



[Behold the Holiday Lights on Display in the Bay](#)

By [Thalia Gigerenzer](#) | December 22, 2010 5:02 p.m. | In [Festivals](#)

Razzle-dazzle Christmas light decorations might be the stuff of comedy films — think the Griswold family in "[National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation](#)" — but Alex Dourov of Livermore has been taking the tradition seriously for more than a decade.

Dourov documents the best-lit houses in the Bay Area (and beyond) on his website, [Lights of the Valley](#). Right now, the site features photos and videos of decorations and light shows at 314 homes. You can see some of our favorites in this slideshow:



Dourov says he gets a flood of e-mails from homeowners who want their holiday decorations featured on his site, but only a few make the cut. Narrowing the field of candidates may be tough, but it was even tougher in the days before contenders could send pictures and videos with a click of a button.

"Back before the Internet, the problem was that anybody could send in a letter but then you would go to the house and say, geez, this is just one string of lights," he remembers.

Dourov, who owns a Web design company, says going to see Christmas light displays has become a ritual for many families.

"People are always looking for the best places to visit, but for many years it was based on word-of-mouth," he says.

What's the biggest change in holiday displays? It's become a multi-sensory experience. A lot of the houses broadcast their music (the Trans-Siberian Orchestra is a favorite) on FM radio stations you can tune in to while you're watching from your car.

"Imagine tens of thousands of Christmas lights blinking synchronized to the music," says Dourov dreamily.

But there's one city that's remained stubbornly lackluster during the holidays, according to Dourov. It's San Francisco, which persists in being the black sheep when it comes to holiday decorating.

We asked Dourov to recommend the most fantastic, awe-inspiring houses in the Bay. Among them was Scott Weaver's "Winter Wonderland" in Rohnert Park, Sonoma County. For 16 years, Weaver has been turning his entire house into a 55-foot Disney-themed castle, with Dalmatians, a "Jungle Book" fountain, some "South Park" characters, a bubble machine and many other attractions. And get this: Weaver shaped all of the characters out of plywood himself.

To find out where the lights are in your neighborhood, check out Dourov's [website](#).