Popper sculpture Human + Nature. Inviting guests to explore this iconic piece.

Next, our guests are invited to move up Frost Hill and explore 'Ornament Hill', this year with double the number of glowing ornaments, transforming and expanding the vista.

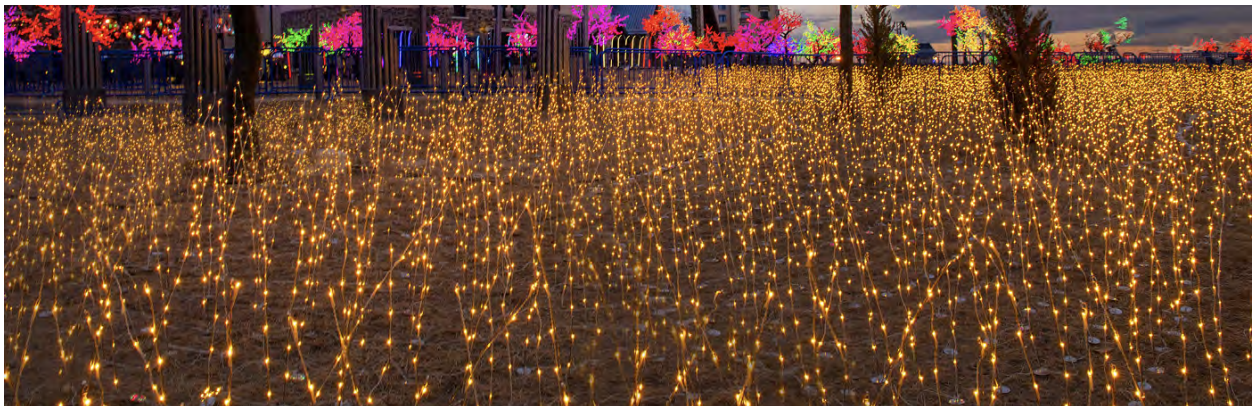


Past the increased array of glowing orbs and engaging carpet of light of 'Ornament Hill', our guests move up to the elegant and surreal 'Crystal Promenade'...or do they? This year there is something new, beautiful, and exciting, 'Promenade of Light'. This all new for 2021 experience features a canopy of diverse designs of lanterns - some with glass, some perforated metal, some with delicate, filigree lacework, all gently glowing. Lanterns extend from the overhead canopy into the trees beyond, almost as if they have drifted off on a gentle breeze. 'Promenade of Light', all new for 2021.



Across from 'Promenade of Light', the iconic 'Four Columns' are this year enlivened with brilliant, vivid colour. Rippling across and around the columns, it almost looks like the majestic twenty foot high columns are rotating.

Moving on, our voyagers discover another completely new installation for 2021 - 'Golden Meadow'. The meadow in front of our guests is transformed into a glowing, surreal field of golden rods - a meadow of golden light. As with Ornament Hill, perhaps there is a path for guests to venture out into the middle of the meadow, to be immersed in the experience.



This all new feature will fill this vast space with wonder, and delight and engage guests. 'Golden Meadow' will be an exciting new addition to our guests journey.

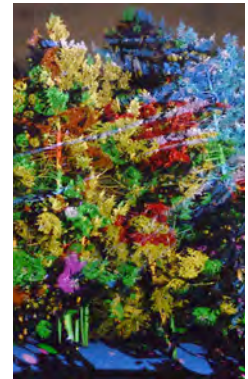
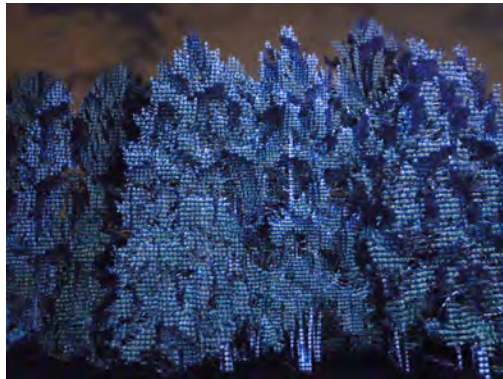
Next, the journey continues into what we are thinking of as our contemplative gallery of our experience. We are now inviting our guests into a more cerebral frame of mind.

Questions like 'how are these man-made objects interacting with the natural environment?', 'how do I relate to arbor in the winter', or even 'how can I decorate my outdoor environment at home with more imagination?' might spring to mind.

Our guests move on through 'Enchanted Forest'. Colour will move and skip from tree to tree, rippling and dancing between the arbor – the trees are speaking. Listen, and watch.



Emerging from 'Enchanted Forest', visitors come to our visitors favourite experiences, Treemagination.

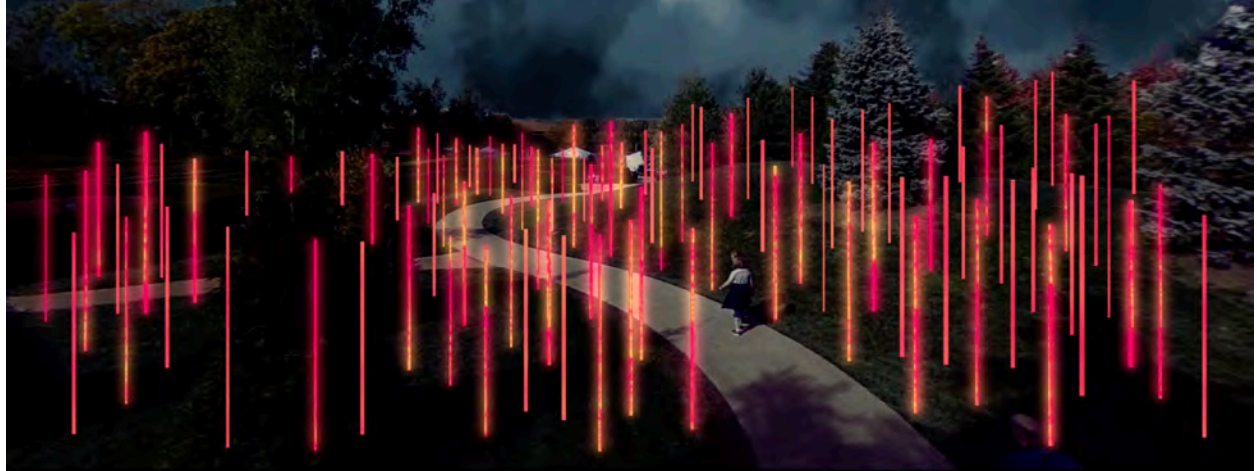
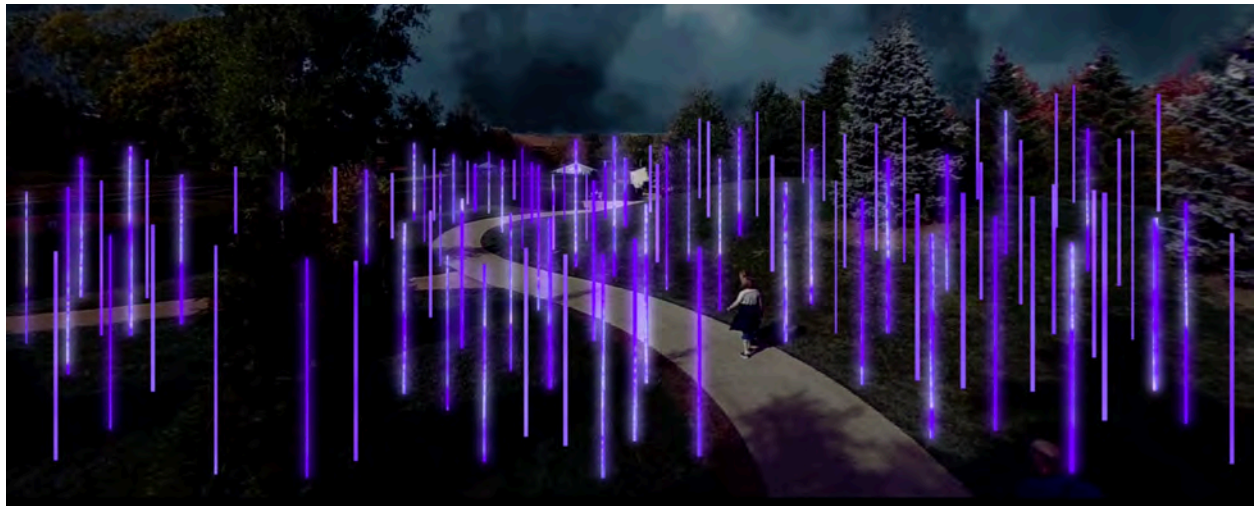


In a more concise show this year, we will continue to educate our guests with video content that demonstrate concepts like the sequestration of CO₂, trees transpiration of water and the simple notion of trees 'breathing'.



Almost at the end of their journey, our visitors rediscover an old favourite - the chandeliers from Crystal Promenade in a new location nestled in a grove of trees, lower and more intimate. So many peoples memories of Illumination, so many proposals and weddings, so many children's dreams and fantasies are anchored by these chandeliers, we still wanted to make sure they were part of the experience...but in a new way, in a new location.

Our guests turn right to their last experience, a reimagined and all new exit installation - perhaps named 'Forest Finale'? This piece will continue to explore the intersection of the natural and the made, and reintroduces the LED grasses our guests first encountered at the very beginning of their journey in Arbour Court. An homage to the native Big Bluestem tall grass of the midwest prairie, the LED fixtures are interspersed with reflective polished PVC pipe to increase the impact of the light emanating from the LED strips, and with the 'constructed' version of the same audio as accompanied the entry experience. This area is designed to bookend the visit to Illumination, provide a high throughput yet engaging close to the night, in an immersive, dynamic and festive display.



As our guests return to Arbor Court excited and enlightened by their visit to Illumination 2021, they delight in a perfect night at Illumination - Tree Lights at The Morton Arboretum. A celebration, joy and peace for the holidays, all framed by the most beautiful natural environment imaginable.

Key 'talking points':

1. Walking is back! After our driving dalliance in 2020, we're back amongst The Morton Arboretum's beautiful collection, revealing in the sights, sounds and smells of winter arbor.
2. As in 2019, the new route offers guests an expanded experience, with more space for different group sizes and pace to coexist.
3. Illumination 2021 is focused on maintaining our traditional guest favourites, but with new experiences and reimagined installations throughout.
4. Every experience at Illumination is designed exclusively and specifically for the Morton Arboretum - this is no 'cookie cutter', off the shelf installation.
5. A new 'photo op' at the beginning of the trail offers guests a new and exciting way to commemorate their visit to Illumination, whether a 'selfie' or group photo.
6. A new entry experience combines with an expansive new exit installation to 'bookend' the visit to Illumination, both featuring bespoke music, and there is more music than ever on the trail.
7. The popular 'Woodland Wonder' offers a distinctive and delightful experience for our visitors.
8. An expanded 'Leaf Walk' immerses our visitor in the beauty of the shapes of nature, featuring distinctive and iconic leaf patterns.
9. Our 'Champion Tree' provides a physical and metaphorical centre and heart to Illumination and communicates using light and colour with the trees at the Peninsula.
10. The 'Symphony Woods' Son et Lumiere presentation is easy to explain, media and PR friendly, and an ideal spot for photography, videography, interviews and press.
11. 'Symphony Woods' will once again offer a shared experience to large groups of guests in a safe, paved, easy to navigate area that is easily accessible from the Visitors Center and ADA compliant.
12. 'Crown of Light', a 'designed just for Illumination', lit, sculptural installation by acclaimed and Smithsonian featured artists HYBYCOZO add a new dimension to Illumination in its new location.
13. 'Ornament Hill', a firm crowd favourite is doubled in size for 2021, increasing the spectacle and wonder and enlivening Frost Hill as never before.
14. At the top of Frost Hill, guests find first a reimagined 'Promenade of Light', and the relit 'Four Columns'.
15. Spreading across thousands of square feet, the new and innovative 'Golden Meadow' is an installation of scale which brings a whole new lighting technique to the visitor journey.
16. 'Treemagination', a dynamic visitor favourite, features dramatic projection mapped content specially designed to educate, engage and surprise using trees as a projection screen.
17. 'Forest Finale' energises exit walk past the hedge collection with a brand new, engaging, immersive audio and lighting finale to Illumination, evocative of prairie tall grasses.
18. One final photo op at the exit to bring the evening to a close, in an on brand and on message way.