

Low-Maintenance Approach to Enclosing a Porch



Custom-sized aluminum frames with interchangeable glass and screen panels lengthen your customer's outdoor-living season

by Paul Mantoni

Over 20 years ago, on a vinyl siding job, I screened in a deck that had a shed roof. I used wooden screen doors for the panels and framed out openings to fit them. Some years later, I went back to the same house to install some windows, and the vinyl siding looked great — but the screens didn't. The frames hadn't been painted in some time; what was left of the paint was peeling, and the frames had started to rot.

I see a lot of wood trim that's been neglected, just like the screen-door frames on that porch. Being a vinyl-siding contractor as well as a deck builder, I'm interested in low-maintenance alternatives, so now I use storm doors made of aluminum, instead of wood, for the panels. They last for decades with only seasonal cleaning, as the finish doesn't peel and the aluminum doesn't rot.

Aluminum storm-door panels aren't just durable, they're also versatile: The screens can be swapped for glass, extending the seasonal use of the porch considerably. Even

in winter, the porch can be comfortable for parties and holidays, with a space heater.

I buy the panels in custom sizes that range in width from 6 inches to 42 inches. My supplier, Harvey Industries (800/942-7839, harveyind.com), also sells everything needed to join the panels into a screen system: upper and lower track, F-channels to attach the panels to the support posts, and H-channels for joining the panels to each other. I can get them in three colors and four styles, along with matching coil stock for trimming the posts. Harvey distributes in the Northeast, but there are probably similar products available in other parts of the country.

Installing the panels proceeds as shown in the photos on pages 46 and 48. Note that there are typically two panels between each pair of support posts. ❖

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1

The F-channels, upper and lower tracks, and H-channels — used to join aluminum storm-door panels together and to framing — are supplied long. Cut them to length using a chop saw; a standard trim blade works well.



2

Bed the base track in caulk and screw it to the decking. Attach the top track, which is deeper than the bottom one, the same way. Drill weep holes in the base track 3 inches from the ends and 16 inches on-center.



3

Measure each side F-channel separately to fit plumb between the top and base tracks. Screw the channel to the posts between the tracks.

4

With the glass or screens removed to lighten the panels and reduce the risk of damage, join two panels with an H-channel that's cut to fit between the top and bottom tracks.



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5



Slide the pair of wall panels up into the deeper top track until they clear the bottom of the opening, then drop the panels into the base track.

6

Adjust both panels to fit evenly and securely in the H-channel and the F-channels.



7

Using the supplied screws, fasten the panels to the F-channels and the H-channel.

8

For the final step, install the glass or screens in the panels.

