



Porches & Decks

Design Suggestions for Renovating and Improving Your Home
Part Four of a Six Part Design Guideline Series

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The enclosure or demolition of an existing historic porch is strongly discouraged. Such features should be maintained and preserved in their original form whenever possible.

If an existing open porch needs to be enclosed or converted to a screened porch, the new enclosure should be erected behind the columns and railings so that they may remain exposed and visible as before. Any such new enclosure should be of complementary materials and finish to minimize their visual impact and not distract from the original porch construction. **(A) in Fig. 1.**



Fig. 1: Although it is not recommended that existing porches be enclosed or converted to screened porches, if it is done the new enclosure should incorporate the original porch construction as shown above so that it remains exposed as a relief on the new enclosure.

The inclusion of open front porches on new construction and additions is encouraged, especially where porches are found on neighboring buildings. Such porches, or a smaller “front-entry porch”, is often recommended to highlight the main entry to a home. **(B) in Fig. 2.**

The addition of a new front porch to a historic building may not always be appropriate, especially if the original building was not designed to accommodate one. If you are unsure about whether or not a front porch is architecturally appropriate for your particular home, contact the Saratoga Springs Design Review Commission, or the Saratoga Springs Preservation Foundation.

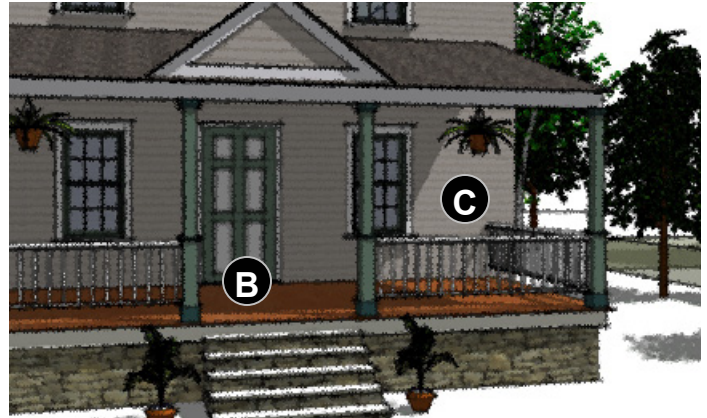


Fig. 2: Porches provide depth and shadows to a facade, creating a more welcoming shaded entry area. Ideally they should be deep enough to accommodate a few people sitting around a table to enjoy the view.

New front porches should ideally be deep enough to accommodate seating and circulation, **(C) in Fig. 2,** and should not terminate at a random point along the width of the facade. The width of a new porch should relate logically to that portion of the facade to which it is attached. **(D) in Fig. 3.**

Porches which wrap around two sides of a residence are a great way to create an area at the corner to highlight a special seating area if it is appropriate to the architectural style of the residence. **(E) in Fig. 3.** This is often found on historic homes located at corner intersections.

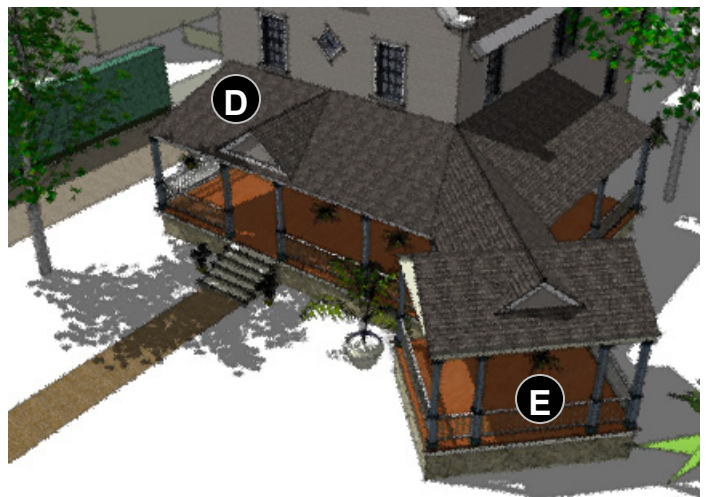


Fig. 3: Porches which wrap around two sides of a house can create the most interesting spaces, and are common on corner lots.



Porches & Decks, cont.

Porches on new construction and additions should be constructed of the same materials as the residence whenever possible. If it is not possible to duplicate the materials of the original structure, then similar materials which compliment the style and appearance can be used.

Keep original woodwork and trim whenever possible, and try to integrate any new modern elements as sympathetically as possible. Adding new stair railings in materials or designs which are not compatible with the original is discouraged.

Where columns and railings need to be replaced, match the original materials and use designs as close to the original as possible. New columns and railings need not have all of the ornament and detail found in their historic designs, but they should keep the basic forms and proportions of the materials being replaced. If existing porch railings are too low to meet code, a new upper railing can be added on top of it which is visually unobtrusive and in keeping with the original style. **(F) in Fig. 4.** This will allow the original design to remain intact below. The railing height and spacing of *balusters* should meet current NY State building code.

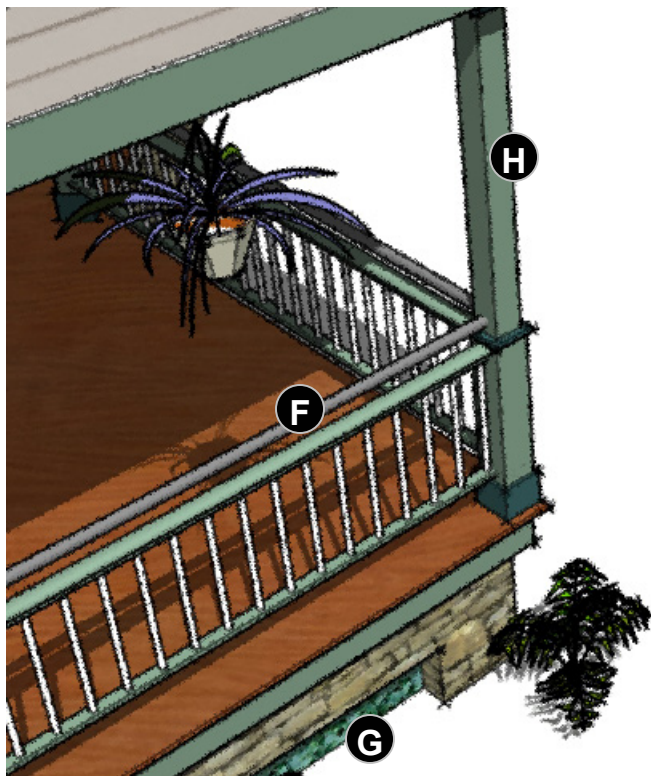


Fig. 4: Typical porch post and railing construction. More modern variations of this traditional style are in use today, but the basic principles of design are the same.

Porch and stair railings are typically constructed as an openwork of individual railings, columns and *balusters* in a regularly spaced rhythm, with spaces in between. **(F) in Fig. 4.** Railings constructed of solid panels or walls are generally discouraged except in cases of masonry construction. **Fig. 5.**

Porches which have open-air space underneath should not have the undersides enclosed in a manner which would prevent air circulation. Instead, grille-work or *lattice* should be used which can help conceal the area underneath while still allowing proper ventilation to reduce problems of moisture build-up. **(G) in Fig. 4.**

Uncovered wood decks, patios or similar construction which do not have a permanent roof overhead are generally discouraged along the front facade. These areas should be reserved for the sides or rear of the house, however masonry terraces can work on the front of the home.

The proportions of columns or posts along a front porch or facade shouldn't appear overly massive or too thin for the amount of weight they appear to be carrying. Posts which carry are relatively light load such as a small porch roof are typically be in the range of 1:10 to 1:15 in width to height proportion. **(H) in Figure 4.** Posts or columns which appear to be carrying a much heavier load such as the main roof of the house should be visually appropriate in width to height proportion. **(I) in Fig. 5.**

Porch posts and railings are best designed in an ornamental fashion which differentiates the base, middle and top of the post, or in a box/tube construction which conceals the real structural post within. Bare, unarticulated posts are not recommended.

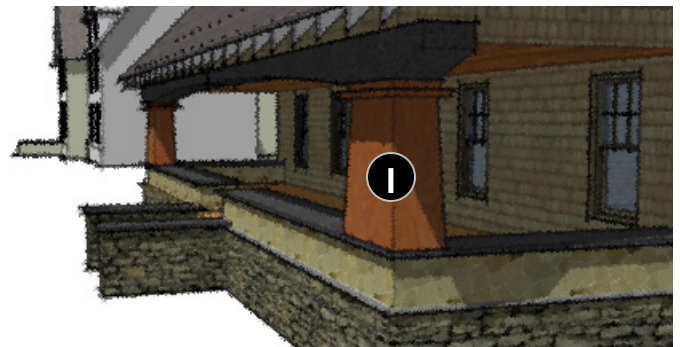


Fig. 5: Regardless of the actual structural need, it is important that posts and columns visually appear bold or strong enough to carry the load above them. Posts which are too thin or spindly will look awkward, even if they are structurally able to carry the load.