

Adding a Deck With Style

by Rosanne Minerva

Decks are a mainstay of American residential architecture, especially since the introduction of pressure-treated lumber. Unfortunately, decks are often added as an afterthought and many of them end up looking like a tacked-on appendage. Even though the deck is usually behind the house, protected from street view, the design goal should still be to create a natural-look-

ing, integrated extension of the house — essentially an outdoor room.

Location, Location, Location

An appealing setting for a deck is important, whether you choose the location for sun, shade, quiet, privacy, or a lovely view. The deck should also relate to a room (or rooms) where it makes practical sense and will be used

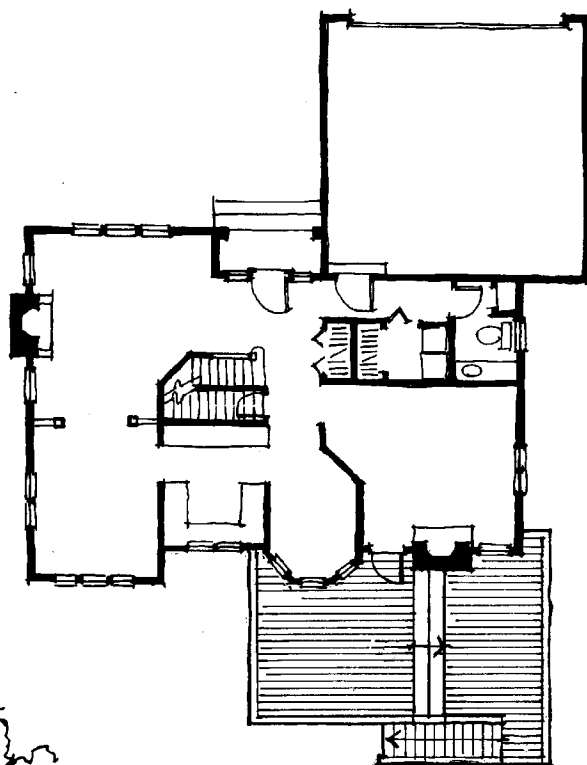
— off a kitchen, breakfast area, or family room. Adding a deck off of a bedroom is less practical. For one thing, privacy is an issue, and the deck will get used less frequently and by fewer people.

Size and Shape

The size and shape of the house should help dictate the form of the deck. The scale should be in keeping

Deck as Afterthought

This deck seems tacked on to the house. Its location on the house seems arbitrary, and its level changes serve no real purpose. The posts and railings don't relate well to doors and windows or even to one another.



Design flaws

- Deck does not relate well to house
- Horizontal 1x6 rails look clumsy
- Posts too spindly for height of deck
- Steps obscure views from beneath

with the size and massing of the house — a small Cape should not have an enormous deck. On the other hand, a tiny deck will look odd on a large home.

When sizing a deck, consider the purpose of the deck and the furniture that it may be required to accommodate. Will it be used for entertaining and dining? Or is it just a balcony for taking in a view or quiet reading?

A deck should relate and align with elements of the house in both plan and elevation. Study the lines of the house before placing the deck. Make sure the transition lines in the deck (a corner or a change in level) fall where they relate

to the lines of the house — corners, chimneys, and so forth.


If designing an upper level deck, consider how it works with the floor below. If posts and steps obscure windows and doors below, or do not relate to patios and planting areas, the design is unsuccessful.

Style

If you choose to echo a strong design shape from the plan of the house (like a curve or a bay) in your deck shape, make sure it makes sense in elevation as well as in plan. Often, keeping the lines of the deck square and simple is a better choice, and can help unify more com-

plex forms on the existing house.

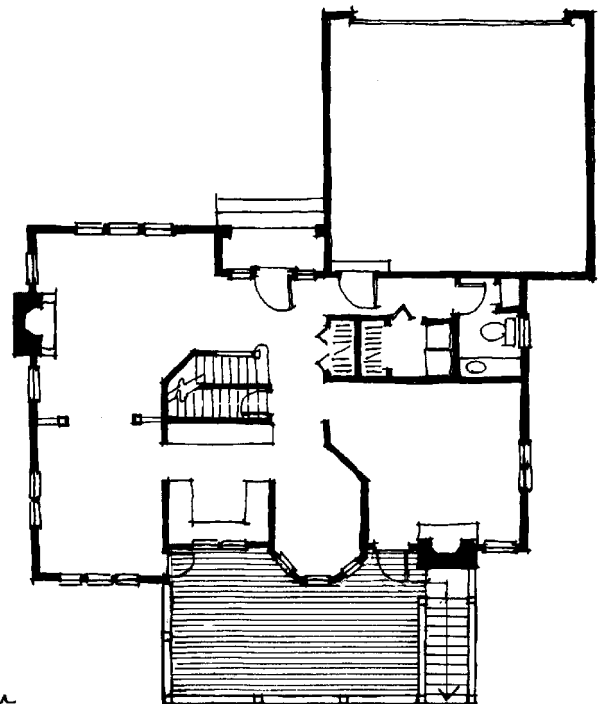
If the house is formal and symmetrical, then the deck should fit into that scheme.

Choose an appropriate deck style, taking design cues for railings, posts, and finishes from the rest of the house — perhaps from a porch or entry. Locate deck posts and railing segments to create “local symmetry” with doors and windows. For example, centering the deck’s rail posts between door and window openings will help make the deck look like an integral part of the house. 

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Integrated Deck

This simple deck feels anchored to the house and site in plan and elevation as it tucks neatly between two corners (offsets at the chimney and dining room). The size and symmetrical location balance the house design and make the deck easily accessible from both the family room and dining room. Note how the posts relate to doors and windows above and below: While not perfectly centered between openings, the post locations make design sense by not landing arbitrarily in the middle of an opening.



Design improvements

- Railing detail complements house
- Posts trimmed to look heftier
- Stairs relate visually to chimney, don't block views below
- Addition of planters creates shady patio below, in contrast to sunny deck above