

Decor Score: The new old-fashioned porch

by *Rose_Bennett_Gilbert*

Q: Growing up in a small Midwest town, I remember wonderful summers spent on my grandparents' front porch. Not only did the neighbors drop by to "sit a spell," that porch was where important parties happened, like graduations, engagements, new babies. Whatever mattered in life was celebrated on that porch. I'd so love to give my sons (and my New York City-born husband) a taste of what that was like, but the porch is really modest on our turn-of-the-century Victorian. Any advice would be thrilling.

A: My best advice is race, don't run, to your nearest library or book store and look up a copy of "On The Porch," the book from which we borrowed the photo shown here.

MOUNTAIN VIEW - This open porch with Adirondack overtones invites parties, planned or impromptu. CNS Photo courtesy of Brian Vanden Brink. Written by architect James M. Crisp and designer Suzanne L. Mahoney (and published by The Taunton Press), "On The Porch" not only brings back all those summertime memories in a warm rush of nostalgia, it tells you how to go about conjuring the right physical settings for channeling The Past, complete with creaking swings, convivial neighbors and fireflies sending their Morse code in the darkness beyond.

According to the porch pros, size really doesn't matter. Your "modest" porch - like a modest living room - can still serve as the focus for summer gatherings, as long as you provide the same time-proven attractions: comfortable seating, conveniently located tables, the right light - for looking and for romance.

The cozy porch we show here is made even cozier by the homeowner's choice of deep green paint - for some of the furniture, as well as the walls. Rustic twig furniture, rush seats and amusing ethnic accents, like the American Indian pillow and carvings, would take any starch out of the stuffiest of guests. Most important to your question, the furniture is carefully arranged in groupings that encourage conversations.

Not having a good time in a setting like this would be, well, as hard as all outdoors.

Q: My girlfriend (who has an uncle in the business and keeps up with things) tells me there's a new kind of leather that can be used on outdoor furniture. I want to have new covers made for my apartment balcony chairs, so I'm really interested in the details (but don't want to ask her, she already thinks she knows everything). What do you know about outdoor fabrics?

A: I know that I'm really glad you asked, seeing as how we were already talking about "hot" ideas in outdoor living. There is, indeed, a new almost-leather that Ultrafabrics, the manufacturer, says is the first polyurethane "leather" to be designed specifically for outdoor furniture. Not only does it do a good job of emulating tanned

leather, Brista Soleil is breathable - natural leather isn't, which is why small children and bare legs often stick to it. It is also anti-fungal and mildew-resistant, so it can live happily outdoors longer.

For a closer look at outdoor leather in action, click on the U.K. furniture manufacturer Gloster Furniture at www.Gloster.com, which worked with Ultrafabrics to upholster its teak outdoor furniture.

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