

Dressing Up Support Posts

by Bayn Wood

When I meet with homeowners to discuss their deck projects, a topic that comes up over and over again is the appearance of the posts that will support the deck. One concern is that the posts will look unfinished compared with the finishes on the rest of the deck. In addition, many clients complain that decks often look like they're supported on stilts, particularly when the framing is more than a few feet above grade, such as when the deck is built over a walk-out basement. And I agree with them: Even though 6x6 support posts are structurally adequate for most decks, they can look skinny and out of proportion on a tall deck.

So a few years ago, we began to include a post-cladding option in our quotes for

all decks more than 3 or 4 feet above the ground. Used in conjunction with our triple-stack fascia option (see "Upgrade to a Tiered Fascia," Mar/Apr 2013), this allows us to offer a fully finished deck structure from the ground level up, whether we're using natural or synthetic materials for the decking.

Clad the Posts

The most common and least expensive approach is to clad 6x6 support posts the same way we typically clad porch posts—using 1x6 stock on two sides of the posts and 1x8 stock on the most-visible faces. We orient the cladding this way so that the joints on the corners will be less apparent. Cedar or other stock that comes in 1x6 and 1x8 widths doesn't nor-

mally need to be ripped. But the faces of nominal 6x6 posts can measure anywhere from 5 1/2 inches to 5 3/4 inches, so in some cases we need to use 1x8 stock for all four sides and rip it to fit, slowing down the installation considerably.

Usually we wrap the posts with the same material that's used for the decking. Many of our decks are cedar, which is more affordable than synthetic decking in our area and can be stained to match the house trim. The cladding can be stained after it's installed, but it's better to pre-stain it so that all the sides have a finish on them.

Most synthetic-decking manufacturers offer matching 1x8 riser fascia and 1x12 rim fascia, so we simply rip the 1x12s in half to make two 1x6s for two sides of a



Clad support columns that have been stained to match the trim on the rest of the house look more substantial than bare 6x6 PT posts and do a better job of visually anchoring a tall deck to the ground.



Although these 6x6 PT posts are structurally sound, they look under-sized and unfinished.



Offcuts were used for the simple built-up trim applied to the bases and tops of the cedar-clad columns.



Drop blocks were added to the cantilevered section of this deck to support tiered trim that will be used to finish the fascia.



Posts can usually be clad with standard 1x6 and 1x8 trim, but check post dimensions first. Often, at least one face of a 6x6 post measures more than 5 1/2 inches wide.



Wide cladding, such as 1x12 rim fascia, makes 6x6 posts look even more substantial, but blocking must be added to properly support the trim.



With finished support columns and tiered fascia, this raised deck looks good from the ground level.

6x6 post (TimberTech fascia measures a full 12 inches wide, while Azek and Trex fascias measure 11 1/4 inches). We oversize the 1x6 ribs by at least 1/16 inch to make sure they cover plus-sized posts. The 1x8 riser fascia works perfectly for the other two sides because it has factory edges that cover the ripped sides of the 1x6s.

To create an even more substantial look, we sometimes clad posts with full 1x12 rim fascia on all four sides. For proper nailing, it's necessary to add blocking to each side of the 6x6 support post, usually on 16-inch centers to meet manufacturer requirements.

Fasteners. The fastening details we use depend on the material that we're working with. With cedar, for example, we nail the cladding together and to the posts with 2- or 2 1/2-inch galvanized fin-

ish nails 16 inches on-center, reinforcing the corners with PL construction adhesive. If we're using capped composite stock, we predrill and countersink the holes and fasten the cladding with Starborn Headcote screws in matching colors. With PVC, we tack the stock in place with brads, then go back and fasten everything together with either FastenMaster Cortex screws (for white trim) or Headcote screws (to match colored trim).

Top and bottom detail. In most cases, we start our cladding a few inches above grade and run it up to the bottom of the beam, since both the bottom and top of the post will be trimmed out with tiered trim to match our stacked fascia detail. We build out the tiers with a 1x8 base followed by a second 1x4 cap. Depending

on the decking material, we typically will use one 1x12x12 rim fascia and three 1x8x12 riser fascias per post. Depending on the height of the deck, we sometimes can use cut-offs for the tiered top and bottom post trim, resulting in one less 1x8 per post.

Cost. The cost to clad a post varies based on height and cladding material. Cladding a typical 6- to 10-foot-long post with cedar, for example, costs \$90 to \$110; with a capped composite, \$195 to \$265 (depending on color); and with PVC, \$290 to \$370 (again depending on color). Keep in mind that the lower the post height, the more likely you'll be able to use offcuts to build out the tiered trim on the top and bottom of the post. To give clients a rough idea of relative prices, I tell them that capped composites typically



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EYE FOR DESIGN



This deck is conventionally framed with 6x6 wood posts. The masonry columns are laid up around each post and tied to it with galvanized brick ties.



Brick columns don't actually support this deck, but they're built as if they did. The masonry requires adequately sized footings for support.

are twice the cost of cedar, while PVC is as much as triple the cost of cedar.

Cladding Kits

While we've never used them, you could also dress up support columns with one of the cellular PVC post-cladding kits that are available from companies like Versatex and Azek. These would probably involve less labor to install and would be similarly priced (in the \$400-to-\$600 range per post), but unless your client wanted white columns, they would need to be painted.

Round columns are another option to consider. There are a number of different manufacturers who offer structural and non-structural versions made of materials like fiber-reinforced polymer (FRP), fiberglass, PVC, and polyurethane.

Masonry

Brick and stone veneer are other cladding options we offer. These columns require a larger pier footing and a good masonry subcontractor to build them, so they're

considerably more expensive than other choices. Still, I like mixing synthetic decking products with brick or stone columns, and apparently so do our clients: This is our most requested deck support detail.

The most efficiently built masonry column sizes are 20 inches by 20 inches or 24 inches by 24 inches, so the footing must be designed to fully support the brickwork. We simply oversize the footings, digging the large holes with an auger mounted on a Toro Dingo mini skidsteer. While some masons lay up their brick around steel supports, ours prefers standard 6x6 PT posts, which he says are easier to fasten his brick ties to.

The cost of a masonry column varies a lot, depending on height and the brick or stone being used. A ballpark figure that I use with my clients is \$1,200 to \$1,500 for a 10-foot column with a 20-by-20-inch footprint, which includes the oversized pier foundation. ♦

Bayn Wood owns Autumnwood Construction in Shelby Township, Mich.