

Decor Score: Slate or wood for a sun porch floor?

by *Rose_Bennett_Gilbert*

Q: We are adding a sun porch that will open to a deck through three walls of French doors. My husband wants to put a slate floor in the new room, but I am trying to hold out for wood. I think slate will make the whole room feel dark and kind of cold. Please help us decide.

A: Both choices have a lot going for them. Slate is a natural material that is a, well, natural for outdoorsy rooms. And not all slate has to be blackboard-dark, you know. However, all slate is cool to the touch, just like all other stones.

REFLECT ON THIS - A light wood floor will brighten the entire room. CNS Photo courtesy of Robbins Hardwood Flooring. Even so, you can design your way around that problem if you install low-voltage heating elements under your new slate floor. At this stage of construction, it would be easy and relatively inexpensive to lay the elements under whatever comes on top, whether that's stone, wood or tile (even resilient).

On the other hand, wood is also a natural material that will look totally at home in the outdoorsy setting you describe. A material that literally lives and breathes in your home, wood, too, can be had in a variety of species and wood tones, from very light natural to almost black.

There are also new wood-finishing techniques going on underfoot. The floor we show in this sun-filled sunroom has been distressed, using a new technique that looks almost smoky dark and dramatic when it's applied to dark woods. On light-toned woods, such as the one we show here (Robbins Fine Hardwood Flooring from Armstrong), the lighter the wood, the more it acts like a reflector, bouncing the light up and all around the room.

It's a look that sounds quite right for your sunroom. It's also warm, thanks to wood's naturally warm disposition.

Q: I have metal French doors leading to the side of the house off our dining room. Because my doors are metal, can I treat them the same as wood doors when thinking about blinds? Also, being it is the dining room, what blinds would be elegant enough? In the afternoon the setting sun is very warm, so I want to block that.

A: Aesthetically speaking, yes, you can think of dressing your metal French doors just as you would if they were wood.

However - and here comes a big caveat - you may have to go to extra measures just to install any hardware on a metal door. No problem if you have competent craftsmanship at your fingertips. Otherwise, you might consider installing the blinds on the door frame above the opening. They'll give much the same effect - you will have the convenience of light control at the twist of a wand - but you will have to raise the blinds when you want to go out through the doors.

Are blinds elegant enough for a (I'm reading "formal") dining room? If they're wood, they're inherently traditional and elegant. But before you decide, I suggest that you also explore some of the new window coverings now on the decorating market. For example, what one manufacturer calls "shadings" are actually soft and sheer like a curtain but work like blinds, rotating shut to control light (check out www.hunterdouglas.com).

Heat-gain problems are another matter. While any window treatment will help block the sun, you may want to go right back to a classic solution: traditional curtains interlined with an insulating material to ensure that you really can keep your cool.

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