

Christine Orr of East Main Street spends a Saturday morning catching up on her magazines.

Porches of Penn Yan

Photos and Story by Darlene Bordwell

Share Your Stories

Did you grow up living the porch life? Are you continuing that lifestyle, or are you a new convert? Contribute your own reminiscences, funny or poignant stories, decorating and building ideas, and tall tales at the author's front-porch blog at frontporchmemories.blogspot.com.

The story of the rise, decline and resurgence of the American porch is the story of America itself. European homes generally do not feature what we think of as porches – broad, roofed expanses that extend our living space into the outdoors and create a pleasing transition from street to entryway. The development of the American porch is somewhat exceptional, a uniquely American architectural appendage that symbolizes our traditions of welcome, hospitality, and close-knit community. Some cultural experts even link the decline in popularity and use of the front porch with the decline of the health and well-being of the nuclear family since the 1950s.

Just the words “Let’s sit on the porch” conjure up cozy images of iced tea in tall glasses, your tired frame sinking into the depths of a well-padded wicker chair, a light breeze ruffling your hair and desultory talk drifting you through a summer afternoon. Hammocks swing, newspapers are abandoned over snoozing faces. The regular creak of rocking chairs and porch swings murmurs along with the gentle snores of companionable napping and the *shush* of passing cars. The household cat or dog joins in, sprawling in that sunny spot in the corner. The porch is a comforting place, the welcoming arms of home, setting the tone for what a visitor will find inside.

Simple Pleasures

One recent summer day I decided to take a walk around my old hometown with my camera to document some of the porches I passed. The town was strangely quiet that warm Saturday morning, but I found a few folks working on do-it-yourself projects (on their porches, of course), gardening, or just relaxing with a magazine. Though I knew none of them personally, all were happy to have me photograph their porches, and even themselves, with no prior notice – trust that’s rare, and



The Trimmer House (circa 1891), a bed and breakfast on East Main Street, Penn Yan