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Vintage Curb Appeal

by Beandra Bey



Anyone who has stayed at the Grand Hotel on Michigan's Mackinac Island invariably brags about the presidents and other notables who have also enjoyed this impressive facility. But the memory that usually sticks is the sight of the hotel's front porch. A full 660 feet long, it overlooks a gorgeous tea garden and gargantuan swimming pool, and is a top destination for visitors and locals alike. But

you don't need to build a porch of such grandiose proportions to create a space that will have your guests talking about it long after they return home.

First impressions count and you can learn a lot by observing porches in your own neighborhood. Whether they are built at the front of the house, commonly found in city-based homes; wrap around the home, as often seen in rural areas; or attach to the rear of a home, porches should look like a natural extension rather than a separate appendage. One way to accomplish this look, say *On the Porch* (Taunton, 2007) authors James Crisp and Sandra Mahoney, is to use some of the same building materials in the porch as in the house, like echoing a brick floor, steps, or post supports.

Architectural elements such as columns, railings, post bases, and caps can make a dramatic visual impression, as long as they are proportionate to the size of the entire home. The scale of the porch itself also needs to be considered. "Ten-inch-round columns can really enhance a large porch that's about 40 feet in length," says Vacaville architect Brian Johnston. "A smaller porch of about 7 feet long would look better with 6 x 6-inch turned columns."

One important consideration that often gets lost in porch planning is "line of sight," says Ben Hume, president of Mirage Screen Systems. "It's important that the placement of an add-on porch doesn't hide existing important architectural features of the home or block the light flow coming from inside the house. From a different perspective, a porch should not impair outdoor views that the homeowners enjoyed before the porch was built." That's one of the benefits of retractable screens, Ben says. "During those hours when you need to have screens to protect you and your guests from insects or inclement weather, you roll down the screens. Then, at your discretion, you can retract the screens and enjoy an unimpeded view of your outdoor area."

Trends in porch floor coverings in 2007 echo the growing desire of homeowners to make their porches a seamless extension of their outdoor areas, says Monte Hoover, general manager of Fairfield-based Gillespie's Abbey Carpets. "We're seeing lots of interest in porcelain tile, natural stone and slate, as well as textured floorings that have great slip-resistant surfaces. For porches that are totally enclosed, our clients are asking for carpet. Carpet adds warmth to a porch and produces a quiet surface, but it's only feasible if the porch is moisture-free."

Glassed-in porches also permit homeowners to use beautiful natural materials, say Barbara Buchholz and Lisa Skolnik, authors of *Porch Style* (Rizzoli, 2003). Sisal, rush, and sea grass are popular choices. Coir, a coconut husk fiber, has graduated from its former use as a rope or matting product and is a smart flooring choice due to its sturdiness and easy maintenance.

If you're in the market for a new home, there's a 70 percent chance a porch will be in your future, according to the Home of the Future survey by the National Association of Home Builders. And whether you inherit a porch or build one from scratch, you'll find an abundance of manufacturers with great products that will make your porch the kind of place that you and your guests will enjoy time and time again.

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