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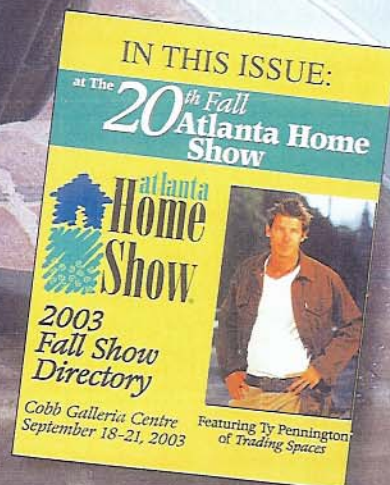
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Front Porches



ROCKING CHAIRS are synonymous with the Southern front porch.

Photo by Jan Stittleburg at the home of Tom and Sue Davis.

Nothing characterizes a Southern home quite like an inviting front porch.

by Sharise Cunningham

Ask someone to describe the classic Southern house and they'd probably describe a big country home with an inviting white porch—a porch full of rocking chairs that's perfect for lazy days, cool evenings, fresh lemonade and sleepy dogs.

Nineteenth century landscape architect Andrew Jackson Downing is generally credited with making the front porch popular in America. Within his pattern books, he put forth the idea of linking the house with the landscape as “a note of preparation, and an effectual shelter and protection to the entrance.” He also viewed the porch as a place of enjoyment and respite from work.

Once extremely popular, particularly in the South, the front porch slipped into obscurity as urban living, prefab subdivisions and apartment complexes became the norm. Contemporary design largely eliminated the front porch, seemingly forgetting its original purpose.

Nevertheless, the desire to connect the home with nature remains, which has led to the growth in the creation of outdoor rooms. Although outdoor rooms are usually thought of as part of the back of the house, a well-groomed front porch sets the tone for the rest of the house as it welcomes you and greets your guests, providing just a hint of what may lie inside.

Today the front porch is experiencing a slow revival as upscale homeowners, builders and architects join the ranks of those redesigning the front of the home as an extra space for relaxing and entertaining.

Come Home

THE FRONT PORCH, the perfect marriage of inside living space and outdoor relaxation and entertaining, is experiencing a revival in the South.

Photo by Jan Stittsburg at the home of Chip and Susan Traynar.

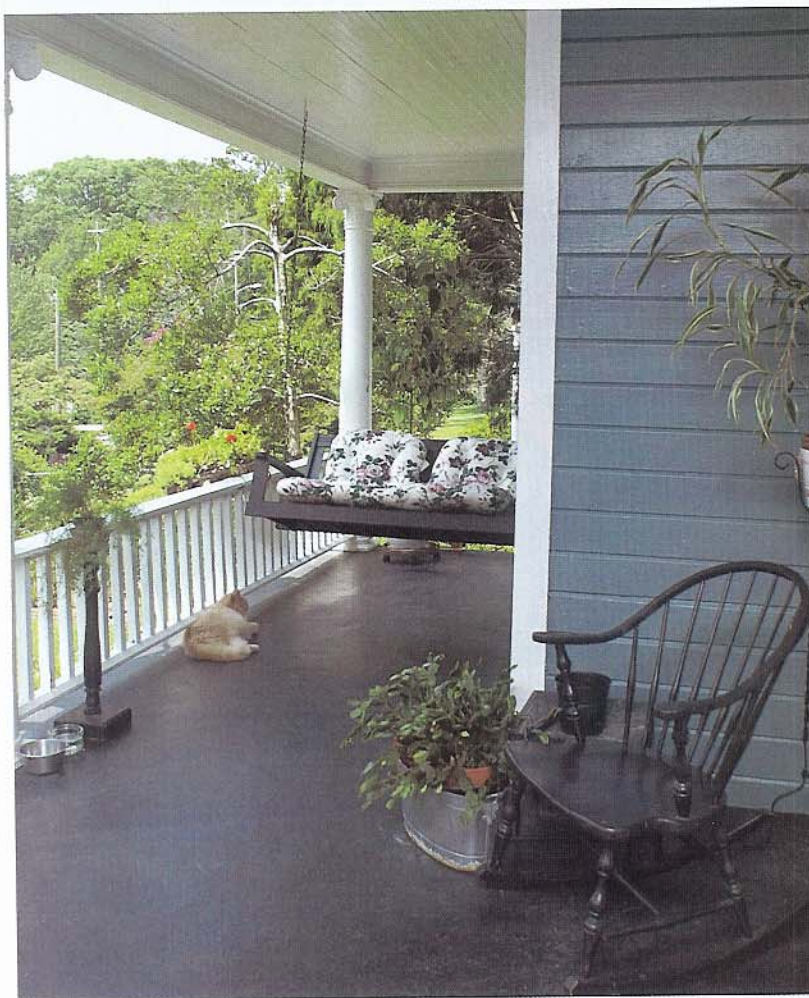


Photo by Jan Stittleburg at the home of Gordon and Suzanne Gephardt.

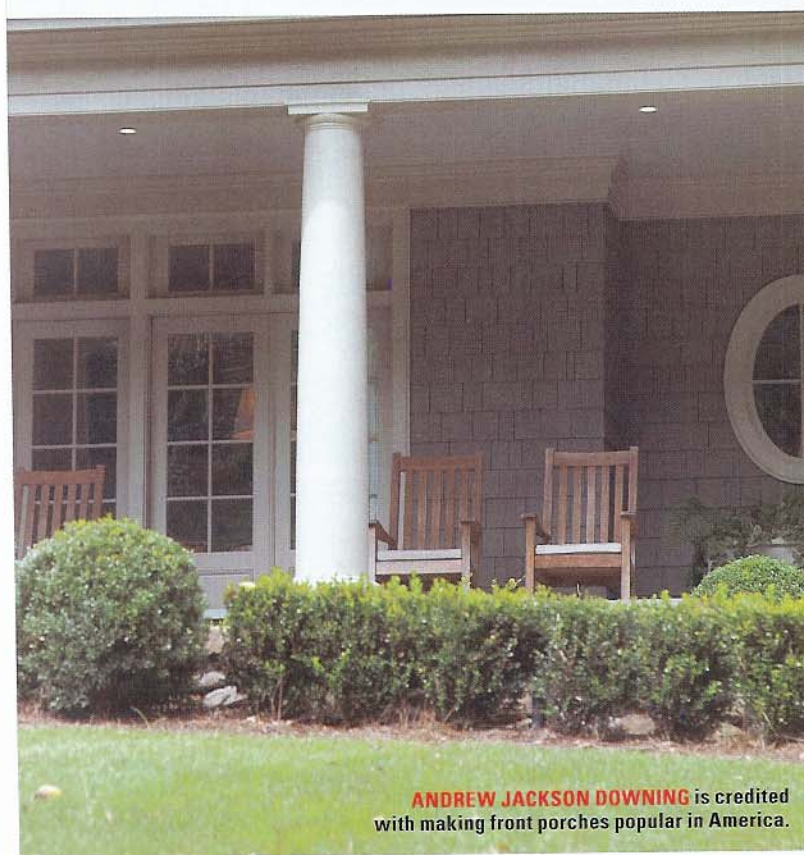


Photo by Jan Stittleburg at the home of Carol Farbolin.

ANDREW JACKSON DOWNING is credited with making front porches popular in America.

Whether your home is Victorian, country, plantation, urban or a ranch, the options for front porches are now as unlimited as the home styles themselves. Double, enclosed, wraparound, screened and open-air are some of the most common styles, and they come adorned with ceiling fans, beaded-board ceilings, weatherproof hardwood floors and durable but comfortable furnishings.

Rick Goldstein, an architect for DeckWright, says the screened porch is still popular and has transformed from a dark, underutilized space to a complete outdoor living room.

These front-of-the-home outdoor environments are designed to be low maintenance, easily heated or cooled, fully functional rooms with living room-style furnishings and fabrics with natural elements incorporated. Many homeowners are even including specialty items like permanent outdoor entertainment systems that are protected from the elements.

Even if the porch is enclosed, the materials and fabrics still need to be able to withstand changes in temperature and humidity, and the presence of pollen, mold and other environmental conditions.

So how do you make sure your front porch is up to snuff and fits your lifestyle? Here are some things to keep in mind when buying a new home, or building or remodeling a front porch.

Goldstein says the proportion, scale, materials and detailing are very important items to consider, as the front porch is what the public and potential homebuyers will see first. He further recommends hiring a qualified architect to meet these design standards.

An obvious consideration for the porch's style is the style of the home. Whether the porch is new, or part of an addition or remodel, it should reflect the design of the rest of the house; not doing so is like wearing stripes with plaid—it just won't look right.

One flexible and popular design, particularly in the pest-laden South, is the screened porch. Not only does it provide practical protection from bugs and other pests, it works with virtually any type of architectural style. If you're adding or remodeling, you may want to spend some time deciding your long-term goals. For instance, is architectural continuity more important than maintenance?

Materials are also important to consider. Tim Carter, a nationally syndicated talk show host and columnist, says that one benefit to using wood is that it often allows you to match the architectural details of older homes. However, you'll also be faced with periodic maintenance issues like painting. If your goal is low maintenance, then an aluminum enclosure is fairly quick to install and offers a number of design possibilities.

To help make the front porch an all-season functional room, weatherproof materials such as simulated hardwoods

Photo by Jan Sittlerburg at the home of Steve and Jennie Wurzbacher.

The options for front porches are now as unlimited as home styles themselves.



Photo courtesy of Phillip H. Norris Designs at the home of Carol and Bill Beavers.



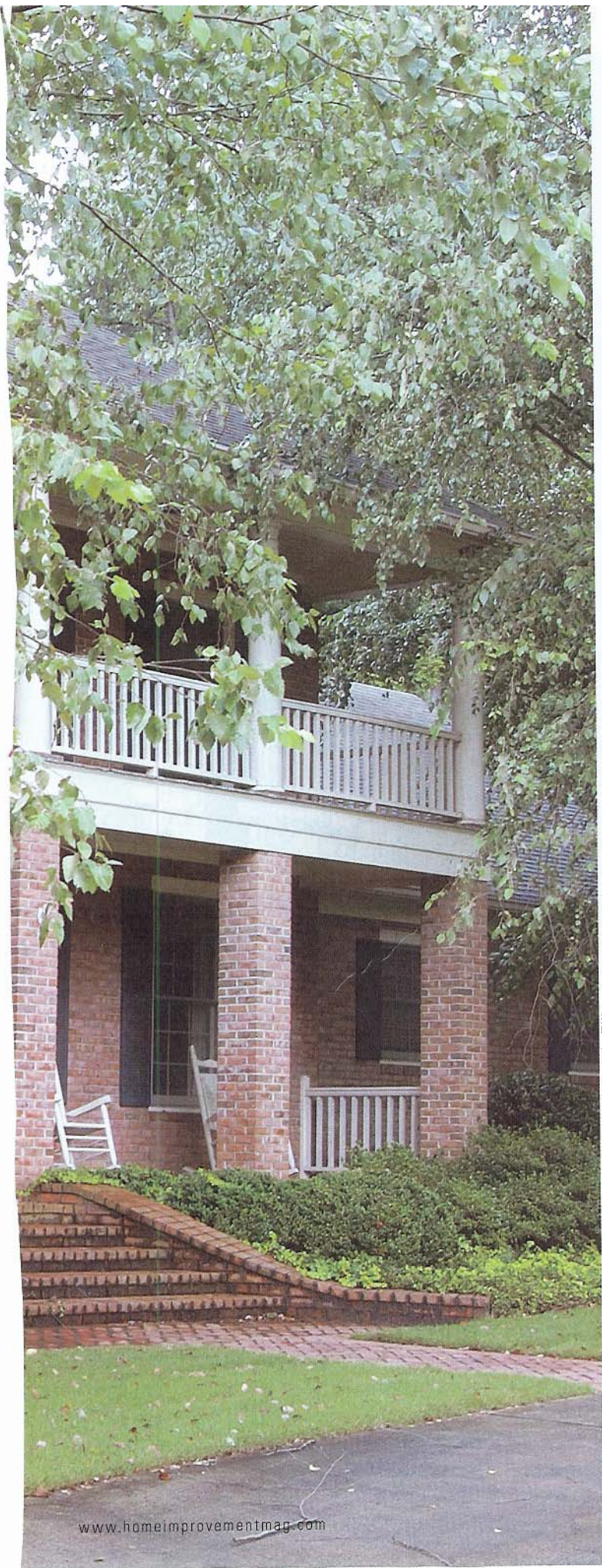


Photo by Jan Stittsburg at the home of John and Leigh Elliott.

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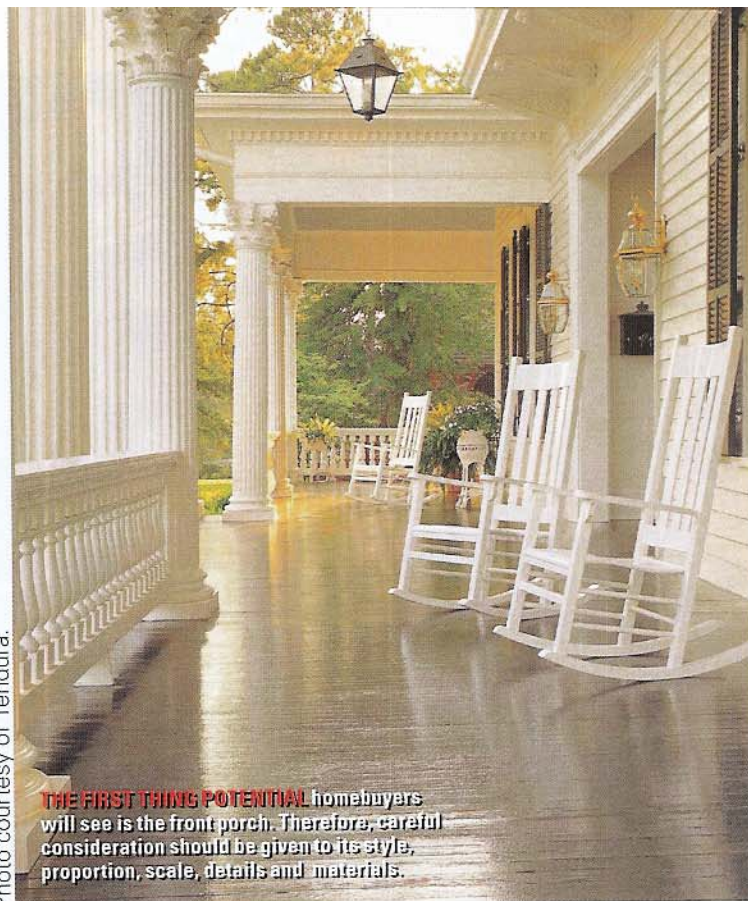


Photo courtesy of Tendura.

THE FIRST THING POTENTIAL homebuyers will see is the front porch. Therefore, careful consideration should be given to its style, proportion, scale, details and materials.

like Tenduraplank from Tendura, and stone, tile and decorated concrete can be incorporated. Currently, DeckWright uses Ipe, a Brazilian hardwood, in many of its designs because it's elegant, rich and low maintenance.

Richard Dixon of Complete Outdoor Services says that the depth of the porch is also an important consideration. In neighborhoods with sidewalks, it's likely the porch will be close to pedestrian and street traffic, reducing privacy. The minimum recommended porch depth is 8 feet, but 10 feet or more, when possible, is best. The deeper the porch the more space for social interaction, Dixon says. It also allows plenty of room for furniture and comfortable seating groups.

Dixon says the floor should be properly sloped (about a quarter-inch for every foot) for positive drainage so rainwater will drain off and help prevent rotting. Frank Pologruto of Decks and More suggests that the roof have a 4 to 12 pitch (a 4-inch drop for every foot) for proper drainage.

Dixon also recommends the following:

- **Use lighting creatively;** try ambient gaslights, dimmer switches, recessed lighting or a suitable combination.
- **Make the porch wide** enough to shield the entryway from the elements.
- **Set pillars** on aluminum or other non-corrosive bases to prevent rotting.



Photos by Jan Stittsburg.

WEATHER-PROOF MATERIALS like stone, simulated hardwoods, tile, brick and decorated concrete are good choices for low-maintenance porches.



Photo at the home of Scott and Carla Mills.

- **Limit use of pressure-treated wood** to the floor; otherwise, you're just wasting money. Plus, it's harder to paint.
- **Add color and texture** with plants in and around the porch.

Pologruto reminisces about the Walton's super-sized family porch and suggests you may wish to adorn yours with decorative spindles or rails to add a touch of distinction.

Goldstein says other items to consider are solar orientation of the proposed porch, the prevailing breezes and roof overhangs. Much like great landscaping, he says the front porch adds immediate curb appeal, which in turn, creates real and perceived value.

There's no denying it. Outdoor rooms have redefined our living spaces and the trend has breathed new life into the timeless front porch. And, as we've turned from the back porch to the front porch, the American lifestyle has also changed, bringing neighbors closer together over a glass of lemonade.





THERE'S NOTHING LIKE a front porch for sitting outside, relaxing and enjoying the neighborhood.