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Creating curb appeal

These five remodels turn a more attractive, better-functioning face to the world

BY PETER O. WHITELEY AND DANIEL GREGORY

■ Real estate agents call it curb appeal—your first impression of a house as you see it from the street. When a house has lots of curb appeal, it's both welcoming and intriguing. But you don't have to put your house on the market to give it extra charm. These five modest houses were once exposed to the street, with unadorned yards. With the addition of simple architectural features and new landscaping, they have achieved privacy, grace, and better-defined entryways that benefit the neighborhood as well as the homeowner.

Layering is the key. The hard-edged, geometric forms of these houses are softened by layers of plants, fences, gates, freestanding arbors, or trellises and porches attached to the front walls. Interacting harmoniously, these features create sheltered transitional zones that lead to clearly articulated entries.



Gazebo entry hall

Before: An abrupt front stoop and a tiny overhang provided barely enough room for standing in front of the door.

After: As part of a remodel that included a second-floor addition, the generous trellis-covered terrace—occupying the area between the garage and the front door—creates a graceful outdoor entrance hall. Vines cover the pyramid-shaped structure, making it feel like a shady garden gazebo. The new entry helps to individualize the tract house.

Design: BAK Architects, Santa Monica (310/315-9595)



The portico idea

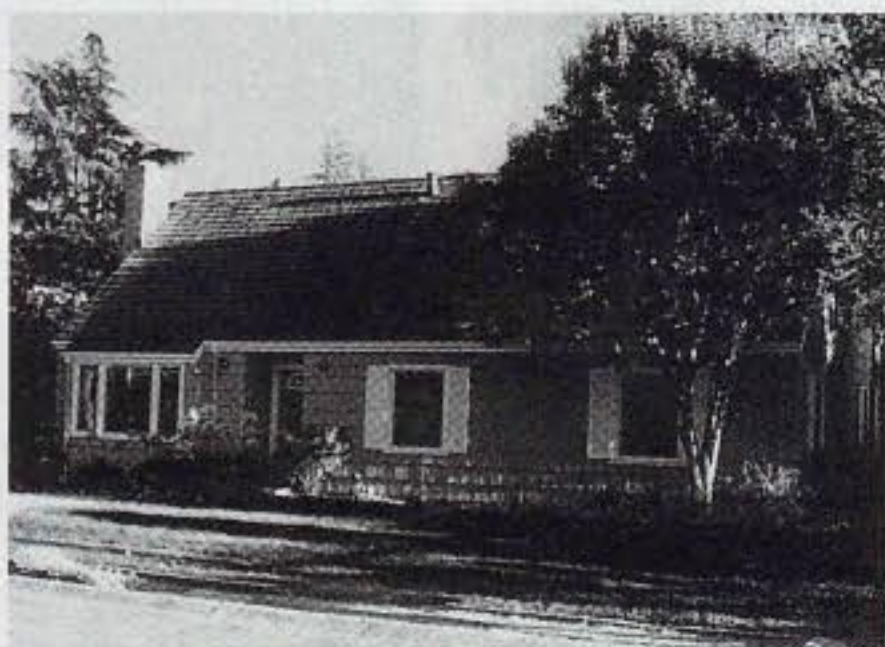
Before: The front door looked like the back door at this Denver house. The tiny stoop offered no entryway protection from the elements.

After: A remodel of the whole façade includes a gable-roofed portico, which echoes the classically inspired style of the house. With the new path across the lawn, the structure—both open and sheltering—provides an unmistakable sense of arrival.

Design: John Woodward Mink, AIA, Architectural Partnership, Boulder, CO (303/442-8202)



PHILIP WEGENER KANTOR



Layers of definition

Before: Nothing but lawn separated the ranch-style house from the street.

After: Four new layers of different heights were added between curb and house. First is a white picket fence that defines the lawn area and separates it from the driveway. Next are shrubs and columnar trees that grow close to the fence. At ground level is a T-shaped walkway in two parts: An entry path crosses a slender walk that runs the width of the house. The housewide walkway serves as a front porch, providing a base for the tallest elements—a pair of trellises. One frames the recessed entry, and the other (hidden from view) serves as a support for a bench swing from which the owners can chat with strolling neighbors and watch their children at play in the enclosed front yard.

Design: Chris Jacobson, GardenArt, San Francisco (415/664-5913)



MARK LUTHRINGER