

Decor Score: The front porch - an appealing place, a state of mind

by *Rose_Bennett_Gilbert*

Q: One reason we bought this big Victorian house (1889 Queen Anne) was the wraparound porch. I grew up with a porch like this, where everything happened in summer, and on rainy days we kids would ride our bikes outside. That was a long time ago, so I think I need an update. There must be new things happening.

A: In our determination to totally control our environment, we're finding ways to make summer last almost all year, no matter what the weather's like where you live.

PORCH LIVING - Summertime? Not yet, but the living can still be easy when you use today's indoor-outdoor materials. CNS Photo by Rob Karosis. Today's technology has introduced weather-resistant finishes, waterproof "woods" made of resins, fabrics, fringes and tassels, even table and floor lamps that can stay outside all winter. Nevermind that we're having this discussion in freezing weather. Just as devoted gardeners while away the winter months planning next season's plantings, time spent getting ready now will start paying off when the first crocus appears (or whatever heralds "Spring!" in your neck of the woods).

To begin, you might curl up by the fire with an inspiring book called "On The Porch" by James M. Crisp and Sandra L. Mahoney of the Crisp Architects firm (The Taunton Press). The book's 200 pages are rich with photos, advice and personal testimony to what makes outdoor porches integral to the well-lived life. For example, the porch in the photo we show here is a new addition to an old lake house, deliberately planned to encourage family activities to drift outside in all kinds of weather. Connected to the kitchen and living room through new windows and French doors, the porch has an indoor attitude and indoor amenities, like real furniture and fabrics, rugs, and a comfortable dining spot for almost all family meals.

To quote Jackie Hirschhaut of the American Home Furnishings Alliance, "Our own porches and patios are the most easily accessible 'de-stressing' zones we have." Jackie has more input to share on the alliance Web site at www.AHFAnews.com

HISTORIC HOMES ON PARADE

Mark your calendar now for Historic Garden Week in the state of Virginia, celebrating its 75th year of open houses April 19 - 27. It's a virtual tour of the architectural and gardening history of the U.S., with houses that date to the Colonial era, American Revolution, Civil War and the Victorian periods, plus a number from the 20th and even the 21st centuries.

Get details at www.vagardenweek.org and do it soon! "America's Largest Open House," as the event is called, draws thousands of voyeurs from over the world.

DREAM BED

Your dream bed may be just around the corner - introduced at the 2008 Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas in January, "The Starry Night" is a high-tech bed that uses diagnostic tools to moderate temperature, monitor body movements and alleviate snoring, according to manufacturer Leggett & Platt.

The bed's built-in vibration detector gently shifts the snorer's sleep position to stop the noise. There's also a system that can be set to heat or cool both sides of the bed from 68 to 117 degrees, so you can forget the air conditioner or the whole-house heating system. Moreover, "The Starry Night" comes with a Surround Sound system, a headboard projector, Internet connectivity and iPod docking station, plus 1.5 terabytes of disc storage, among other special effects.

Only its price might cause sleepless nights: between \$20,000 and \$50,000, depending on the features you choose. Look for it this spring. Or if you can't wait, check out www.starrynightbed.com.

Rose Bennett Gilbert is the co-author of "Hampton Style" and associate editor of Country Decorating Ideas. Please send your questions to her at Copley News Service, P.O. Box 120190, San Diego, CA 92112-0190, or by e-mail.

Â© Copley News Service

Decor Score: The front porch - an appealing place, a state of mind by Rose_Bennett_Gilbert