



A Traditional Porch Ceiling With a Modern Look

by Jason Stimis

Stretching 80 feet across the front of the Maryland home that my company was building, this front porch was one of the home's major design elements and would be highly visible from the road. As the general contractor, I knew the home inside and out. It was designed as an all-white, modern version of a farmhouse, with black doors and window frames. During construction, the owner and I agreed that a dark ceiling for the porch would help soften the contrast between the bright white exterior and the black accents.

The house stands on a fairly exposed site, a working farm on Maryland's east-

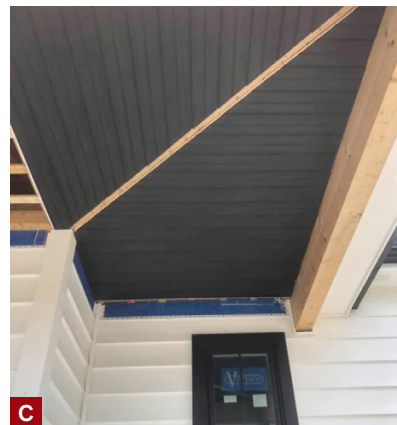
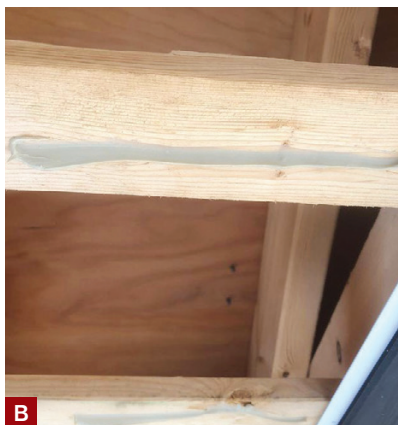
ern shore, between Chesapeake Bay and the Atlantic. So the ceiling would have to resist strong winds, humidity, and fading due to reflected UV radiation.

At my recommendation, natural wood was out. Not long before, I had completed a similar project using stained tongue-and-groove (T&G) pine, and I was disappointed by its premature need for refinishing. Black vinyl soffit was an option, but I wasn't sure it would be tough enough in these coastal conditions.

PVC trim is always a good choice in challenging environments, and we have installed a lot of it on all kinds of projects. But in this case, I was reluctant to recom-

mend coating or staining standard white PVC to achieve the dark ceiling desired by the client. While good-quality PVC will stand up structurally to environmental hazards, applying color adds one more step to the process, and the surface can suffer noticeable dings and scratches during shipping and installation.

However, we had some familiarity with a comparatively new material that checked most of the boxes for this project. Versatex manufactures a T&G ceiling board it calls Canvas, which comes in a range of durable, wood-look laminates permanently bonded to a solid PVC substrate. I knew these field-tested



To prep the porch ceiling framing for the PVC T&G boards, workers installed strapping 10 inches on-center (A) and used construction adhesive to glue each blind-nailed board to the strapping (B). At the diagonals where the porch turned a corner, T-shaped molding was used to cover the intersection (C). Because this trim wasn't available with the Kitami finish on the rest of the ceiling, the author prepped and painted standard white PVC T-molding with AquaSurTech D200 paint, formulated specifically for use with PVC (D, E). The painted T-molding is a close color-match to the ceiling (F).

ceiling boards would be a perfect fit for this project, except for one problem: My client and I were looking for something darker and more neutral than the wood tones in the product lineup.

Here's where showing up at trade shows and product demos paid off. I met a member of the Versatex team who told me about a dark Canvas shade, called Kitami, that was in the new-product pipeline. According to the company, Kitami is a nod to the recent interest in shou sugi ban, a centuries-old Japanese technique for preserving cypress wall and ceiling cladding by heat-treating their outer layers. The resulting boards, or yakisugi,

have a weatherproof, charcoal-toned, matte surface that was the inspiration behind the new Canvas color.

My Versatex friend supplied a sample, which my client agreed was just what the project called for, and I ordered enough boards with the Kitami finish to complete his 8-foot-by-80-foot ceiling. Following the company's installation guidance, we strapped the ceiling joists 10 inches on-center to make sure that the boards would remain flat and used construction adhesive to ensure that they wouldn't sag or start to come down. My two-person crew wrapped up the job in just one day, with ordinary carpenter's tools.

Kitami is currently available for T&G beadboard or $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch-thick WP4 stock, both with 4-inch crown and bed moldings to match. But it's not yet available as a T-strip, which we needed to finish the angles. For that, we acquired a quart of matching AquaSurTech D200 paint (aquasurtech-oem.com) and PVC cleaner, on the recommendation of the Versatex tech department, and used them to color-match standard white PVC molding. ❖

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