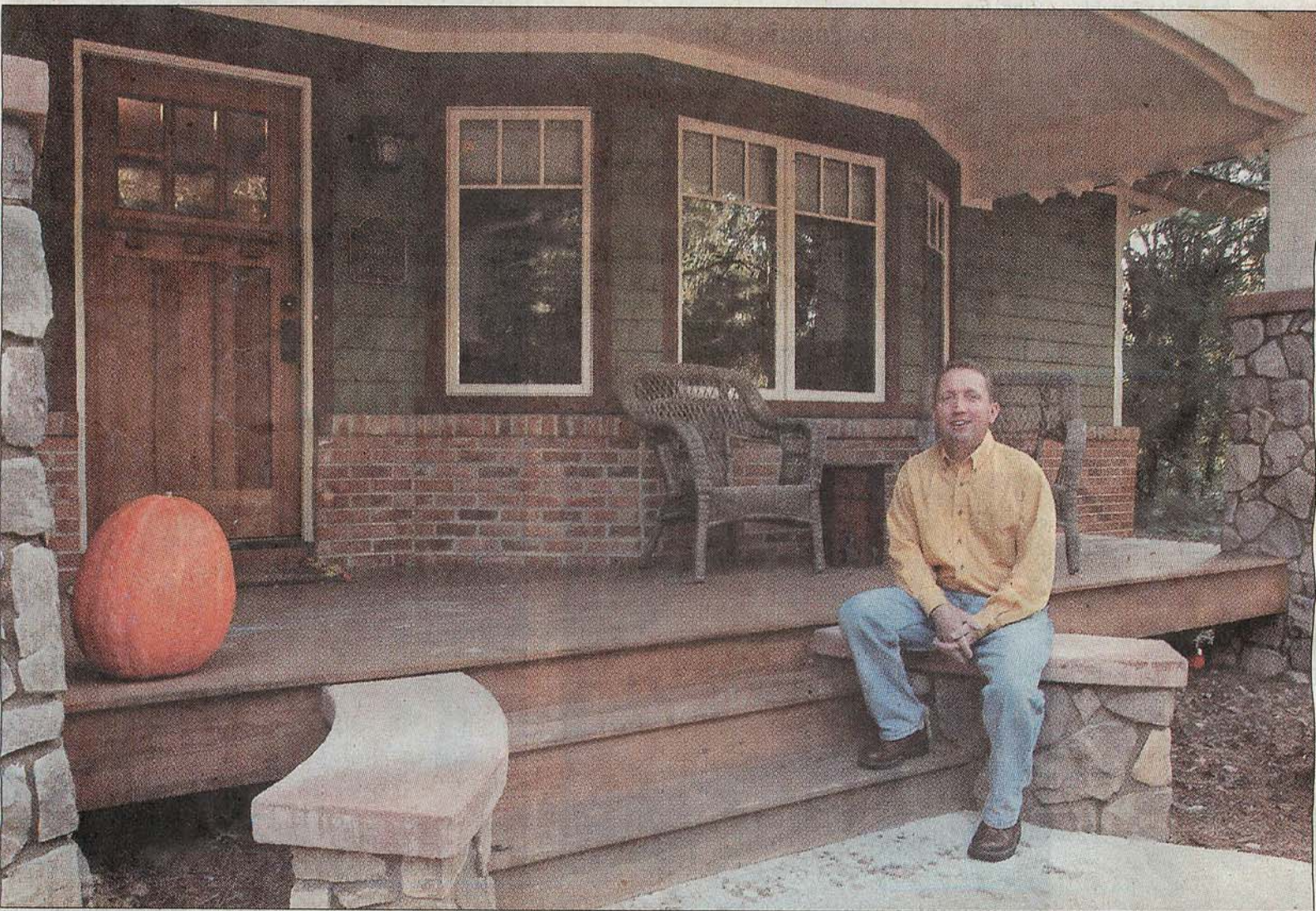


## Come on up and sit a spell



Chapel Hill native and local builder Kurt Mueller built his family's craftsman-style wooden porch with exposed rafters and no railings to be a welcoming feature in his home on Overland Drive in Colony Woods.

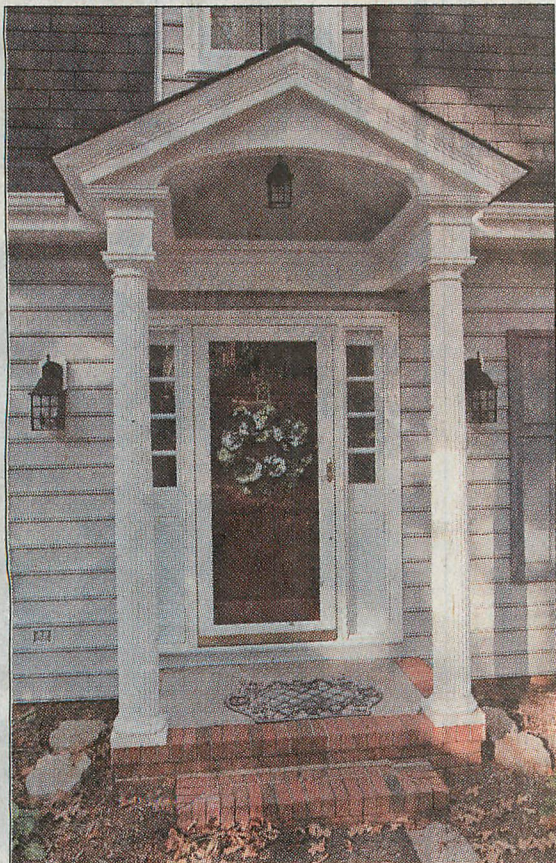
STAFF PHOTOS BY HARRY LYNCH



# A porch can be an inviting and useful addition to an existing home

By CATHERINE WRIGHT  
CORRESPONDENT

That big front porch that seems such a staple of old farmhouses is a must-have now for new houses and remodeling projects. It's borne of a desire to better connect new homes to existing neighborhoods and neighbors to neighbors.



Mueller renovated his neighbor's covered porch with classic styled columns and a small standing arched beam over the doorway.

A house that has a welcoming approach has a more welcoming porch, says Casey Blalock, principal interior designer at The Virginia Gail Collection, located in University Mall. Such porches give guests a clear direction to the house and an invitation to neighbors to hang out.

"There's been an overall trend over the last few years of people wanting their communities to be more open. The design of the house can help, but it's not going to be the fix itself," cautions Kurt Mueller, owner of New Vista Development Inc.

The designer and builder lives in a Chapel Hill neighborhood with lots of people walking and visiting on porches, but he says it's the homeowners' actions that really matter.

"When you're getting home and getting out of your car, do you wave to your neighbor and say hello?" he asks. "You get out of a neighborhood what you put into it."

That said, Mueller often will recommend clients add a screened-in porch and small deck rather than build one large deck. The budget is the same, but the porch sees more use. "They don't end up using big decks," Mueller says, noting homeowners can sit on a screened-in porch even during a downpour and can air out the house by leaving the porch door open.

Besides connecting the outdoors to the indoors, porches also serve another purpose. They protect the exterior doors of homes.

"Houses built in Chapel Hill about 50 years ago would have the front door rot out because nothing was there to protect it," Mueller said, noting porches are a design function of green building. "The less the house has to be repaired, the less has to be thrown into the dump."

## Consult a Professional

Want to add a porch? Mueller suggests consulting an architect or designer:

- A new front porch can have ramifications for the existing house, such as possibly affecting upstairs windows or dramatically changing the amount of light entering a house. Skylights might be an option to ensure natural light still gets in.

- The scale and proportion of a porch should be appropriate for the house as one of the goals should be to enhance the house. A larger porch may mean more money for a contractor, but the porch may not work for the house, Mueller warns.



# PORCH

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## Make Your Porch Inviting

• Consider going without a handrail and spindles if your porch is 30 inches or less off ground. Mueller did this on his own porch to allow for greater interaction with neighbors on the street. Be aware that stairs which are three steps or more have to have a handrail.

• Think about the long-term effect of landscaping. "That great little shrub may grow 8 feet tall right in front of the porch," Mueller says. "I've seen that in a lot of neighborhoods."

• Add some comfortable seating for yourself and others. "That's a signal that 'Hey, we like you. We want you to come up and hang out,'" the builder says. "That happens all the time on our front porch. People come up as we're talking."

But be sure not to overfurnish or impede the porch's walkway, cautions Blalock, the designer at the Virginia Gail Collection.

"It's true throughout the house: The function needs to be workable, and it also needs to be beautiful and inviting," she says. "If you're going to put pumpkins on the stairs — or whatever you're putting there — you need to make sure it's not

going to trip people out."

• If adding a plant, make sure it's something easy to maintain. "There's nothing less welcoming than a dead plant," Blalock says.

• Changing the exterior lighting if it's dated or worn can make a big impact, the designer says, adding that motion- or dusk-sensitive lights are good options to ensure the home's exterior is well lit for anyone walking to or from the porch at night.

• Consider painting or changing the door or its hardware for a clean, fresh look. Many stunning door options are available, including stained glass doors, Blalock notes, adding doors that weather better will be more costly upfront.

## Decorative Touches

You can dress up an old concrete porch by placing tile or stone on it or painting or staining it. Consider adding brick stairs or a decorative brick border to a porch.

Add a bit of color with outdoor fabrics for the seating and outdoor rugs. Or add some color via the ceiling.

"The ceiling of a porch is important — kind of like a room," Blalock says. "It's a real southern kind of tradition to paint the ceiling of a porch light blue or aqua. It's said to keep the wasps away, but it certainly makes it feel open and light."