Decor Score: Shades of summer

by Rose_Bennett_Gilbert

Q: We love our big porch but in summertime, the heat and glare keep us from using it during the day. I looked into old-fashioned awnings - which we would love - but they were too much for our budget. Should we add some sort of weather-proof curtains? And what about the floor? I've read that outdoor rugs are more attractive now than the horrid, prickly thing my mother used to have on our porch.

A: It's curtains for you, by all means. Or shades of an equally weather-worthy material. Today's outdoor fabrics are minor miracles of modern technology: they feel soft to the touch, yet refuse to fade, stain or rot. And you have a wealth of colors and patterns to choose from, not to mention, decorative tassels and trimmings with ditto endurance.

THE GREAT OUTDOORS, INDOOR - Roll-up shades and man-made â€˜sisalâ€™ rugs take the comforts of home into the great outdoors. CNS Photo.

I wouldn't be above simply pinning up hemmed lengths of outdoor fabric to block the afternoon sun, using large push-pins or upholsterer's tacks. Come evening, you can tie the curtains back with weatherproof tassel cord. Take a tip from professional designers who would use double-faced fabric - make it by sewing patterns back-to-back - so your curtains look good from the outside, too.

Roll-up blinds or shades are another relatively inexpensive solution to your need for shade. On the expansive porch we show here (from the book "On the Porch," by James M. Crisp and Sandra L. Mahoney, The Taunton Press), the shades unfurl from ceiling-high to block glare and the eyes of passers-by, too.

Here's an interesting example of today's improved sisal rugs, too. The real thing is made from the spikey agave bush. It's tough - and rough to the touch, as you remember from your childhood - but sisal is also so susceptible to water that it's suitable only for indoor use or on a protected porch like this one. Otherwise, what looks like the real thing may really be an impervious man-made fiber such as olefin, masquerading as sisal - or as another natural material, for example, wool Berber .

Discuss your situation with a knowledgeable rug and carpet dealer, who can help find the right material for your particular floor covering needs.

Q: I am the worst when it comes to decorating ideas, so I need your advice. I have a large garden window, 59 by 40 inches, in my small kitchen. We have a white sun-blocking vinyl roller shade on it - definitely serviceable, but ugly. The problem is, it is constantly getting splashed with water and food stains because it is so close to the sink. There is full sun on that window from early morning until noon and it gets really hot. I would like to put something else on that window. Can you make a recommendation?

A: How about nothing? I'm only half-kidding: your best solution might be an application of sun-blocking window film. Products like Vista UV-Shield (www.vista-films.com) barely change the color of your window glass, but promise to knock out 99 or so percent of the sun's UV rays - the ones that heat up your room and fade everything in their path.

Most of the films must be professionally applied, but they are so effective, Uncle Sam will even give you a tax break for using them. The Energy Policy Act, first passed in 2005, was enlarged last year to include window films as a reliable means of reducing your energy use. Have your window treated before Dec. 31 and you can get credit on your 2007 taxes.

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