



HELLO, SUNSHINE

One of my favorite times of year is back: porch season! I've never had a day that didn't get a little better in the shade of a veranda, with a hint of breeze and a glass of homemade blackberry lemonade (my go-to summer treat) in hand. The pink-and-green setup on page 79 is a little piece of porch heaven, especially that wide, cushioned swing. Can you envision a more winsome spot to stretch out with a book or indulge in an after-lunch nap?

With outdoor living comes outdoor entertaining, and no one throws a porch-side get-together like a Southern lady. Texas author and talented hostess Denise Gee wrote a whole book on the tradition of alfresco fêtes (titled *Porch Parties*, aptly enough). She kindly shares her secrets on page 109, from décor pointers to making guests feel comfortable and relaxed from the moment they arrive. "A porch is where a home welcomes you with open arms," Denise explains, and I couldn't agree with her more.

Cheers to that.

Although I am not blessed with a green thumb, I love living vicariously through other people's beautiful gardens. When I first stepped into the backyard on page 61, designed by Birmingham landscape architect John Golightly Wilson, I was spellbound. The way it unfolds in a series of multilevel "rooms," each possessing individual character and small surprises, is remarkable—all the more so because from the street, you'd never know such a wonderland lay behind the modest entry gate.

Finally, summer is among the best seasons to enjoy a weekend getaway to some of our region's prettiest college towns, when students are bound for home and an air of tranquility descends. In this issue, our Southern Literary Trail travel series takes us to just such a place: Oxford, Mississippi, and Rowan Oak (page 69), the 1840s abode where William Faulkner lived and wrote. His spirit still pervades the house, right down to the novel plot points he jotted on the walls of his study, and Oxford itself is a delight to explore. I hope you'll be inspired to pay a visit!

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Porch Party Pointers

Gathering on a porch is a time-honored tradition for Southerners looking to beat the heat. Join us as we explore tips for hosting an outdoor affair that shines like a diamond in the rough. BY Dorothy Walton | PHOTOGRAPHY BY Robert M. Peacock





Life seems to slow down when we take time to enjoy simple pleasures like sipping a glass of lemonade while a gentle breeze carries conversations through the warm summer air. What better place to find refuge and foster fellowship than in the shade of a veranda?

“A porch is where a home welcomes you with open arms,” says Denise Gee, the Dallas-based author of *Porch Parties: Cocktail Recipes and Easy Ideas for Outdoor Entertaining*. “There is something instantly relaxing about it.”

It’s no surprise, then, that porches are among the gems of the South and have become a focal point for entertaining. Similar to selecting a diamond, Denise suggests following what she describes as her four C’s—comfort, color, conviviality, and creativity—for planning and hosting a porch party that sparkles.

COMFORT

The beauty of a porch party comes from the informal setting that allows guests to take advantage of the season’s lingering daylight. Denise recommends putting the emphasis on the food, beverages, and temperature while letting the space speak for itself as an inviting yet laid-back environment. “Guests are put at ease when they don’t feel like everything is too precious or uptight,” says Denise, who suggests foods that are easy to access and eat, plenty of seating and tables, and a ceiling fan for particularly hot days. “You want people to feel comfortable.”

COLOR

Cheerful dabs of color create a welcoming ambience and “[guests] immediately feel like they are in a special place,” says Denise. A mix of vivid throw pillows and cushions with cheery tablecloths and linens adds pizzazz

and personalizes porch décor. Food and beverages are also a great way to infuse color imaginatively; Denise likes to float fresh fruit in a bowl of beautiful punch to incorporate a splashy hue. “Great design doesn’t need to be [about] how much money you spend on something, but instead, the interest it adds.”

CONVIVIALITY

Porch living embraces the Southern hospitality we hold so dear and helps to foster a genial mood for a gathering. “Everyone takes the cue from the host,” says Denise, “so think about making it fun for yourself and others. Allow yourself to enjoy the party and beautiful surroundings.” And while she’s a fan of overpreparing, the key is not to let your guests sense all the extra effort—a relaxed hostess makes for a relaxed affair.

CREATIVITY

Centering your menu, décor, and music around a theme can give you the opportunity to show off your creativity in a simple and stylish way that appears effortless. For a casual get-together, a refreshing punch, quick nibbles like spiced nuts and pimiento cheese sandwiches, and upbeat tunes contribute to the easygoing mood, while bubbly sippers, hors d’oeuvres, and classical music combine for a more elegant atmosphere.

“It’s all about making people feel special and glad they were a part of the party,” Denise says. “They met new people, they learned a great recipe or design idea, and most importantly, they felt the love you were dishing out.”