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Garden Glories

Connecting indoor spaces with outdoor wonders.

BY JENNIFER SPERRY | PHOTOS BY RICHARD MANDELKORN



Jan Gleysteen offers traditional elements to this classic entry porch, such as simple Doric columns and arches.

Opposite: Gleysteen blends the interior and exterior through the introduction of this large breakfast nook bay. The oversized windows surround the banquet, making the dining experience feel alfresco.



Historically, a porch was an indulgence of time and materials, but the benefits always outweighed the expense. From an expansive wraparound to a modest portico, a welcoming porch provides a comfortable transition between outdoors and in. But for owners desiring a closer connection to their home's landscape, a porch is not the only solution. Pavilion-like rooms can go a long way toward achieving the same effect.

THE COVERED PORCH

Principal Jan Gleysteen of Jan Gleysteen Architects Inc. in Wellesley, Massachusetts, is always conscious of how his home designs interact with the property as a whole. His background in landscape architecture prompts him to dream up new and interesting ways to, in the words of master architect Peter Gisolfi, "Find the place of architecture in the landscape."

"Connecting traditional homes to the outdoors takes more than just

a modern sheet of glass," explains Gleysteen, whose penchant for traditional architecture is apparent throughout his portfolio. Designing homes for the suburbs of Greater Boston adds another layer of complexity, he relates. "A lot of our clients already have outdoor-centric homes on Cape Cod and don't require that same vacation environment in their primary residence. That leaves us designing unique spaces for spring, fall, and even wintertime activities."

The architect's personal preference is for an open-air covered porch: "It's much more freeing [than a screened version]," he says. "Kids can run on and off; plus it's ideal for the spring and fall when it's not too buggy."

His covered designs tend to nestle into a home's exterior, with the porch and the home sharing one or two exterior walls. This efficient arrangement suits the small to medium lot sizes of Greater Boston but also allows for at

least one if not two access points from inside.

However closely connected a porch to its partner residence, Gleysteen insists on practical styling. "When a porch is raised off the ground and connected to a home, we employ outdoor materials to make it feel like an authentic outdoor space. We use paving materials such as bluestone, limestone, or granite for the floor; exterior columns, whether round or square; beadboard; and exterior light fixtures," says the architect. He adds that materials and fixtures should remain consistent throughout the exterior—a porch's elements should echo the front portico's, for example.

One of his covered porches in Weston, Massachusetts, is ideally suited for off-season enjoyment. A generously sized outdoor fireplace crafted from stone and granite is its centerpiece. The fireplace's rusticity contrasts the porch's more polished

bluestone flooring and beadboard cathedral ceiling. To one side of the fireplace is a built-in grill complete with vent hood to protect the ceiling from smoke stains.

Gleysteen's trick to ensuring off-season use: installed heat lamps, which provide quick, comforting heat. "If the owners don't want to go through the effort of building and maintaining a fire, they can still enjoy a 50-degree day thanks to those lamps," he says. Meanwhile, a ceiling fan positioned over a seating area of wicker furniture cools the space when temps are high.

Ultimately, the more time homeowners spend in their outdoor spaces, the more features they desire. Besides those amenities evocative of outdoor kitchens, such as grills, bars, and beverage refrigerators, other requested perks include recessed speakers and mounted televisions. Gleysteen is currently designing a Cape Cod home whose outdoor porch will boast a retractable screen system.

THE SCREENED-IN PORCH

Compared to an open-air version, a screened-in porch feels more like an interior space. For those who prefer bug-free relaxation, the protection afforded by screens results in the best of both worlds: indoor comforts coupled with refreshing outdoor air.

For a Colonial home in Weston, Massachusetts, Gleysteen positioned an elegant screened-in porch in a rear corner near a mature tree line for added privacy. Exterior light fixtures, exposed siding, and a bluestone floor differentiate the porch from nearby interior spaces. Its generous length allows enough room for a seating area plus a dining table.

THE BREAKFAST NOOK

"Breakfast rooms are symbolic of a garden gazebo," notes Gleysteen of the reason why his breakfast nooks tend to be so "outdoor" oriented. When appropriate, he arranges them as three-sided structures that project outside

the main home's mass. "Surrounded by glass on three sides, you can enjoy your garden, whether snow covered or blossoming, 365 days a year," he elaborates.

For example, one particular breakfast room in West Newton, Massachusetts, is no less than a rectangular pavilion, accessed via an arched opening. Its beadboard ceiling is painted a light blue to replicate the sky. A built-in banquette, outfitted with complementary blue upholstery, accomplishes a variety of tasks: "Banquettes make for intimate, cheek-to-cheek dinner parties and are also popular with kids and their friends. Or, after reading the Sunday paper, you can lie down and take a nap. The banquette takes the window seat concept and makes it functional," says the architect.

Another Gleysteen-designed breakfast room, this one located in Wellesley, Massachusetts, similarly juts out from the home's primary mass, reaching into the long, linear land-

scape. Punctuated by a dramatic barrel vault ceiling, the space is a study in echoing curves, from the rounded banquette to the mesh drum chandelier to the segmented arch transom window, which enhances the area's natural light.

Gleysteen is always seeking to integrate indoors and outdoors without sacrificing adherence to traditional architecture. Prioritizing a home's relationship to its natural environment, whether through general layout, window apportionment, or the creation of meaningful outdoor spaces, is not just step one: It's the entire battle. **SMH**

Jennifer Sperry is a freelance writer and editor living in Massachusetts.

For Resources, see page 72.

A three-season screened porch and open porch with hearth offer the best of all worlds when it comes to outdoor enjoyment.

