

## Lighten Up Below the Deck

by Elaine E. Laney

In the mountains of North Carolina, where I work as a residential designer, most homeowners prefer wooded lots — but at the same time, they want an abundance of natural light in their homes.

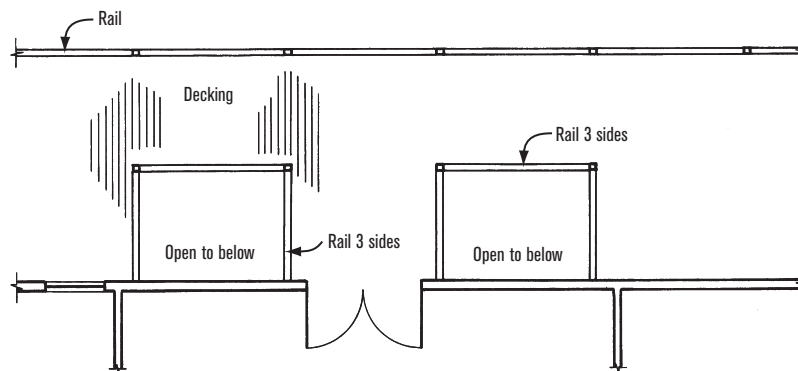
Trees aren't the only obstacles to light here. Because of the slopes many houses are built on, what might be a utilitarian basement in other locales can open to light and views, and is often used as finished space.

However, overhanging decks often keep the sun from reaching these lower-level areas.

Depending on the solar orientation of the home, there is a possible solution to the problem. By eliminating the portion of the decking directly above the glazed areas in the exterior wall below, light is allowed to fall on the windows below the deck (**Figure 1**).

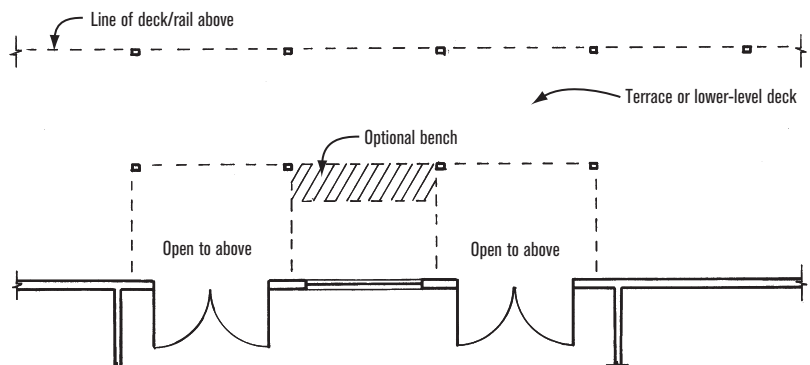
Deck rails surrounding the well (for lack of a better word to describe the "hole" in the deck) are best constructed with the same material and design used at the outer edge of the deck. A possible alternative would be tempered glass infill around the well to maximize the amount of light permitted to reach the wall below. The shape of the well, in plan, can vary

### Upper level

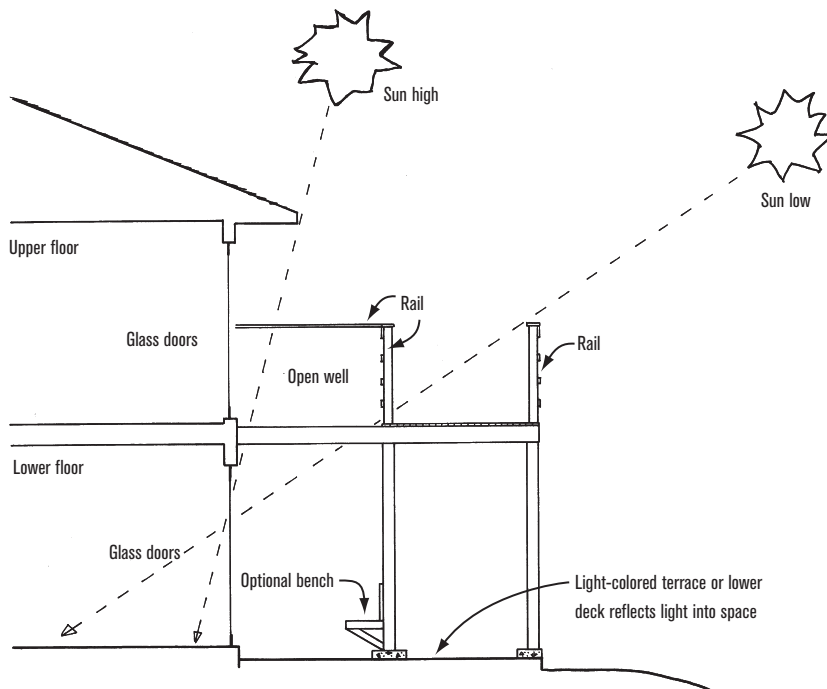


**Figure 1.** In addition to providing light to spaces below, wells can define the spaces of a deck into distinct areas for sitting, eating, hot tubbing, and so forth. If the deck above is tall enough, the area below can be set up as a shady terrace for the hottest weather.

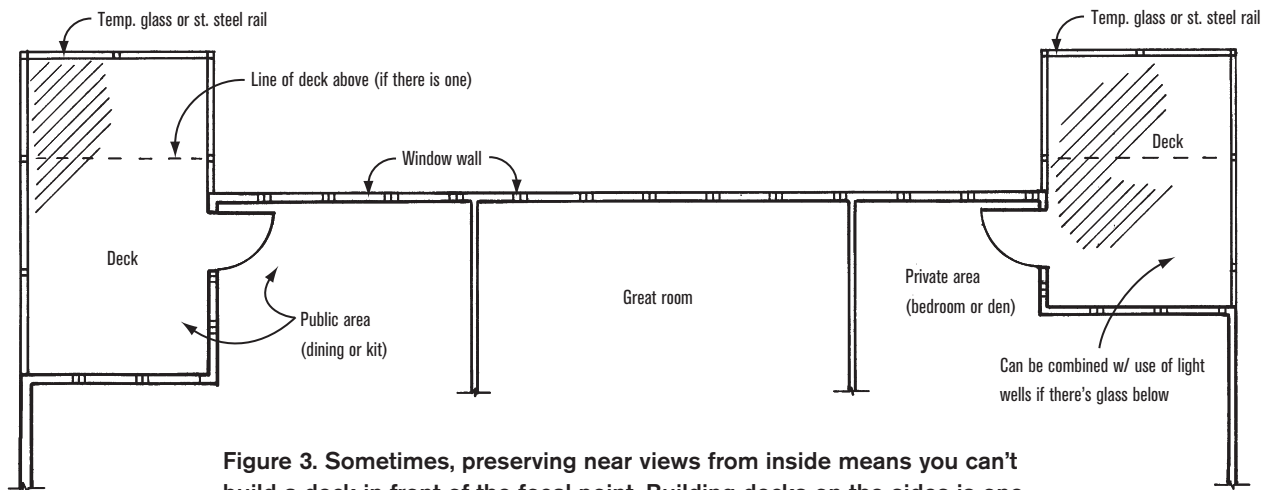
### Lower level



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**Figure 2.** Size the light well to admit the amount of sunlight you want. Observe the angle of the sun where it strikes the exterior wall at the lower level. If the summer sun is going to have a straight shot into the lower-level windows or sliding doors, you may want to make the well narrow (front-to-back). This will allow reflected light from the ground to enter the windows while blocking direct, hot afternoon sun – important to consider in warmer climates. If the wall of the house faces south, a deep (front-to-back) well will allow a maximum of warming sunlight to reach the glazed areas below – which may be the goal in colder climates.



**Figure 3.** Sometimes, preserving near views from inside means you can't build a deck in front of the focal point. Building decks on the sides is one way to avoid blocking the view while creating outdoor living space.

from rectangular or square to a more interesting triangular configuration.

The direction the house faces is vital to the success of this type of solution (Figure 2). If the window wall faces directly north, sunlight will never reach the windows, with or without a deck. However, eastern, western, and

southern exposures give varying degrees of success. In addition to light below, the deck itself gains interest – especially if the deck extends the entire width of the home. Using two or three railed wells can break the deck into distinct areas of usage.

Sometimes, the view is just too nice

to block with a deck. In those cases, smaller decks tucked to the side of the view can allow the best of both worlds (Figure 3). ♦

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