



PHOTOS: AMANDA INSCORE/THE NEWS-PRESS  
 Ridlehoover's front porch on Sanibel Island is the charm of a traditional Southern home.



The ultimate place to relax and socialize

# Porch perfection

BY BARBARA BOXLEITNER  
 Special to The News-Press

Aah . . . rocking chairs, lazy days and stolen moments.

Homeowners with front porches will tell you they have much to appreciate.

When Jean and Curtis Hardin moved from Tice to Hendry County eight years ago, their new home lacked a front porch. Within a year, it had one.

Curtis Hardin, 74, spent more than three months building a 60-foot porch that has a distinctively southern charm. The length of their Fort Denaud home, the rail porch is 6 feet deep for 20 feet from each end and 8 feet deep for the center 20 feet. He added at least 20 loads of dirt to create a hill for the sidewalk to the porch.

"It adds accent to our front porch," he said.

Time out front rivals that spent elsewhere. "I'd say we probably spend one to three hours a day out there," he said.

They have company, too. Two grown daughters from Lee County and neighbors gather there, where a row of seven chairs invites longer stays. They have an idyllic view of deer, rabbit and other wildlife that dot the 5 1/2-acre landscape.

Without hesitation, Hardin said his favorite part of being on the porch is "watching the animals."

The front porch has long been a design mainstay in the South, but it's becoming more common in new construction. Adams Homes of Northwest Florida, which also builds in the area, has at least five floor plans featuring a rail porch along one or both sides of the front door.

■ See PORCHES E5

## PLANNING THE IDEAL PORCH

- An ideal height is 24 inches off the sidewalk to place someone sitting on the porch at eye level with a person standing on the sidewalk.
- An open rail enables the best social interaction, the clearest view and the most cooling breezes.
- Seven feet of depth is optimum for comfortable maneuvering when chairs are in place. Ten feet of depth is best when a small table is on the porch.
- A wood ceiling and floor are aesthetically pleasing, typically making the porch appear longer and deeper because of the seams.
- Build it to endure a lot of humid-

- ity so the finish does not peel off.
- Install ceiling fans, preferably one every 12 feet. Dark blades conceal dirt.
- Especially in open porches, use furniture that can withstand the elements.
- Comfortable, attractive seating promotes longer stays.
- Wall sconces provide light from behind — not in the eyes of those sitting on the porch.

Sources: Rob Andrys, owner and principal of Robert A. Andrys Architects Inc. in Alva, and Jonathan Tongyai, president of Island Styles Remodeling, Inc. on Sanibel Island

## PORCHES

Continued from E1

The porch is included in some of the most popular plans.

A front porch without the rail is another option in newer homes by builders.

Rob Andrys, owner and principal of Robert A. Andrys Architects Inc. in Alva, wrote in an e-mail that the New Urbanism architectural movement "promotes community interaction through proper design. One of the more important components within a residential neighborhood is to have a front porch and a sidewalk lining the street so that people are able to socialize with their neighbors."

Porches are quite popular in homes on Sanibel and Captiva islands, according to Jonathan Tongyal, president of Island Styles Remodeling Inc. on Sanibel. He said the railway components have become so diversified that there are many types of systems "that can give you a clear view."

Lynn and Ed Riddlehoover's home, completed in February, was built with a porch because she likes to be outside. Their white aluminum rail porch is elevated like the rest of the home and across the living and dining rooms in the front.

Lynn Riddlehoover, who is in her 60s, enjoys watching the wildlife from there, adding that

she saw a bobcat walk down the driveway.

"I had never seen a bobcat until this year," she said, "and they're beautiful."

Although rail and open porches are appealing, screened porches still have their place. Fort Myers resident Joan Carr, 75, has a screened front porch on a Fort Myers house she called "older than me."

The porch on the 1920s home has a wooden table and four chairs. "It's basically a place to sit down and read. I can't do too much of one thing at one time," she said, noting the relief from outside chores.

Front porches don't have to be elaborate to be functional. Riddlehoover sought simplicity, so her porch has two fans on the sky blue ceiling and four Adirondack chairs.

"It is very comfortable," she said.

The floor is gray plank with a little space between boards. "You get this fantastic cool air," she said. "You can feel the coolness from the ground."

With its inland location and shade from a massive tree, the Hardin porch does not have ceiling fans. Still, time on the rocking chairs usually is accompanied by cool breezes.

"It's relatively cooler here even in the summer time," Curtis Hardin said. "Lots of nights we'll leave the windows open. With the air being cool at night, it blows through the house."



SPECIAL TO THE NEWS-PRESS  
 ■ The Hutchcraft family of Fort Myers added this front porch to their home.



SPECIAL TO THE NEWS-PRESS  
 ■ Jean and Curtis Hardin of Hendry County added their 60-foot-long front porch and entertain and relax there often.

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