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presents

AN OPEN-AIR CHESAPEAKE ROOM
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AN OPEN-AIR CHESAPEAKE ROOM

A Screened Porch is Reimagined as an Outdoor Living Room

By Merle Thorpe Architects

One of the pleasures of living on Maryland's Eastern Shore is the informality and accessibility of living outdoors. Screen porches complement outdoor living, with their unbroken views, natural ventilation, and protection from sun, insects and rain. For this project, the clients wanted to add a screened porch where they could grill, eat and entertain outdoors in one open space, and minimize intrusion to the fabric of the existing house.

To meet these objectives, the design incorporates what are the typical elements of a conventional great room - a kitchen, dining & living areas and a fireplace - but transforms that idiom by stripping away the walls, creating a dramatic, screened extension to the house.



In selecting a location for the new screened porch, we focused on an underdeveloped corner beside the existing house's double garage and service areas. The location possesses some of the most pleasing attributes of the property, with panoramic sightlines across the creek, shade from a mature tree canopy, proximity to the boat dock and longitudinal views of the broad lawn and specimen trees along the property's shoreline. The location also presented an opportunity to give the garage side of the house a proper family entry into the service end of the house and a new guest entrance leading directly into the new screened room.



The screened porch was designed with an open plan. A roof monitor sits atop the room introducing light and air through serviceable windows. Structural rigidity and strength resides below the wood and brick surface in steel tube columns. This feature allows the near elimination of bracing walls on the perimeter. The brick materials in the floor and raised plinth were carefully selected to resemble the brick used in the foundation of the original house.



The Rumford-design fireplace is a powerful anchor to the room, but is deliberately set off to the side of the main seating arrangement of the living area to accentuate the informality of the entire space, as if inviting other seating arrangements to be improvised. Special consideration was given to the large firebox design, which stands about 18 inches above the brick floor on a structural concrete shelf. The added height allows the fire to be visible throughout the room.



As a screened outdoor space, materials and appliances were selected with care to be serviceable, weather-resistant and easy to maintain. The fine-mesh screens are made of stainless steel to resist ultraviolet deterioration and tearing, with a black powder coat finish to eliminate glare and accentuate transparency. Deeply proportioned eaves ward off most wind-driven rain. The baseboards of the screen frames unobtrusively hide weep holes that encourage water to drain out quickly after hosing down the porch or after a heavy downpour.

Each of the kitchen, grill and lighting components are rated for outdoor use. Even the kitchen cabinets and finish were selected to withstand the exterior effects of moisture and temperature change.

The open structure creates a generous volume for the screened living area in keeping with generous exterior views. Yet, the capacious volume of the screened room transitions well via door openings to the original house.





In less than a year from design to occupancy, the clients began entertaining on their new screened porch, which has become the new focal point of the family's living, grilling and dining out-of-doors. And it becomes a space for rest and relaxation in all but the coldest winter conditions. Screened rooms can flourish in the temperate climate of the Mid-Atlantic coastline region, which extends outdoor living from late spring to the Indian summer weekends of Fall.

Merle Thorpe's practice on Maryland's Eastern Shore began in 1989. Merle Thorpe Architects understands the unique attributes of the location, climate and ecology. The practice extends to the greater Atlantic seaboard. Merle Thorpe brings over 30 years' experience as a practicing architect to diverse projects. Recognized for excellence in custom residential design, the work has received numerous awards for distinctive residential architecture, including an Award for Excellence from the DC Chapter of the American Institute of Architects.

ARCHITECTURE IS PERFORMED BEST IN COLLABORATION WITH OTHER INDIVIDUALS COMMITTED TO THEIR RESPECTIVE CRAFTS. TO THAT END, WE WANT TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE FOLLOWING STAFF, CONSULTANTS AND CONTRACTORS:

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