



Robert William Reinhardt

**W**ith a full roof and a sturdy concrete floor already in place, a porch like this (above) is a ready candidate for conversion to an enclosed living space. To maintain the original design and control costs, the new sunroom was created by filling in the screened openings (above, top). The use of operable windows on the south and west walls allows for warm weather ventilation.

Thoughtful design turns a gloomy back porch into a light-filled "second home"

## LET THE SUN SHINE IN

BY MICHAEL J. CROSBIE  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY ARNOLD KRAMER

For a young, growing family, the screened porch was ideal. Thomas and Bobbe Faulders added it to the back of their four-bedroom colonial brick home near Arlington,

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Virginia, soon after they bought the house 20 years ago. While their children were growing up, the porch was the scene of many picnics, games, and rainy-day frolics; it also served as a place to store boots, shovels, and the barbecue grill.

By the time the Faulderses' children left home for college, activity on the porch had all but ceased. Its utility diminished, the porch's shortcomings became all too obvious: It shaded the living room, kitchen, and powder room from natural light, making it seem gloomy at times. So the couple hired Robert William Reinhardt, an architect in Washington, D.C., to do something

about it. The porch conversion he designed not only provides the Faulderses with more sunlight, but also with a well-appointed living and dining space that has become their "second home."

The original porch measured 34 feet long by 12 feet wide, with its back oriented due southeast. It was accessible at one end of the house through a pair of French doors, or through a simple back door at the other end. To break up the long, boxcar-like interior, Reinhardt divided the space with a storage module that protrudes into the renovated porch from the back wall of the house. Looking much like a large piece of furniture, the divider contains bookshelves, cabinets, closets, and a small room for mechanical equipment.

Designing this storage module demanded some effort. The challenge was to make it big enough to separate the two halves of the porch, yet not so big that it was in the way. "You didn't want to smack right into it when you came in," recalls Reinhardt, "yet you wanted a sense of separation between the two spaces. The angled edges seem to make the spaces flow into each other, aiding circulation."

The central storage unit solved some problems, but it created another: It prevented natural light from entering the home's powder room and first-floor hallway. Reinhardt solved this by designing a light shaft outside the powder room window. He placed a skylight directly over the powder room window, had the sash in the powder room window removed and wood trim added to dress up the old casing. Now the powder room receives ample daylight from the skylight via this lightshaft and modified window. At night, this space can be artificially illuminated, creating a dramatic focal point.

Reinhardt's next challenge was to let some natural light deep into the porch in order to brighten up the kitchen. He accomplished this by placing a large skylight where the porch roof meets the back of the house, and by opening up the kitchen wall with two glass pocket (sliding) doors and a fixed glass door in between.

The old screened porch had a flat ceiling made of wallboard, which Reinhardt removed. Now the ceiling follows the roof pitch, giving the dining and living areas greater height. The central section of ceiling, which runs from the outside entrance to the closet unit, remains flat and relatively low (about 6 feet 8 inches, flush with the top of the door casing). This low strip of ceiling lends a cozy feeling to the porch's entrance and distinguishes it from the vaulted spaces on either side.

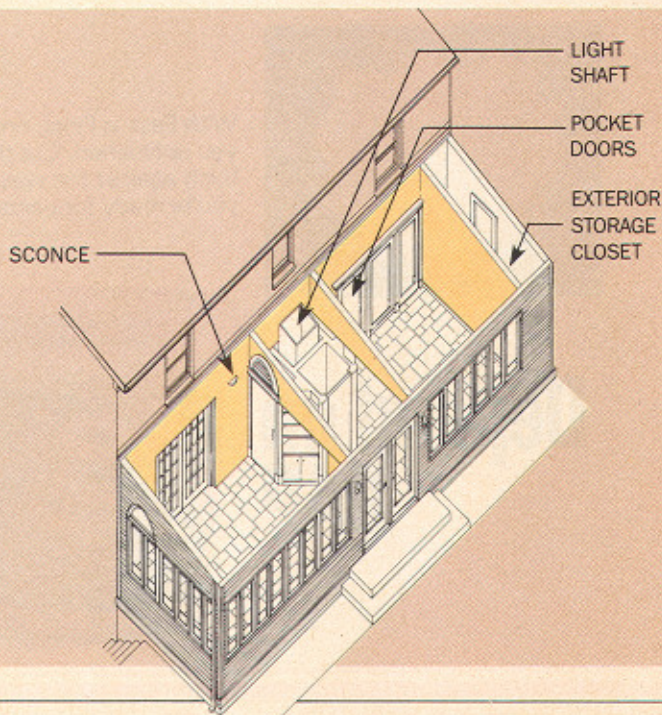
The lowered ceiling also provides space for forced-air ducts that run from the heat pump in the closet through two "columns" on either side of the entry. The heated or cooled air enters the living space through

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The "boxcar" shape of this 34-foot long porch is successfully relieved (above, top) by the center storage module, which creates two distinct spaces for the sitting and dining rooms. The skylight in the dining room (above, right) was the right solution for bringing more daylight to the main house. The entire project was certainly the right solution for the Faulderses (above, left), who now find themselves occupying the porch more than the rest of the house!

## ENCLOSING A PORCH



This porch conversion created about 360 square feet of year-round living space, plus a 50 square-foot storage room at the east end, accessed by an exterior door.