

Home Zone: Conservatories help homeowners see the light

by Linda Pescatore

If you want to reclaim space from the outdoors, open your home to more natural light or create a comfortable place to commune with nature, you may be considering adding a screened-in porch to your home.

MAKE ROOM - A conservatory is a more substantial addition to a home or yard than a porch or a sunroom, and will be custom-designed to blend with period architecture. CNS Photo courtesy of Marston & Langer. Think again. Although the expense is considerably greater, the practicality and visual appeal of a conservatory - or glass house - may be a much more attractive option than an ordinary porch or sunroom.

Although often called a hothouse or orangery, most modern conservatories are used for everyday living, not for cultivating plants. With better insulating double-paned glass, roof and window shades, fireplaces and underfloor heating, today's conservatories offer a comfortable environment all day and night, year-round.

But their main selling point is their striking good looks.

Conservatories are almost always custom projects, designed from the ground up to accommodate a homeowner's individual needs, to fit into an unusual space, or to match a period style. Conservatories have been built to match Gothic, Tudor, Victorian, and Arts and Crafts styles, to name a few, and can be attached to the main structure or free-standing.

Glass houses may seem vulnerable to both bad weather and break-ins, but when they are made of high-quality materials, they are as secure as any other part of the home, according to leading conservatory builder Marston & Langer. The company's frameworks are made of tough, steel-reinforced hardwood and double-glazed, twin-paned security glass that cannot be removed from the outside, according to Marston & Langer literature.

For more information visit www.Marston-and-Langinger.com.

CHANGE TO CHAINS

Here's one way to stop repairing leaky downspouts once and for all: get rid of them, and replace them with rain chains.

Rain chains, which come in various designs ranging from a single row of linked rings to a series of stacked, cuplike funnels, are a decorative alternative to downspouts that gently break the fall of water, guiding it to the ground, onto an arrangement of pebbles, or into a receptacle that allows the reuse of the rainwater.

CHAIN GANG - A new square rain chain from RainChains.com directs water to the ground with an Arts and Crafts look. CNS Photo courtesy of RainChains.com. Rain chains have been used for centuries in Japan, and are now resurging in popularity here because of their simple practicality and the way they enhance the sound of the falling rain, much like a fountain or waterfall.

They also are much easier to keep clear of leaves and other debris. They attach easily to gutters with an included bar that goes across the opening for a downspout. The chains are not harmed by ice and, if heavy winds are a problem, they can be secured to a base to prevent them from whipping against the house.

Typically 8 1/2 feet long, rain chains can be made of brass, aluminum and even plastic, but copper - and especially pure copper, which takes on a patina with age - is the most popular material by far. Rain chains come in a variety of styles, including a new square design from RainChains.com that goes well with Arts and Crafts-inspired homes.

Of course, rain chains wouldn't be so popular if they didn't do the job they were designed for: channeling water away from your house and foundation. When positioned in the spot where the downspout would have been, rain chains will perform just as well, says Garm Beall, CEO of RainChains.com.

"Most people would not have a problem," he said, adding that only one rain chain had been returned to his company all last year.

Prices at RainChains.com range from \$70 for a plain chain to \$400 for an ornamental set, with the most popular styles going for \$120-\$150, according to Beall.

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