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THE GREAT MOUNTAIN ROMANCE... GRAND AND GRACIOUS OUTDOOR LIVING

They're as Southern as mint juleps in the summer sun. With the same kind of friendly ambience. The same laid-back, kicked-back approach to life. Maybe that's why, coupled with warm climes, nothing satisfies so much as balmy days basking on a high, wide and handsome porch. Thankfully, now they're back bigger than ever.

BY AL PLATT, ARCHITECT
PHOTOS BY JERRY MARKATOS

Life on the porch is back in the Southern mountains. Designers and builders have rediscovered the ability of outdoor living to add a wonderful dimension to the mountain experience. Hence, the porch has once again become the setting for leisure and work, cooking and eating, entertaining and even sleeping.

But these are no old-fashioned throwbacks.

Today's accommodations include fireplaces, dining tables, work tables, cooking facilities – from simple gas grills to complete outdoor kitchens – hammocks, swings, daybeds, exercise equipment, televisions and most of the comforts and conveniences provided indoors.

It's an ironic switch. Where summer heat once drove people out-of-doors, now only the coldest months force them inside. Fortunately, we share the perfect climate for napping under a ceiling fan in August or wrapping up with a book and blanket by the fire in a January warm spell.

More to Come

There are many reasons why this lifestyle trend should continue.

For many of us, our Southern mountain houses are seasonal. Even when we occupy them full time, family and friends are more often around in spring, summer and fall... the porch seasons. When houses are smaller, more efficient and better scaled to the ordinary needs of the owner, they become drastically larger when porches are in use.

LEFT: At Toxaway Mountain, the living room and kitchen each open to the covered porch where a fireplace and dining area are located behind the rockers.



ABOVE: Packed into this screened porch at Richland Ridge are a fireplace sitting area, a second area arranged for the view and a dining location common to most outdoor living rooms.

Part of the 800-square-foot porch at a one-bedroom weekend cabin, this space can accommodate 20 at dinner for evenings around the massive stone fireplace.



In our architectural practice, the development of the outdoor living room – with its relationships to views and sun, its proximity to the kitchen and other interior living areas – has become as important as the design of primary indoor living and dining areas. Accordingly, there is a special emphasis on careful planning of features, fixtures and finishes.

The Ultimate Compliment

Always roofed over most of the area and often screened, porches are the spaces which, time after time, our client homeowners tell us, “This is where we live.”

But this new trend to outdoor living presents one important planning challenge: the protection of interior spaces from the potential impact of a fully developed outdoor living area. The porch cannot simply be “attached” to the house the way a sun deck or patio may be. Planning must take into consideration the light and views required by the interior space so that the porch does not compromise those features.

Measured in hours, the outdoor living room will become the key element that makes a Southern mountain house what it is: a place to experience, express, understand and enjoy the elevation, air, light, sounds and smells of the Southern highlands.

More than style, more than windows, more than garden and more than materials, it will be the days and nights lived out-of-doors that make the memories and satisfactions of a Southern mountain home unforgettable. ■■■



LEFT: A large "dogtrot" at a summer lodge in Lake Toxaway is positioned in the center of interior space, with the great room behind the fireplace and four bedrooms opposite.

During extensive renovations to this house in Brevard, N.C., owners added a fireplace, skylights and spiral stairs to the porch.

