Decor Score: Out with the indoor stuff

by Rose_Bennett_Gilbert

Q: We are just moving in and haven't had the chance to furnish our outdoor porch. It's covered, so I'm thinking about just taking out some of the living room furniture we don't need. My husband thinks I've lost my mind, that it will look like some tacky roadside shack with the old sofa on the porch (and a car carcass in the yard). What do you think?

A: I think you need to demonstrate to your husband how very savvy and forward-thinking you are. I say: out with your indoor furniture!

OUTSIDE AND STILL ELEGANT - Summertime, and the outdoor living is easy -- and living-room elegant. Today's outdoor furniture is made with durable material especially engineered to deal with the elements, yet still look sophisticated and comfortable. CNS Photo courtesy of Tarasoff Interiors. As long as it not going to be rained upon, you can make outdoors as comfortable - and elegant - as any room inside your house.

In fact, modern technology has outdated your husband's mental image of what's proper for porch living. Next season, when you have time to shop for furniture that's actually designed for outdoor use, you'll find new moisture-and-sun proof fabrics, rugs, and even lamps handsome enough to live indoors, too.

Study the posh outdoor living room by designer Anne Tarasoff that we show here. Except for the hammock, and the barbecue pit in the wood-burning fireplace, you'd never guess that it's all about New Age materials engineered to deal with the elements, so sophisticated and comfortable is her arrangement.

Anne says she followed the same design principles that would apply to arranging an indoor room: the seating pieces (covered in canvas-like outdoor fabric) are grouped conversationally around an area rug (a weather-proof painted canvas floor cloth). The arrangement includes tables within easy reach of every seating piece, and lighting that extends summer days into the night. Even the tied-back draperies, for all their lush looks, can also stand up to Mother Nature's worst moods. (See more Tarasoff talent at www.annetarasoffinteriors.com.)

Q: Even thinking about renovating our kitchen gives me nightmares. We have three children under 7, and I don't see how we're going to live as a family during the many weeks our contractor says its will take to rip out, renovate and replace everything. What advice can you offer?

A: Collective wisdom can be summed up in a phrase: "Renovation is hell." Yet renovation is also rather like childbirth: the results almost always make you forget the pain you've been through.

I suggest that you find an expert to lean on who can help you around the miseries of living without a kitchen and with the inherent disruption, such as a certified kitchen designer or other interior designer who has many successful renovations already notched on his/her yardstick.

(For starters, the National Kitchen & Bath Association, www.nkba.com, can steer you to a designer in your area.)

I also want to pass along some good advice from an experienced designer who's done a lot of kitchens, including her own. "Get excited about your kitchen," says Cynthia Schwartz, head of CRS Designs in North Caldwell, N.J. "Make sure you personally love everything that goes in it."

And, perhaps most relevant to your question: "Don't demolish the old kitchen until everything new is there and ready to go in."

THEY DO WINDOWS, MIRRORS, TOO

Think your house maintenance chores never end?

A squib spotted in a New York Times article may put your problems in perspective. The article reads, "It is safe to say that maintenance work never ends when a property has 700 rooms, 2,153 windows, 352 chimneys, and 38 acres of roof." We're talking about Louis XIV's masterwork, Versailles, where restoration of the famed Hall of Mirrors has now been completed, just in time for your summer visit.

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