

PORCH POSTS AND BEAMS

BY MARIANNE CUSATO

Getting porch details right can be tricky, but by anticipating where common mistakes typically occur, you can achieve a design that seamlessly expands the living area of a home. A key porch detail—and one that is commonly botched—is the alignment of the top of the post and the beam it supports. Misalignments occur when the rough and finish dimensions are not coordinated.

On a typical project, the framer will align the rough beam with the foundation. But if a finish material will be added to the beam or to the post, this can result in a beam that is proud of the post, or vice versa. This issue may be further exacerbated when using a tapered column. For this reason, I almost exclusively use square posts to ease installation and to minimize the chance of misalignments.

To get this detail right, first determine the size of the finished post and set the width of the finished beam to match. Then work backward to determine the rough dimension of the beam. Make sure your framer has a drawing other than the foundation plan that calls out the rough-beam location.

To get a porch to look right, you'll have to consider the height and dimensions of the posts, and the spacing between the posts. For the height, start with a 9-ft. post and adjust as needed to fit the overall composition of



A half post at the house. When possible, especially on wider homes, connect the porch to the wall with a half post. If you are using 8x8 posts, for example, have the post at the wall be a 4x8. In some cases, the corner board can create the look of a post at the wall. This will help to integrate the porch in the overall composition of the home.

the home's elevation. Avoid posts shorter than 8 ft., which will feel too low, or taller than 10 ft., which will make the porch feel uncontained.

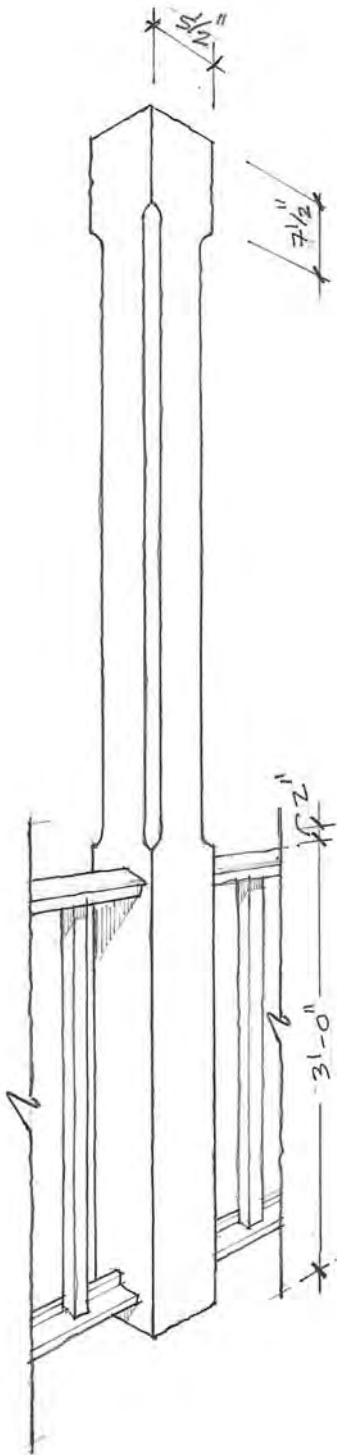
For cottages and smaller homes, 6x6 posts with a simple chamfer are a good place to start. As the home gets larger, you can either double up the posts to visually give more support or use larger posts like 8x8s. Keep in mind that solid posts are more prone to warping and cracking. If you are planning to use solid 6x6 or 8x8 posts, make sure you can get high-quality material. Otherwise, plan to wrap a smaller post.

The space between posts will depend on the overall composition of your home. While there are no established aesthetic

requirements for spans, one rule of thumb is to set the space no wider than the height of the posts. It's also common to space the posts so that the clear area above the railing is about square.

Of course, the first sizing requirement for the posts, beam, and spans is that they be an adequate size to carry the roof load. Though those requirements often call for smaller posts and beams than you'll need for a well-proportioned design, planning post and beam size and post spacing can be a balancing act.

Marianne Cusato is the author of *Get Your House Right: Architectural Elements to Use and Avoid*. Drawings by the author.

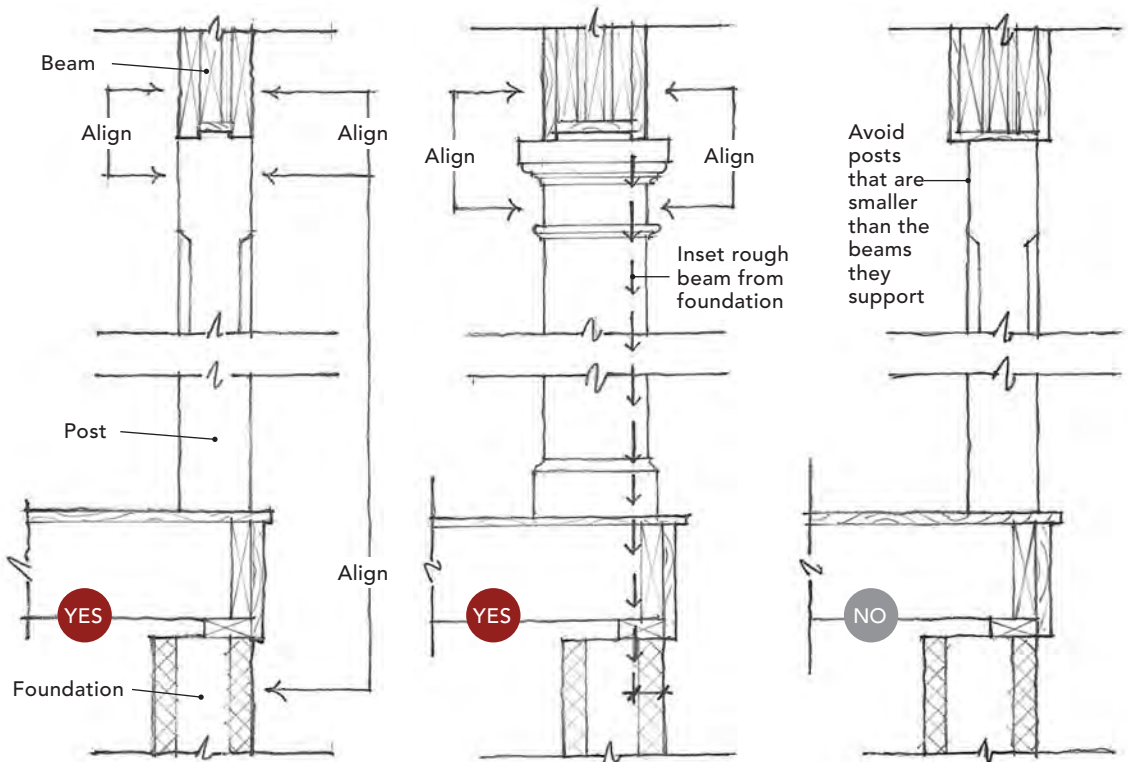


A CHAMFER IS ENOUGH

Porch posts don't need a whole lot of adornment. A chamfer, beginning a couple inches above the railing and ending about 7 in. from the beam, gives a 6x6 plenty of dimension and detail.

BEAM ALIGNMENT

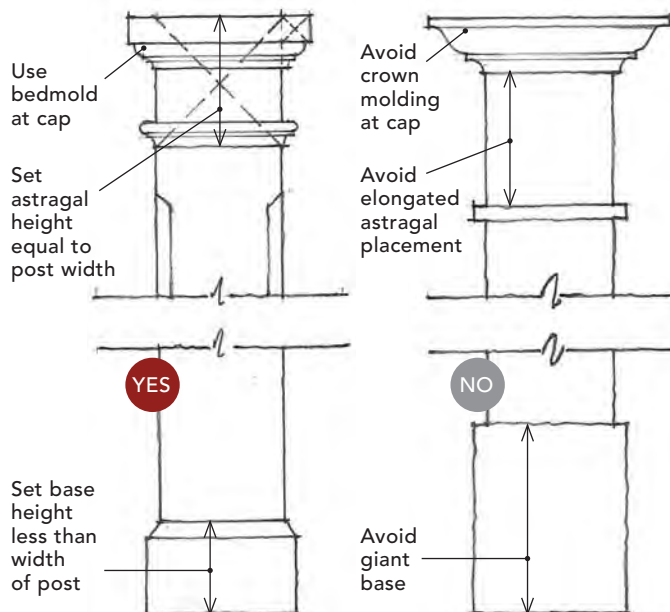
Aligning the beam is one of the most difficult aspects of a porch installation and requires planning ahead to get it right.



SIMPLE INSTALLATION
When the rough beam is the finished beam and the rough post is the finished post, align both with the face of the foundation.

BUILT-UP INSTALLATION
When the finished beam will be trimmed, inset the rough beam from the foundation to allow for the finish materials to align.

MISALIGNED INSTALLATION
When the rough beam is not the finished beam, aligning the rough beam to the foundation results in a misalignment.



CAPITALS & BASES

When you use capital and base trim, remember that less is more. The simplest cap and base are single 1x4 boards. For more detail, you can recreate the look of a column capital with a bedmold supporting a 2x with nose and cove molding as the astragal. For the base, add detail by chamfering the top of a 1x4. Posts do not need bases for aesthetic reasons—if a small part of a steel connector is visible, it will be barely noticeable and preferable to chunky moldings, which call attention to misalignments.