

Decor Score: Living with an unorthodox architectural marriage

by *Rose_Bennett_Gilbert*

Q: With summer coming (even if it is minus 11 degrees outside this week!), we are planning to add a wraparound porch to our small ranch house. I know it sounds weird - everyone puts a deck on a ranch - but we want an old-fashioned covered porch. Here's our question: what should we put on the ceiling? Every porch we look at has a wood plank ceiling. Is that our only option, and if so, what color should we paint it?

A: You're right: wraparound porches are considered the province of Victorian houses. Certainly, the Victorians pretty much claimed them with the help of architects like McKim, Mead & White, who built wonderfully wide and enticing porches onto the trademark shingle-style homes they designed for well-to-do clients in vacation resorts in Maine and the Hamptons.

PORCH PLANS - Thinking outside the box (and the house): a porch offers new angles on outdoor living. CNS Photo courtesy of Rob Karosis. But never mind all that. An outside porch is a wondrous thing, no matter what style the house itself may be. As yours is an unorthodox architectural marriage, you will want to consult an architect skilled enough to blend the new addition gracefully into the original house.

It is nowhere written that you must follow tradition.

The narrow porch we show here offers all the comforts and none of the clichés of an old-fashioned outdoor space. Not only is it curved around the house and supported by custom-crafted "palm tree" posts, its unique ceiling is composed of narrow, rounded slats that pick up the curve and carry it on overhead.

No paint necessary here. Most porch ceilings are painted blue, by the way; it's supposed to suggest the open sky, I'm told. But I've also seen porch ceilings painted a light-reflecting gloss white, or cozy dark green, deep blue or even warm brown.

For an entire book of other porch ideas, check out "On the Porch" (The Taunton Press), written by architect James M. Crisp and architect expert Sandra L. Mahoney. We borrowed this photo from their book. I can promise you'll also find plenty to borrow for your project.

Q: Our living room ceiling is only 8 feet tall. My husband is 6-foot-3-inches and it's really beginning to bother him. We can't remodel. What else would you suggest? There are wood beams running across the ceiling. Should we take them down?

A: The less eye-catching your ceiling, the more you'll ignore it, and the higher and more spacious it will seem.

Removing the beams may be difficult (comes close to "remodeling," which you don't want to do). An easier cure would be to paint the beams to match the ceiling - white or a very light and unobtrusive color overall. And do use a high-gloss paint if you can, the better to reflect all the available light. One caveat here: the ceiling between the beams has to be nearly perfectly smooth. Otherwise, high-gloss paint will exaggerate every blemish and bump.

Q: Am I making this up, or did you once say that you should never paint your bathroom green? I love green! What's the deal?

A: The fault, dear reader, lies not in the color green but in the physics governing light waves. Every morning and night when you flip on the lights and peer into your mirror, you can expect to see yourself with a greenish, albeit ghoulish cast.

Light bounces. It will bounce off your green walls and engulf both your mirror image and your self-image.

Better to think rosy, healthy, vibrant peach, terra cotta, apricot, or a rich, blood red instead, the colors of life itself.

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