

Screen doors can be useful and artful

BY JACKIE FREEMAN
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With their curlicues and gingerbread, decorative wooden frames, I think that wood screen doors outshine their vinyl-clad self-storing counterparts every time.

As a designer, I am hooked — I own seven decorative screen doors and am always on the lookout for another one.

The design and installation benefits of using wood are many. They come in the three standard sizes: 30, 33 and 36 inches, which fit most door openings.

And if not, five minutes with a hand planer will fix that. A simple screwdriver is your only installation tool.

Wood screen doors are lightweight and easily handled solo. Cheap is good when cheap works and these doors are in the \$25 range. You can dress them up and take them out, using different finishes.

In Maryland, a folk art technique is to paint illustrations on window screens. The Baltimore Historical Society estimates at one time close to 100,000 painted door and window screens existed in the city.

Tom Lipka, a traditional Baltimore screen painter, often depicts lighthouses and red roof bungalows in his country scenes.

You might create an abstract Kandinski, fruit and flowers, or even Elvis — the possibilities are endless. Rumor has it vegetables were the first screen image painted, used as a backdrop for produce stands.

To try this art form yourself, tape the picture you



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wish to paint or a plain piece of stiff paper behind your screen. This provides a firm surface and better contrast. Use paint, colored chalk, or crayons to create or trace over your image. It is a fast and simple process and is remarkably distinct viewed from the street. This technique also enhances privacy.

Once you begin using screen doors as art, you may become addicted. If you desire more places to use these inexpensive decorating props, you can take them inside the house where they will establish an instant theme — Victorian, islander, or country provincial perhaps. Go a little wild imagining where you can use them — in your pantry, or closets, in passage doorways, or you can make a folding screen room divider. Let your imagination show you the way.

Your finishes and embellishments will only add to the project. From chicken wire to bamboo reeds, crackle finishes to gem stones, tie-back draperies to painted screening, you will discover the possibilities are



The air flow should not be altered with painted screen doors. Think of it as a painting by George Seurat — all the dots together make up the image and from a distance look solid, but are actually points of color. Above and right, Baltimore artist Tom Lipka creates a variety of screen door images.

endless. For a Tommy Bahama islander look, attach them in hinged pairs to the casings on your sliding patio doors, in lieu of draperies.

My outside screen doors are illustrative. A favorite is awash in Rose Glaze, top coated with Glitter Spray. It shimmers when a set of headlights beams on it.

Another of my doors is

embellished with wiggly moldings. The vote for the most over-the top goes to the garden shower door, riotous with color, a lacy velveteen drapery with toy wagon wheels used for tie downs against the wind.

The point is, wood screen doors can be used in many spots, outside and in. Summer is the only time they're in the home



improvement centers. Stocking up now is necessary for winter projects. The most sensational results are achieved with imagination, while having fun.

Jackie Freeman, MA and BFA, with interior design and real estate experience, is owner of Staged Homes Sell in Suttons Bay.

To contact artist Tom Lipka, call 410-319-9254 or E-mail at screenpainter@geocities.com

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