



Is A Back Porch In Your Future?

Summertime is just around the corner, and as things start heating up, many people will be looking to home improvement projects that allow them to take better advantage of the great outdoors.

One such project, the enclosed or screened-in porch, got top billing in a recent Better Homes & Gardens survey that asked readers which rooms they'd most like to have added or improved in their homes. The survey's initial results were presented by BH&G editor Joan McCloskey at the International Builders' Show held in Dallas this January.

It's certainly true that a well-planned, three-season porch can add value to your home, both from an investment standpoint and a personal one. Because it's such a popular option, the porch can enhance your home's appeal when it comes time to sell. Like most home improvement projects, however, the amount you spend should be more in keeping with what you require to enjoy your home than with how much profit you're hoping to make when you sell. You may get about 75 percent of your porch investment back at sale, which is not bad considering the improvement will probably attract buyers and get the home off the market that much faster. In the meantime, your family will reap the lifestyle benefits of the new addition.

Whether you're planning to hire a contractor/remodeler or aim to do the job yourself, there are a few things to consider before you start. First of all, home remodeling experts say it's essential to begin with a solid plan that allows you to visualize what the final product will look like, how it will fit in with the rest of the house, how expensive it will be, and how long it will take to complete. And don't forget to take into account future additions you may want to make, such as sliding doors in place of screen windows. If you plan ahead for future upgrades, you'll wind up spending less time and money the next time home improvements are called for.

One very important consideration that some home owners fail to recognize before adding a porch is the way the entry from the home to the porch will affect the house's existing floor plan. While it may be very convenient to locate the entry door where a window had previously looked out on the backyard, keep in mind how this change will alter the look of the room leading out to the porch. Where light previously poured in from a large window to the family's dining area, for example, a high-traffic entryway may be created.

Similarly, while mulling over your concept for a back porch, matters of form and function must be taken very seriously. After all, the porch should both look and feel like a natural extension of the home, so its design and style should complement the existing structure. Of course, that means using similar exterior finishing materials as well as keeping the size of the addition in proportion with the house and yard.

A variety of sources can help you with the more technical aspects of building a three-season porch. The National Association of Home Builders website, www.nahb.com, is a good place to start, whatever your remodeling project. Just click on the "Especially for Consumers" category, then on the "Guide to Remodeling" and "NAHB's Remodeling Resource" to find all kinds of information on cost comparisons, managing a remodeling project and other valuable resources. Other helpful sites include the Home Building and Remodeling Network, at www.hbmet.com, and HomeTime, at www.hometime.com, which provides step-by-step instructions for do-it-yourselfers. Of course, there are multitudes of books on the subject that you'll find in the Home Improvement section of your local bookstore. When in doubt, however, it's always a good idea to consult a professional.

Remember that you need a building permit before you start, and that the job will likely require numerous inspections along the way as such things as footings, framing and wiring are completed, and certainly upon

completion of the entire job. Working without a permit won't just cost you fines and legal headaches, it could also invalidate your homeowners insurance policy.

Good luck with your upcoming project, and don't hesitate to contact us for help in locating qualified contractors in your area.

--Preserving The American Dream 1999