

Whatever happened to the Front Porch!

written by James A. Nelson

They say change is good because it produces progress. In most cases, I agree. However, there has been one change in modern architecture that I feel has done a real disservice to the American family. Yes, the single person can be included. When the homebuilders of today eliminated the large covered front porch, they did more than save money. They destroyed a sacred tradition that has always been a part of Americana. The large front porch has been replaced by a concrete slab in the backyard called a patio. Patios are nice, but they are a far cry from the front porch that I knew and loved.

Our front porch extended all the way across the front of the house. At both ends, it had ivy climbing up trellises. Also, one half of the front was enclosed in this plant-like covering. Best of all, it came with a huge porch swing that would squeak pleasantly at just the right speed. Try to get one of those swings on a patio.

I could hardly wait for a summer storm. These storms meant that I could go out and sit in the swing and watch them unfold. It would begin with the breeze rustling the ivy leaves. This rustling would soon become a noisy crescendo as the wind picked up before the rain. I always hoped for thunder and lightning, as this crescendo always brought about a warm, cozy feeling. I was shielded and felt totally protected.

Sunday afternoon can be a great front porch day. After all the dishes are done and put away, the whole family can join in whatever conversation strikes their fancy. Would you believe that television had no place on our front porch? We didn't need that

noisy conversation-stealing piece of equipment on our porch.

Talk about a pecking order, we had a seating order. Mom and dad always got the swing; the children had their prospective places on the front porch steps. The dog was the only one who didn't seem to care where he went. He only wanted to be close to anyone who would scratch his ears.

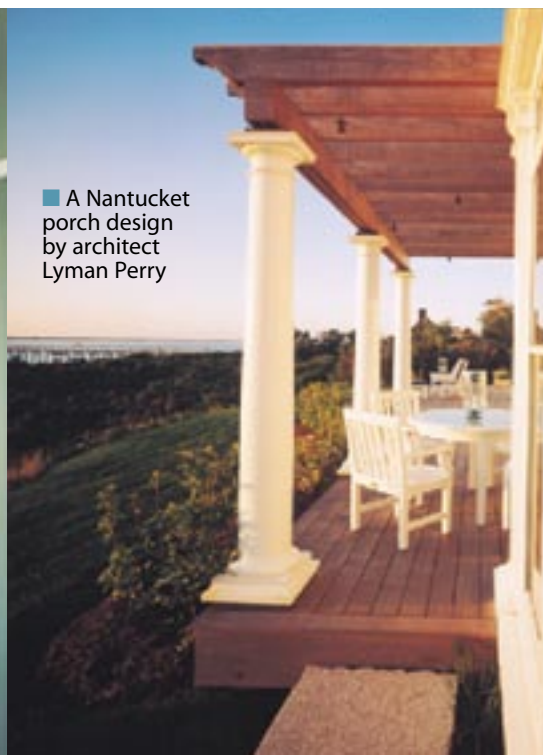
Front porches can be fun, even when you are alone. It was a favorite place to build a fort from blankets thrown over chairs in which you could conquer all sorts of imaginary enemies. It can also be the setting for a large display of dolls, as well as the paraphernalia that comes with those sorts of things. Being a guy, I never really knew all of the details.

Today's modern builders have no idea how many relationships have failed to develop for lack of a porch swing. On moonlit summer nights, the moonbeams danced on the floor of the porch through the rustling ivy and created love affairs that lasted a lifetime. Just ask your mom, dad, or grandparents. I'm sure that my reflections and ideas will do little to bring about the return of the old style front porch. Modern day builders are too interested in the bottom line. To them, a porch is an added cost. The money saved can be spent elsewhere so that hours of pleasure, which money cannot buy, will be lost by the homeowner.

If you're planning to build a house, don't forget a large front porch that can be enclosed in greenery. Most of all, don't forget to leave room for a large, handsomely-made porch swing. You will never regret it and neither will your children. ■



■ Front porch with furniture establishes a welcoming entry



■ A Nantucket porch design by architect Lyman Perry



■ Wrap-around porch overlooks a bay in Michigan