

Good Day, Sunshine

BY PATTI VERBANAS

With proper placement and materials, sunrooms and porches can give your home a carefree ambiance and be energy-efficient and low-maintenance.



Custom conservatories designed by Marston & Langer (shown here and below) seamlessly fit the home's footprint.

SUNROOMS AND PORCHES ADD value, living space, and elegance to your home. The choice of one over the other depends on your lifestyle. "Porches have an advantage if you want a more open living space," notes Benjamin Walmer, principal architect at LiMN Architects in Somerville. "Sunrooms offer more versatility since they are three- or four-season spaces. If you design a three-season room, though, you would want the ability to pull the windows out and turn it into a porch."

When weighing a sunroom versus a porch, consider the type of foundation needed. "A sunroom is going to require a full foundation

that will support windows," Walmer says. "With a porch you can use piers that are footed properly and prevent movement, but you don't have to be as worried about the weight the foundation will need to support."

If you want a low-maintenance addition but prefer the aesthetic of real wood to synthetic material, Walmer suggests investigating tropical woods such as ipe and red mahogany. "Ipe is amazing," he says. "It's so hard that it has the same fire rating as concrete. It's going to last forever, and insects can't touch it. It will get a weathered gray look, though, so keep that in mind."

Existing decks and porches can serve as an

excellent foundation for sunrooms — as long as they are structurally sound and properly braced, says Dan Walker, technical director at the National Sunroom Association. "You need to ensure that a qualified design professional or contractor has considered the additional weight of the sunroom addition," he says.

The best sunrooms harmonize with your home's footprint and are well sited and constructed with durable materials that harness the sun's rays and make them work to your home's advantage. For example, Marston & Langer in New York custom-designs each of its conservatories (another name for a sunroom) and employs a weather-resistant

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combination of hardwood, steel, and other alloys with high-performance glazing.

If you have an older residence, prepare to think off the grid in terms of design. When Walmer was hired to construct a sunroom for a century-old Hillsborough farmhouse that had two separate additions, he found that only a custom sunroom would marry with the house's uneven sides. "It was quite a puzzle," says the architect, who hired Creative Structures of Quakertown, Pennsylvania, to custom-build each component of the red-mahogany structure.

If topography or a foundation does not

dictate where your sunroom will be located, then select your site with energy efficiency in mind. "The best place to site a sunroom is on the north side," Walmer says. "If you install on the south side, it'll be intolerable for periods of the day unless you invest in a glass that will compensate for excess exposure to the sun." Certain types of glass and special coatings can counter the sun's effects and reduce heat, says Walker, who notes that the type of glass used should depend on the site, the amount of light you want to let in, and the climate.

Kim Beckman, vice president of Sole En-

terprises, a Four Seasons Sunrooms franchise in Lindenwold, says low-emissivity coating (which reflects radiant heat), a tint such as solar bronze, and double low-e coating are some of the glass options available. For example, Four Seasons offers an energy-efficient glazing called Conservaglass Plus. "It is more efficient than low-e because it has special mineral coatings that reflect out about 85 percent of the solar heat gain off the roof glass and 50 percent on all vertical glass," she says.

Enclosing your porch is another strategy in maintaining your home's comfort zone, notes Ruth Dykstra, manager of Patio Enclosures in Fairfield. "If done correctly, the addition will take away from the heat gain in the house," she explains. But even if you don't enclose your porch, you can still mitigate solar heat gain with awnings. "Motorized retractable awnings cut down on solar heat gain, and the room adjacent to the porch will also see a nice reduction," Dykstra says. "Plus, it helps keep your furniture from fading due to the sun's UV rays." **NJL**

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