



Seeing the Light

by Jason Russell

My clients' beautiful home on Lake Tapps, a man-made reservoir just east of Tacoma in Washington, had a problem: The sloped backyard living area overlooking the lake was terraced with multiple stone patios and concrete staircases, a recipe for disaster for their two small children. They wanted to simplify the space and make it safer by replacing the hardscaping with a single-level PVC deck that had fewer elevation changes and not as many hard, sharp corners.

My initial design achieved those goals, but met resistance from the neighbors, who wanted us to drop the main deck elevation by at least 30 inches in order to preserve their own views of the lake. Back to the drawing board.

I like to push the envelope a bit, and in my follow-up design, I introduced the idea of glass panel railings for their new—but lower—deck. These panels wouldn't require a top rail, unlike the cable railings in the original design, and would provide clear, unobstructed views of the water.

When I showed the couple some photos of what I had in mind, the wife loved the idea. Not so the husband; he was worried about keeping the panels clean. That's a legitimate concern, but from experience I know that rail panels treated with a self-cleaning hydrophobic coating will effectively repel dirt and water, greatly reducing the problem.

To help sell my idea, I set up a sample railing and left it overnight. This particular system—called CrystalRail by

Regal Ideas—features low-iron 10mm tempered-glass panels and aluminum mounting brackets with built-in LED lighting that illuminates the panels at night. Once I powered up the temporary railing, my clients never looked back.

Installation is fairly straightforward, though the stairs require a bit of planning since the stair panels come in only three lengths and are only available to fit stairs with a 35-degree pitch. But as these photos show, the effect is pretty spectacular, especially at night, both on the deck itself and when you're looking back towards the house from the lake. ❖

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PHOTOS: CLEMENS JELLEMA