

On the Job

Sprucing Up a Porch Floor

by Roe Osborn



Recently a client asked me to replace the floor on her small back porch. At 3 feet wide, it was pretty useless for anything other than collecting stuff, so she wanted to increase the width by more than a foot, plus add a wavy outer edge that would meander around a large Rose O'Sharon shrub and mimic the winding curves of her cottage garden (1).

The customer chose 5/4 x 6 mahogany for the decking, which would provide some extra beef where the boards hung out past the band. But in order to get the cantilever, I would have to run the joists in the same direction as the decking, with horizontal blocking in between for support. I tried laying out the framing on 16-inch centers, which looked okay except for a couple of places where a joist landed directly under a gap in the flooring — a prime spot for dirt and debris to collect. I figured nothing was limit-



ing me to a 16-inch layout, so I did a quick mockup with some decking scraps (2) and came up with a 16¹³/₁₆-inch layout to avoid this situation.

We installed a double ledger along the house, pitched slightly from the inside corner of the porch, and attached hangers for every joist. To visualize the curve, I set some plywood scraps on the foundation and then used a flexible rubber hose to get a rough idea of what the client had in mind. From there I knew how far to run the joists to support the projecting curve. To maintain an adequate slope away from the house, I had to notch some of the joists where they crossed the block foundation (3). Where the band joist stepped out for each section of the curve, I added 45-degree transitions between the projections, then finished off with PVC trim (4).

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Next I rough-cut the boards to length and lined them up on top of the framing; the $16\frac{13}{16}$ -inch layout worked out great (5). I then handed my client a piece of chalk and went out for coffee. When I returned, she had drawn the whimsical pattern she wanted without any meddling from me (6). We refined the curve on either side of the steps for a smooth transition, and I stacked the boards for installation. I cut the curved ends with a jigsaw (7), setting each successive piece in place to mark where the curve of the previous board ended. I eased the edges with a $\frac{3}{16}$ -inch round-over bit (8), then hand-sanded the end (9) before screwing the board in place. I used $2\frac{1}{2}$ -inch stainless finish head screws, pre-drilling for each one.

I reinstalled the original posts (which my client plans to replace eventually with driftwood logs). The drop-off on the open end of the porch was so slight that we could forego a guard rail, but I turned some of the flooring scraps into a decorative railing (10). I even had enough flooring left over to build a matching table. The porch is now wide enough for two people to sit on comfortably.

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