

adding | on

SUMMER *in*

When warm weather breezes into Minnesota's Twin Cities, the Royelts family flings open the doors to celebrate the season—without leaving town. A new screened-in back porch is their favorite getaway.

WRITTEN BY CANDACE GRIG MARROE PHOTOGRAPHY BY KAREN MELVIN



adding on

Mary and Paul Reyelts can't imagine summers at home before the porch—possibly because they didn't spend many there. But now, even to their own surprise, the porch they built between their home and garage has proven much more than a structural addition. Making home the focal point of summer, it represents nothing less than a radical change in lifestyle.

"I've said it a number of times: [The porch] is my cabin," says Mary. The kinds of activities previously reserved for vacation retreats, she explains, now are pursued at home, thanks entirely to the new porch. "You kind of take on that cabin mentality when you are out on the porch. I get nothing done in the summer."

Instead, the porch inspires long reading sessions and

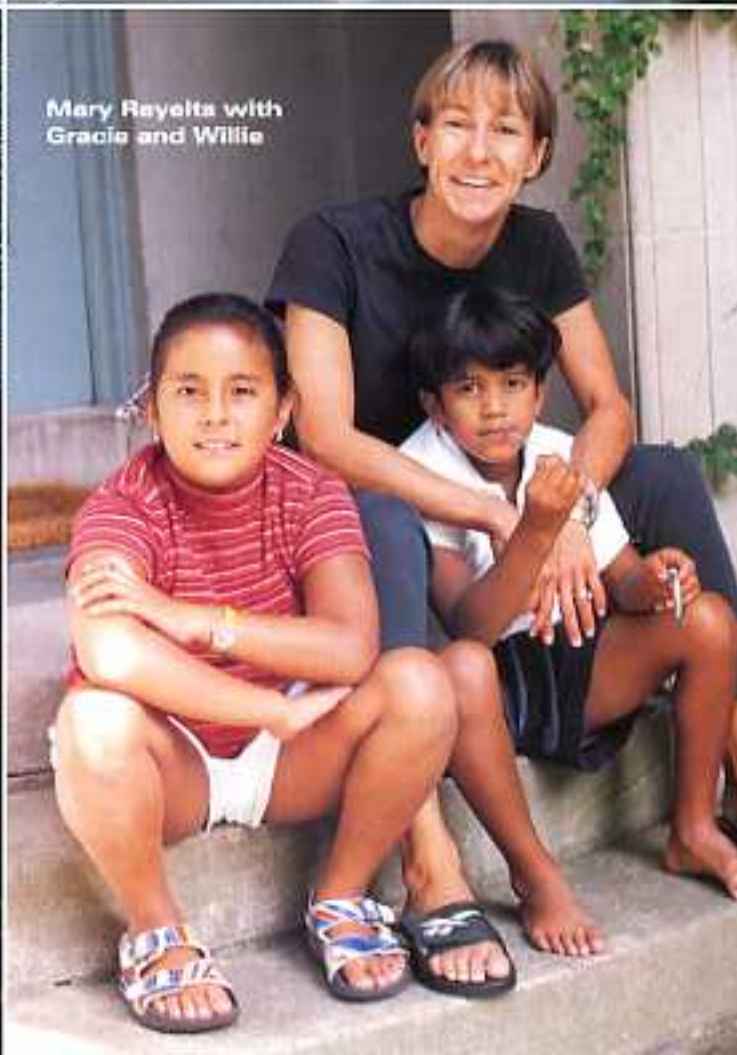
lazy hours piecing together jigsaw puzzles or pursuing family art projects with Gracie, 8, and Willie, 6. "The kinds of things we would normally do when we got to the cabin we now do at home all summer long because we can be outside doing them," Mary explains.

Because the porch makes summer a season to anticipate and celebrate, Mary and Paul don't regret their decision to build it with screens instead of glass for use in only one season instead of three or four.

"Ultimately, we decided we've already got a lot of space inside this house, and we really didn't need any more. All we needed was an outdoor space." However, with Minnesota-size mosquitoes to contend with, an open-air patio or deck wasn't the answer. Plus, "we always



ABOVE: French doors leading to the breakfast area/family room replaced a window during an earlier renovation in anticipation of the future porch. **OPPOSITE, TOP LEFT:** A built-in buffet not only provides storage, it emphasizes the architectural presence of the home's interior, even repeating on its countertop the same granite found in the kitchen. Paint-grade birch is more practical for porch use than a finer grain. **TOP RIGHT:** Wicker furniture that's easily stored during off seasons was painted the same blue-green-gray that decorates the porch and the home's exterior trim. **BOTTOM LEFT:** The porch and courtyard connect the house and garage.



Room on the porch

Building a screened-in porch that looks and functions like a real multipurpose indoor room requires only a little smart planning. Special attention to materials and construction is the key.

"Details, materials, and space make the porch feel like a part of your house," says Minneapolis architect Martha Yunker.

- **Go for the most protected place** when deciding where to add your porch. Connecting a porch between the house and another structure such as a detached garage provides the most protection from blowing winds and rains.
- **Add built-in cabinetry** for a real-room look.
- **Using paint-grade wood** (instead of blemish-free woods) makes built-in features cost-feasible even for an area where they will be exposed to dampness.
- **Allow the porch to be a transition** between the interior and exterior by borrowing colors from both.
- **Consider alternatives to a flat, shed-style roofline** for more of a real-room effect. A hipped-roof skylight is one possibility.
- **Invest the same attention in molding details that you would indoors**, creating real wooden windows instead of apertures consisting of unfinished boards laced with screen.
- **Light the porch with recessed and decorative lighting**, as well as table and floor lamps, just as you would any other room.
- **Choose weather-resilient, easy-to-clean materials** that have dramatic good looks as flooring. Randomly-patterned stone pavers are a good option.
- **Landscape the outdoors** beyond the porch with a focal point that's on the same viewing axis as the porch.
- **Furnish comfortably**, but with pieces you can store in off-seasons.

wanted a porch. I think if you live in Minnesota, you have to have one," sums up Mary.

The logical place was at the rear of the house, in the rough drainage area leading from the back of the house to the garage—an area where dampness prevented grass from growing. Capturing this patch as porch space would solve the drainage and landscaping problems.

But not just any slapdash construction of 2x4's with screen stretched between would do. The Reyelts wanted the porch to blend harmoniously with the rest of their 1929 house, recently renovated by Yunker Assmus Architecture. It only made sense to enlist that team for the porch addition, too.

"We wanted to give the porch the same kind of detail that the rest of the house had," says architect Martha Yunker. That meant imbuing it with the architectural presence of a real room. The first way was through banks of extra-tall windows topped by clerestories, with the dimensions of all apertures carefully thought out in terms of scale and proportion, says project architect Anthony Scott. "A lot of porches are low and the ceilings are really enclosing, so they feel kind of small, almost claustrophobic," adds Yunker. Located just above the termination point of standard ceiling heights, the clerestories ensure that daylight is admitted even on the porch's two walls connecting to the garage and house.

A centered skylight adds even more soaring dimension. Besides ushering daylight into the middle of the room, the skylight resolves a dilemma between dueling rooflines. For the porch to relate proportionately to the house, it required ▶

before



A cast-stone fountain attached to the garage is the focal point of the courtyard, visible from the porch and the indoor family room. It was positioned in an old garage window.

a tall roofline. But because the porch also was to connect to the garage, an awkward imbalance was created by the porch's roofline towering above that of the garage. A hipped-roof skylight was the solution. "It repeats the French feeling of the hipped roofs of the house and the garage, but is able to do so in a way that resolves those rooflines," Yunker explains.

In addition to windows and a skylight worthy of any indoor room, the porch relates to the home's interior through a built-in birch buffet with a granite countertop that matches the kitchen counters. The buffet was feasible for a screened-in porch because of its protected position on an inside wall (which opens into the garage).

Even the wooden columns used in the porch feature a hierarchy of scale to ensure the same serene sense of balance that's present indoors. Though it would do justice to any interior room, the porch's floor, made of New York bluestone pavers, signals a departure from the interior's wood floors. "We wanted the porch to relate to the house, yet still be distinctly a porch," says Yunker. Part of the pavers' beauty is their rugged practicality: Cleaning is as easy as spraying them down with a garden hose. Plus, they continue uninterrupted into the courtyard for visual transition to the outdoors.

The same soft, bluish-green paint color that trims the house's exterior covers the porch, too. Mary likes the hue because it doesn't compete with the foliage outside. That means the view from inside the home itself—from the family room, looking through leaded-glass windows and French doors that open onto the porch—embraces the outdoors unimpeded by any clamoring colors on the porch. Instead, the eye gravitates to a fountain in the courtyard beyond. "Paul wanted to be able to look out the window in the family

room and have [the fountain] as a focal point out there," Mary explains.

A family-friendly antique table joins casual wicker furniture for low-maintenance ease—an essential, because all meals are taken on the porch in summer and, weather permitting, even into October. Although the porch is too protected to catch much drifting snow, winter still means storing all furnishings. "It's a project," admits Mary, "but,

again, it's like opening and closing your cabin for the season." Instead of being a hassle, the ritual of readying the porch for summer, somehow, only increases the pleasure. □

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