



Bryce Harper for The New York Times

**AIR COOLED** David Lake, of the architecture firm Lake/Flato, known for its fresh takes on the old-fashioned screened porch, sits with his wife, Ellen, on their own version in San Antonio.

## Between Living Room and Lawn

By TRACIE ROZHON

**D**ISMISSED in recent decades as relics of the lazy past, screened porches are back.

In the 80's and 90's, they were summarily ripped out to unclutter the facade or to make way for "great rooms," combined living rooms and kitchens stocked with Sub-Zeroes and steel restaurant ranges. The world was air-conditioned, and McMansions crowded out the lawn.

But now, homeowners are once again scurrying to screen in nature. For the builders of expensive speculative houses, "screened-in porches are standard," said Gopal Ahluwalia, research director at the National Association of Home Builders, a trade group in Washington. Gerry Cowart, an architect in Savannah, Ga., finds he is using more screening than ever. "It's an old-fashioned idea that's been rediscovered," he said.

To buyers and renovators, screened-in rooms preserve the sensation of being outside, without the bugs. Depending on where they live, today's homeowners are wary of West Nile virus, black flies, deerflies and ticks. The resurgence also stems from "a sense of not disturb-

Americans are rediscovering the bugless beauty of screened-in spaces.

ing what's out there, while wanting to be part of it," said Dershie McDevitt, whose two-story screened porch wraps around her house on Dewees Island in South Carolina. In her case, what's out there is not just bugs: a 12-foot alligator swims in the nearby pond.

Mr. Ahluwalia thinks the return of the screened porch reflects a change in the way Americans live. "People are trying to move the outside inside," he said. "Thirty years ago, people didn't think that much about flowers and greenery. The baby boomers like the outside — but they have no time to spend there, so they want to snatch at something that reminds them of the outdoors."

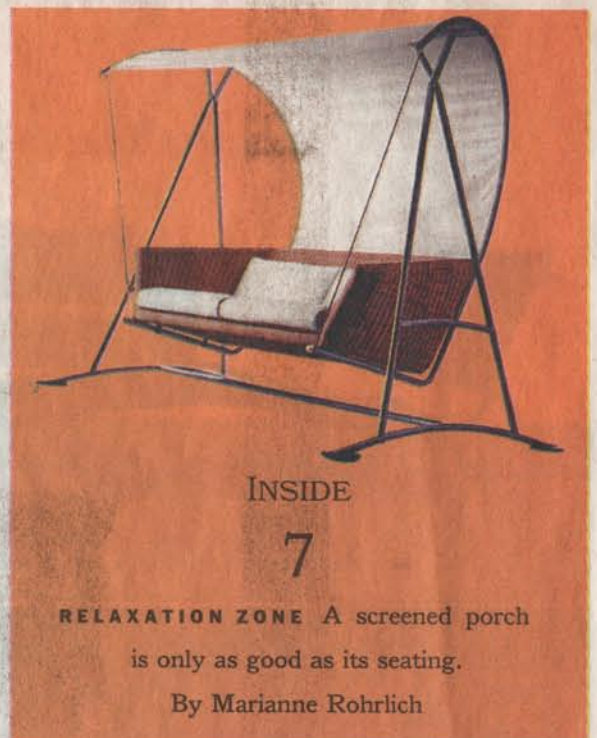
The appeal of the un-air-conditioned retreat is as much about memory as nature. "No new house around here is a house without a screened-in 'living room,'" said Duo Dickinson, an architect who last week finished a 6,000-square-foot house with a screened addition on the water in Stamford, Conn. "It's about encephalitis B and West Nile virus, but it's also about nostalgia."

Ah, nostalgia. The sound (thwack!) of the screen door hitting the frame. ... the Airedale sticking his snout through a hole in the mesh. ... the fireflies flickering on the dusky lawn.

In the current embrace of nostalgia and nature, air-conditioning has come to seem sterile — closer to Motel 6 than to the great outdoors. "While everybody has central air inside these days, this generation has tired of it," said Ted Flato of Lake/Flato Architects in San Antonio. "They grew up with air-conditioning, and they know its drawbacks: it isn't really pleasant on a day that's only slightly hot or a day that's slightly cold."

Now, instead of turning up the chill, homeowners are ambling out to the screened annex. A porch lets them immerse themselves in the outdoors without em-

Continued on Page 7



INSIDE

7

**RELAXATION ZONE** A screened porch is only as good as its seating.

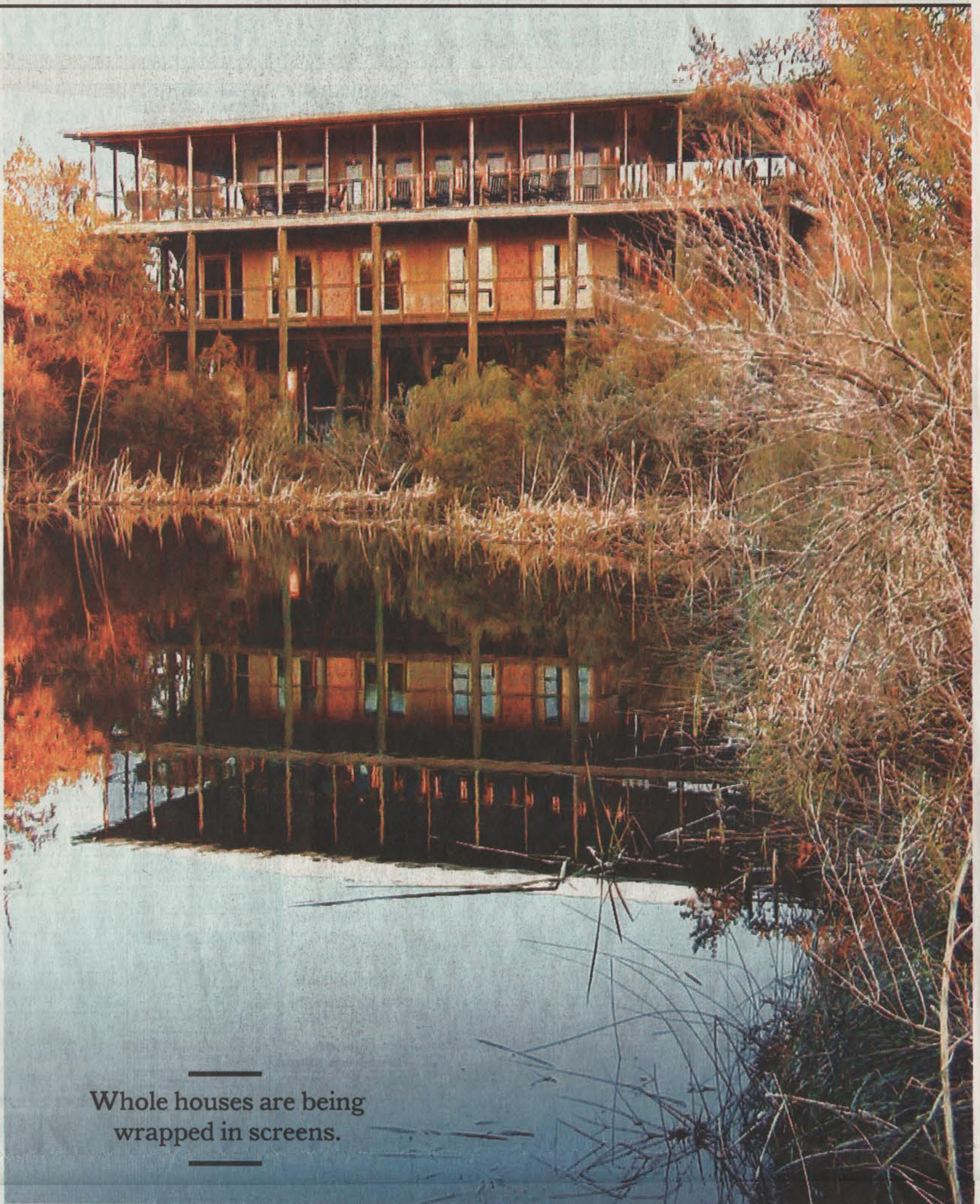
By Marianne Rohrich

TURF

# Somewhere Between Living Room And Lawn



Brian Vanden Brink



Edwin Gardner

Whole houses are being wrapped in screens.

Continued From Page 1, This Section

barking on a long, sweaty hike. "They can carry the dinner out at the drop of a hat," Mr. Flato said. "It's more romantic."

The screened porches of years past tended to be two-by-fours, with screen panels nailed in place. Today's versions stretch to form unexpected shapes and styles.

"Skip Broom, a contractor who prefers to be called a "housewright," has built two screened additions on Fishers Island. One is round, the other is built in the Greek Revival style, with screens stretching between the square columns — a bugless Tara overlooking Long Island Sound.

In Nantucket and Kennebunkport, the screened porch is a summertime retreat; in the South, it is a way of life.

Mark Simon of Centerbrook Architects and Planners in Centerbrook, Conn., designed a two-story porch that is part sleeping porch for a house in southern Maryland. "The farther south we go, the greater part of the year they can be used," he said, adding that he just finished screening in his cousin's porch in Missouri.

Whitney Powers, an architect in Charleston, S.C., built an island retreat for a client with a relatively small budget. "When they told me they wanted a screened-in porch stretching all around the house, I just laughed; the most they could afford was a dog trot," she said. She asked her clients if they wanted to sacrifice everything for a big porch. The answer was yes.

What they got wasn't "a house with a porch around it," she said, "but a porch with a tiny house in it." The result, which Ms. Powers describes as "a little Miesian box," has 1,400 square feet inside and 2,200 square feet of screened porch.

Screening allows architects to put as little as possible between their structure and the outdoors. Mr. Simon recalled an addition that Lester Collins, a landscape architect, built for his cottage in Millbrook, N.Y. The cottage had screens on three sides and on the roof. "To get rid of the leaves on the roof, he just stood on the cement floor and pointed the leaf blower upward, and all the leaves disappeared," Mr. Simon said.

**ENMESHED** A sloped-roofed screened pavilion on stilts

designed by Carol A. Wilson overlooks a pond at the foot of Moose Mountain in Hanover, N.H.,

above. For clients on a budget, Whitney Powers created a "porch with a tiny house inside it," on

Deweese Island in South Carolina, above right. In

Dothan, Ala., Greg Tankersley, an architect, built an outdoor living room, right, equipped with a brawny frame and a lake to contemplate.

In 1966, Charles Moore and an associate designed a "fantasy of the forest," a Japanese-inspired house in Healdsburg, Calif., with screens on all sides. On warm days, the hinged wooden walls swing up, exposing everything to screen-filtered breezes.

In "The Place of Houses," the book Mr.

Moore wrote with Gerald Allen and Donly Lyndon, he described being inside the house-as-porch, with "the light that filters past the branches of the giant oaks and the errant summer breezes that rustle through their leaves."

Architects point out that porches, mar-



Mick Hales

## The Ins and Outs Of Screening

**W**HEN it comes to choosing screening material, homeowners face a dilemma: how to get convenience without sacrificing looks.

Most architects prefer screens made of copper or bronze for their old-fashioned appeal — and their durability. Copper and bronze may be preferable to anodized aluminum, which doesn't rust but tends to become caked up with oxidized "gunk."

Bronze and copper screens may be handsome, but they are also expensive, costing about 10 times the price of plastic and anodized aluminum, which are available at most hardware stores for about \$1.79 a foot in 48-inch-wide rolls. A source for the harder-to-find bronze, brass and copper mesh screening is TWP in Berkeley, Calif., [www.twpin.com](http://www.twpin.com).

Plastic screens have a drawback: they tear easily. They also pull away from their frames more easily than metal screens. No matter what screening you use, builders recommend reinforcing the bottom panels with stiff mesh hardware cloth. That way, the baby can't push his way out and the neighbor's terrier can't nose his way in.

Traditional screened breezeways are not

large enough for today's consumer. Instead of a long and narrow enclosed porch, or an 8-by-10 breezeway that links kitchen and garage, people are thinking 16-by-20, or bigger. And these bigger screened rooms, often with sets of French doors leading from different rooms, open more of the inside than ever.

"Just throw open the doors of the house going into the screened-in room, and everything feels better," said Mary Evans, a Manhattan literary agent. Ms. Evans admits she became a screen zealot after she screened in the porch on the old farmhouse she bought three years ago in Taghkanic, N.Y. Last year, she spent \$4,500 to build a guest shed next to her pond; half of it is screened.

She revels in her view; sitting in one screened porch, she looks out at another.

"Next year, I'm building a barn," she said, "and I'm wrapping the whole thing in screens."

Purists want their screened spaces free of the distractions of modern life, the better to listen to the croaking of frogs on the pond or, as one woman said, "the chit-chit-chit of the myrtle warbler."

Along with their pastoral vistas, others demand electrical hookups for their laptops and cable televisions, elaborate masonry fireplaces and screened-in showers. "I've got one guy who lives out on his porch, he even had me build him a little kitchen out there," said Mr. Cowart, the Savannah architect. "It has a stainless-steel countertop, and it is where he cooks his crabs and shrimp, looking out on that old rice pond."

Part of the new drive to screen comes from looking out across the lawn or the bayou to the neighbor's house — and his new screened pavilion.

After all, Mr. Ahluwalia said, "if somebody else has them, then we have to have them."