

Decor Score: Craze for alfresco furnishings widens

by *Rose_Bennett_Gilbert*

Q: There's a sun porch - I guess you call it - off the living room of our 1929 Colonial-style house. It's all windows on three walls with French doors leading into the living room on both sides of the fourth wall. The room doesn't have heat but our winters are pretty mild. We've been decorating room-by-room since moving in last fall. Now we've come to the porch and need ideas.

RELAX IN STYLE - The craze for alfresco furnishings is sweeping across the nation. This sun room is done in soft beiges and blues that keeps its cool even in the hot afternoon sun. CNS Photo courtesy of Gerald Connell.

A: You're in great luck when it comes to decorating any outdoor - or outdoorsy feeling - space today. Never in the history of humankind has it been possible for so many to live so comfortably outside the hermetically sealed, air-conditioned, and centrally heated inner sanctums of our homes.

The craze for alfresco furnishings that has swept up from the Sun Belt and east from California in the past 20 years or so brings with it increased attention from manufacturers. So, in addition to revolutionary fabrics that won't fade, wrinkle or rot in the sun (www.sunbrella.com), there are rugs, lamps, even painted artworks that can take the elements year-round (check the art at www.openairdesigns.com).

But you don't have much to worry about, weather-wise. Your enclosed sun porch is a porch in name only; feel free to treat it as you would an indoor living room (as long as you use fade-resistant fabrics, or dress the windows to guard against sun damage).

That means you can express your taste in style and colors out-of-doors, just as you might indoors, whether that's relaxed and casual (think wicker and gingham), or dressier and more formal, like the elegant loggia in the photo we show here. British-born designer Jennifer Garrigues (www.jennifergarrigues.com), who created the room for the Red Cross Designers' Show House in Florida, is known for her exotic, eclectic look.

Certainly, there's no T-shirt informality here. Done up in soft beiges and cool blues - the ceiling, too - the elegant retreat is more about textural interplay than color. Polished walls run down to the hefty sisal-look rug; in between, there's the gleam of inlaid mother-of-pearl and silken fabrics. By any name, this is a "sun porch" that looks its glamorous best at night.

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