

# A WARM WELCOME

## THE DOOR AS A REFLECTION OF THE HOMEOWNER

BY CATHY PURPLE CHERRY, AIA, FOUNDING PRINCIPAL AND ALAN COOK, PROJECT MANAGER OF PURPLE CHERRY ARCHITECTS

What do a “welcome” mat, a Christmas wreath, a yellow ribbon, and a newly married couple all have in common? If you guessed the “front door,” you were right! The front door has evolved from the hole of a cave to the flap of a teepee, from the leather-strapped logs of a remote cabin to the incredible metal cast doors of the Vatican.

The custom of the groom carrying the bride across the threshold is a very old one, and appears in many cultures. It’s symbolic of the groom stealing away with his bride, whisking her from her family and into a new life with him. This custom developed in other cultures for many different reasons, often involving avoidance of bad luck or evil spirits. Much, if not all, of the original meaning behind a groom carrying his bride across the threshold has been lost in modern Western weddings, but, after all, it’s better to be safe than sorry.

The front door of a house is one of the most important and often the most visible elements of the welcoming face of a home.

It marks the transition from the outside world to the safety and warmth of the interior, the boundary between the exposure to nature’s elements and the comfort of home. It is the barrier between our public and private realms. As a point of transition, it serves a purpose far beyond the practical need to access, secure or protect us. It simultaneously aids as a message to those who approach it. Our front door can inform visitors if we’re private (solid door), formal (classic raised panel door with sidelights), artistic (hammered copper door), or carefree (all glass door). Since the eye of a visitor is naturally drawn to the entrance, the front door is a valuable opportunity to create a strong first impression. Whether through an unexpected burst of bright color, a dramatically oversized door panel, or the breathtaking beauty of an intricately leaded glass panel, a great entrance can enchant approaching guests and speak to them about who you are as the homeowner. The front door sets the stage.

When building a house with a dramat-

ic view, many people wish for the front door to have clear sight lines through the house to reveal the drama of the landscape beyond. For these homeowners, a largely transparent entrance door is perfect. Others opt to conceal the magnificent vista from the entrance, allowing them to craft a sequence of movements through the interior that exposes the full expanse of the view only after arriving into the living room. A solid carved wooden door or a rich copper hammered door could create visual interest while contributing to the mystery and anticipation of the journey toward arrival. Neither approach is inherently better, but most clients have a strong preference one way or the other. It definitely reflects the personality of the homeowner.

Every architectural style has one characteristic door style that helps to set the tone for the home. A Tudor house adopts a dark, heavy oak door with seeded glass and iron strap hinges. A modern glass mansion of a Hollywood star displays an expanse of crystalline glass in a sleek metal frame. A classic



A classic traditional front door is adorned by leaded glass sidelights and an elliptical window.



The new front door of this 1900's farmhouse was intentionally kept quaint to respect the coziness of the home.

colonial embraces a raised-panel door with leaded-glass sidelights and an elliptical arch transom, while a casual shingle-style beach house welcomes with a half-glass divided or or colorful stained glass door.

Secondary entrances leading to garages, mudrooms, or other areas of the house can similarly mimic the main entrance, or be subordinate in style. Often a house will have a formal character at the main entrance but will present a more casual and open aspect to the backyard, particularly when amenities such as pools, terraces, or views are available. In this case, the doors on the back side of a home are often fully glazed to maximize the connection between inside and out. Sliding doors or multi-panel folding doors can be used in these applications to create expansive connections between interior living spaces and screened porches, patios, or pool decks.

Whatever the style of your home, carefully selecting the materials used can help the door perform well and look beautiful through years of exposure to weather. Wood is the classic front door material, for both painted and stained doors, and continues to be used in beautiful entrances today. Mahogany is traditionally used for its resistance to rot. Owners, however, should be prepared for maintenance with a wood door, as both paint and stain require periodic reapplication. Fiberglass can be used as a substitute for wood, particularly in locations without a roof overhang providing protection from the elements, where durability and resistance to weathering are paramount concerns. Aluminum-clad wood doors combine the strength and finish options of wood on the interior with the ease of maintenance and durability of a factory-applied metal coating. These finishes can last for twenty years or more without needing to be repainted. Other metals can also be used as cladding for doors, and provide a palette of colors and textures to create a truly unique architectural statement. Natural copper slowly patinas over time. Brushed aluminum, bronze, or even stainless steel can be used alone, with glazing, or with other materials to add variety and richness to exterior entry.

Every door needs hardware. The hardware selection can express simplicity, old worldliness or true artistry. Door hardware provides the punctuation to the door itself, reinforcing the design of the door and providing a physical connection to the user at the same time that it operates and provides security. As the part of the door that is actually touched and used every day, the hardware is experienced with both the visual and tactile senses. Knobs, levers, pulls, and hinges are available in a nearly bewildering variety of styles and price ranges. A good hardware store with knowledge-



A stunning porch surrounds a traditional stained mahogany door. Lead glass adds to the elegant touch.



A waterfront home opens to panoramic river views not only through its window, but also its front door. Painted black, this door really pops in its setting.



This contemporary front door emphasizes its importance through a beautiful hammered copper door placed in the center of a floor-to-ceiling wall of glass.



This hidden bookcase door was designed as a "secret" entrance to an adjacent room that tucks away typical office eye-sores.



able employees well-versed in the architectural hardware marketplace can guide you through all the options to help you find hardware that is beautiful, fits your budget, and is also appropriate for the door.

The choice of shape and style of the doorknobs, levers, and pulls in a home is a very personal decision. Levers are often easier to use for people with limited hand mobility or other disabilities. Some doors, such as French doors, come equipped with a three-point lock mechanism that requires a lever to operate. This mechanism locks the door into the jamb at three points through latches at the top, middle and bottom of the door. Hardware finish options are endless: nickel, chrome, pewter, brass, gold, rose gold, antique gold, oil-rubbed bronze, black and more.

Interior doors, because they don't have to be built to withstand exposure to the elements, can really range in durability, style and cost. From hollow core to solid walnut raised panel, options for interior doors can

vary. A wide variety of finish options and even small finials to decorate the hinges themselves can be selected to add to the final finishing touch. Special hardware for pocket doors, Dutch doors, double-acting doors, and many other types of doors is available for unusual applications—even for hidden doors built into bookcases or custom cabinetry that doesn't appear to be doors at all.

When designing a custom home, the style of the doors is influenced by the style of the overall home. You can feel when the selection is right. The doors speak the language of the house. You know when a selection doesn't work. Listen to your instinct. Look to imagery. Because a door is an element you touch throughout your home multiple times a day, it's important to select the style of door that expresses your sense of taste. Doors keep us safe and secure from unwanted visitors, drafts, and winter's chill. At the same time, they allow us to go out to explore the world yet always welcome us home again at the end of the day.

Born and raised in Virginia, **Cathy Purple Cherry** ultimately landed in Annapolis where she grew a large architectural firm specializing in high-end custom homes and estates. A talented architect, visionary, and three-dimensional thinker, Cathy is able to marry clients' dreams with the reality of the built environment. Cathy's intense love for the mountains has always been deeply rooted in her, and as such, Cathy is passionate about extending her 27-year old practice through DC and down the range to Charlottesville. She and her husband are building their second home, which they will one day retire in on Ennis Mountain. While Cathy revels in the intricate design opportunities presented by high-end residential architecture, Cathy is equally passionate about her philanthropic efforts and her work serving the special needs community through the firm's Purposeful Architecture studio.

Purple Cherry Architects  
purplecherry.com