

INTEGRATING A NEW DECK

IT'S A 20th-CENTURY CONCEPT that can be made to work on an old house, either through simplicity or embellishment.

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Near ground level and without a railing, this new deck doesn't look like an afterthought. Classical columns and an open pergola roof tie it to historical precedent and the house.

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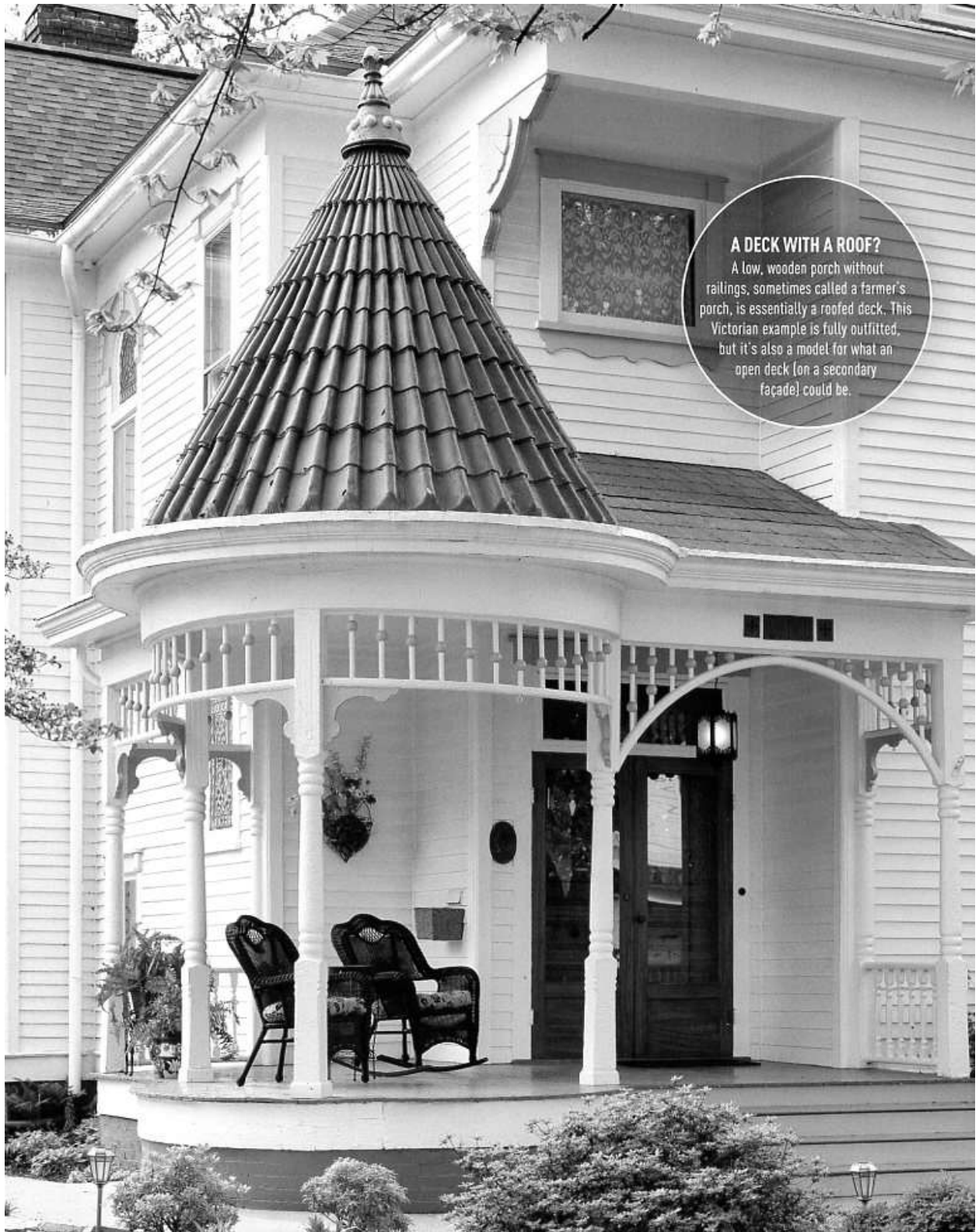
CAN A DECK BE COMPATIBLE? HERE'S HOW TO THINK ABOUT ITS DESIGN.

Location, size, relationship to the existing house, materials, and especially its details are important considerations.

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A DECK WITH A ROOF?

A low, wooden porch without railings, sometimes called a farmer's porch, is essentially a roofed deck. This Victorian example is fully outfitted, but it's also a model for what an open deck (on a secondary façade) could be.

Can a Deck Be Compatible?

We've seen the ones that aren't: too big, in the wrong place, speaking a language all their own. Here's how to think about designing an outdoor deck. | BY PATRICIA POORE

Porches are part of the architecture, patios disappear at grade. But decks are in-between, with a floor and often integrated with the exterior, yet without historic precedent before the mid-20th century. • Whether an added deck is beautiful or ugly will be determined by its design and the materials used. Design encompasses its location, size, relationship to the house, and such details as the railing—plus practical considerations having to do with sight lines, drainage, and construction details that assure longevity. A deck doesn't have to look out of place, even on a period house, as long as proportions and details are done well.



The two examples on these pages are at opposite extremes of deck design. **ABOVE** Decking barely above grade, just big enough to accommodate chairs with a view and with a "live rail" of shrubbery, has an ephemeral quality and little impact on the house. **OPPOSITE** The low Victorian porch offers inspiration for deck design, from the rounded corner and painted risers to style suggestions for an optional balustrade.



THE INTEGRATED DECK

A new deck looks better if it mates in some way with the house, rather than being an obvious appendage. It might be built around a bay, or fill in an ell. It should offer a graceful transition from the house to the yard or patio.

RAIL OR balustrade

This is where so many deck designs go terribly wrong. Flat, horizontal rails are a contemporary default and don't belong on a traditional house.

The simplest deck is a platform at or just slightly above grade, and it won't need

railings to meet code. Still, a railing or balustrade may help integrate the deck with the style of the house. For rail and baluster or spindle designs, look at the existing details on the house or in the neighborhood: porch components, brackets,

steps, even old fences. Any of these may be adapted, but in general they should be simplified—not direct copies or over-embellished. The deck is a secondary structure. Rather than copy a complex piece of fretwork, for example, choose one element as inspiration for a railing.

The enclosure doesn't necessarily have to be made of wood; on a stone house, stone components may better integrate a new deck.

ABOVE This contemporary deck is well situated at the rear of the house; tucked around a window bay, it gains interest and its apparent size is reduced. The railing and skirt details mimic those of a traditional porch. **LEFT** Near the back door of an Italianate house, a new dining deck picks up details from the front porch; this exuberant embellishment works on the large, complex building.





LEFT Ample in size yet neat and unobtrusive, this deck fills space in the corner between the main mass of the house and a wing. Continuous steps are unfussy and provide seating. **BELOW** The deck may be a connector. On the rear façade of a house in Maine, a new, open deck leads from the back door to a shed and a tiny bunkhouse nearby. Three steps go down to the yard.



a BOUT HALF of the single-family houses in the U.S. have a deck, so the idea is here to stay. For a design compatible with an old house, look to traditional concepts that are similar: porches, patios and courtyards, pergolas and gazebos. Borrow from existing elements of the house, whether that's a three-sided bay, a tower, or the porch railing. Learn from others' mistakes: As you walk around the neighborhood or look at decks online, gauge what went wrong when a new deck appears awkward or ugly.

Before you hire a contractor or begin to build, consider the larger scope. Do you really want a deck, or do you want the front porch to wrap around one side of the house? Would a patio with an awning cost less and be less intrusive?

Don't assume you know where the deck has to be, especially if the most likely location isn't ideal. Let's say your dining room has French doors that currently open to bare yard, and you'd like to add a deck for warm-weather dining. But a deck won't fit or won't look right at that location. Maybe the French doors could be relocated and a deck built to suit. Might the family room, with better access to the outdoors, swap places with the current dining room?

A session with an architect or designer is always a good idea when planning an addition, even one as apparently simple as a deck. From the start, pros pick up on the

The Invisible Deck The most foolproof approach to design has the deck disappearing from view. That may be accomplished by building the deck barely above grade and without railings; by keeping it small or narrow; or by disguising it as a walkway. **A freestanding deck is another alternative:** that is, a raised platform in the yard, not attached to the house at all.



LEFT A new deck morphed into an octagonal roofed pavilion, making it more usable and integrating it into the Colonial Revival house. **BELOW** An Arts & Crafts pergola integrates this cement deck or raised patio with the bungalow-era house in California. **BOTTOM** Composite decking from AZEK was specified for this curved deck near the Atlantic Ocean.



AN EMBELLISHED DECK If, owing to its location, size, or height, a new deck can't be made to disappear, consider going in the opposite direction. Details may be borrowed from porches of the period or from garden structures: the arbors, pergolas, and treillage that have been popular for 150 years. A pergola turns the raw, flat space of a contemporary deck into an extension of the old house. Its roof rafters provide some shade, especially covered with summer vines. If you use any composite materials, be sure to design with them in a way that looks authentic.



DECKING

Porch flooring and wood decking have a lot in common, even though it's customary to use tongue-and-groove boards on a porch—rather than lumber laid with a slight gap to allow water to drain, as on a deck. **Weatherbeaten floors are vulnerable to a host of ills:** cracked, split, or waterlogged lumber; chipped, peeling, or faded paint or stain. • Because a porch is part of the house proper, and also because it has a roof to mitigate its exposure to the elements, its floor should be wood. **But a new deck is more forgiving of modern materials.** If weather is wet or harsh, ultraviolet light a constant, and maintenance spotty, you might choose a composite, most of which don't require sealers. With a Class A fire rating, composites resist mildew, but will need scrubbing at least annually.

GROSS & DALEY PHOTO (LEFT); DOUGLAS HENSTER (RIGHT); WIL LIAM WRIGHT (OPP.); LEFT: ROB CARRILLO (OPP.); RIGHT

Outdoor Spaces

> **DECK** From shipbuilding: an open, outdoor area with a floor, often wood. A pergola-roof or awning may offer partial coverage. A deck is usually at or near grade (ground level) and thus does not require a railing. [Raised and second-level decks do.] A deck is most often connected to the house, although a raised, floored platform in the yard may be considered a deck. Also: porch flooring is called a deck or decking.

> **PATIO** From a Spanish word for courtyard, a paved area accessible from the house, at ground level and with neither railings nor roof. The paving may be flagstone, cobble, brick, concrete, tile, or packed gravel.

> **PORCH** A roofed shelter attached to the house, with a door to the interior. Near-grade porches don't necessarily have railings, but most old-house porches do include a balustrade or shingled knee-wall as part of the enclosure. Porch variants include portico, piazza, loggia, arcade, gallery, and verandah.

> **STOOP** From the Dutch *stoep* (step), it comprises the stair-steps and landing in front of an entry door.

COMPATIBLE MATERIALS

In Hastings-on-Hudson, New York, the 1906 Arts & Crafts house built of stone, shingles, and stucco has its original porches, both open and roofed. The simple, grid-like balustrades on this porch deck span between stone piers.



LEFT With a built-in daybed, this unobtrusive deck, designed by Chicago architect John Eitler for his 1916 Frank Lloyd Wright house, extends living space outdoors. **ABOVE** Left to weather naturally, wood planks making up the balustrade blend in with the stone piers.

bigger picture; following through, they'll design compatible details.

Construction should follow best practice: a deck is open to weather. Deck and railing elements must drain or shed water. Be sure to provide adequate joist support beneath the deck. Use pressure-treated or rot-resistant woods. High-quality cedar, redwood, mahogany, and ipe are attractive and will last if they are maintained regularly. For elements in contact with the ground, consider a rot-proof composite material. Paintable modern materials

make it easy to blend real wood with composites to create a traditional design.

Details of the apron or skirting beneath the deck are critical to traditional design. Continuous steps and risers keep it simple. A raised deck needs lattice to provide ventilation while keeping out leaves and skunks. Design the skirt like lattice panels under a porch: with a fascia board to transition from the decking, and framed lattice panels between posts or concrete supports. Don't use garden lattice, as the holes formed by the crossing wood laths

are too big; aim for about an inch to an inch and a half for the holes.

Never paint wood decking that's open to the elements; the finish simply will not last and is hard to renew. You can choose a clear sealer or one that's tinted. Stain won't wrinkle or peel and it's much easier than paint to refresh. Color stains run from semi-transparent to opaque, the latter being close to the look of paint. When the deck needs renewing, pressure-wash it and let it dry before adding a renewal coat of sealer or stain.



THEY STILL MAKE...



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