



Ideas for Custom Railings



Site-built deck rails use unconventional materials to preserve the view

BY DEBRA JUDGE SILBER

While there's no shortage of off-the-shelf railing systems from decking manufacturers, there still can be advantages to building your own system. Cost is one. Craft is another. Still another is the ability to deliver a unique outdoor feature that fits a client's desires—and a deck's design—perfectly. "It's a lot more fun to play with different ideas and to create something that's more than the sum of its parts," says North Carolina builder Michael Chandler, who incorporated agricultural panels and coil stock in the railing shown on p. 52. "There's an alchemy in taking something very prosaic, like galvanized flashing and goat wire, and turning it into something that's high value and more attractive than premade cast-aluminum stuff."

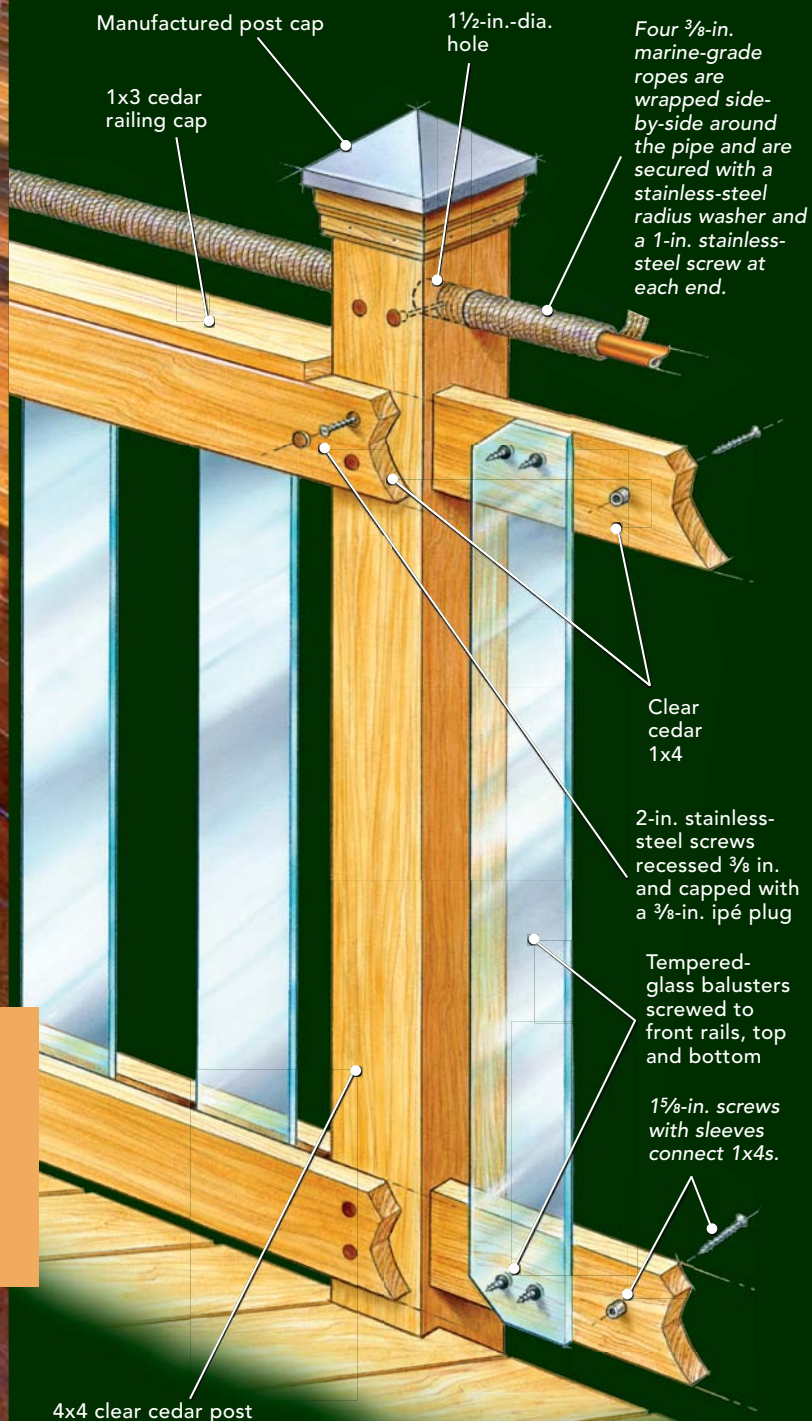
Maryland deck builder Clemens Jellema used two types of manufactured balusters in the railing he designed for a home near the Chesapeake Bay (photos above, facing page), but he supported them in a cedar framework detailed with ipé plugs and a rope-wound top rail. In Jellema's case, with the high labor costs associated with a metropolitan area, it pays to incorporate some ready-made components.

If you're inspired by these designs to create your own answer to run-of-the-mill deck rails, we invite you to post photos of your work in our project gallery at FineHomebuilding.com. Consider yourself warned that we'll be on the lookout for creative deck accessories to feature in our *Decks & Outdoor Projects* special issue in spring 2012. And please keep in mind that although the railings shown here meet the code requirements for their jurisdictions, regulations vary, so check the codes in your area.

Debra Judge Silber is managing editor.

1 NAUTICAL DETAILS

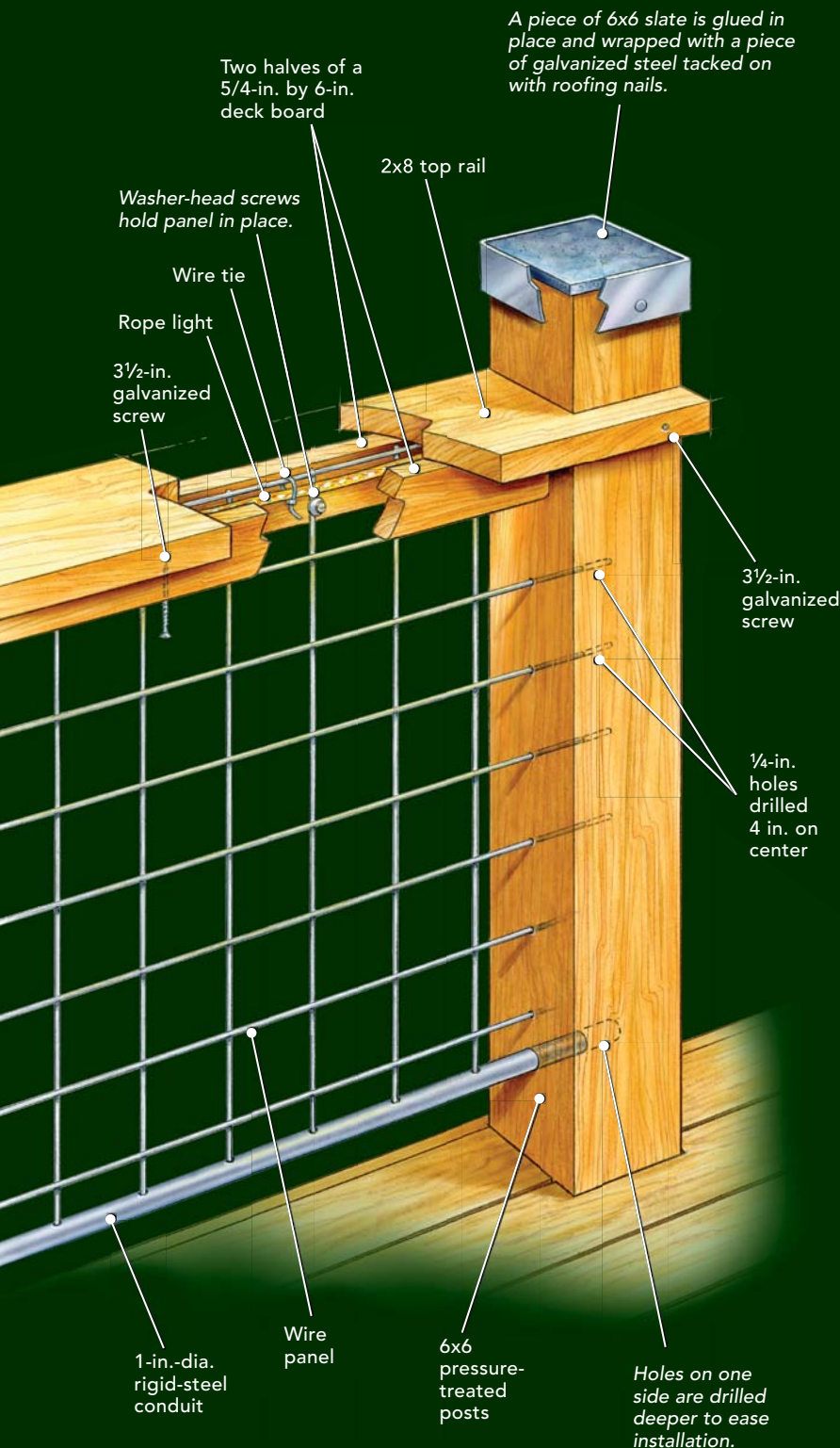
Maryland deck builder Clemens Jellema produced this design for a client who wanted a rail with nautical features that wouldn't obscure his view of the nearby woods and river. Jellema achieved the shipshape appearance with a top rail of 1-in. copper pipe wrapped with marine-grade roping. To preserve the view, he chose tempered-glass balusters from Deckorators. For the stair rails and deck sections facing the yard, he used the company's stainless aluminum balusters and connectors. In those sections, a single cedar 2x4 was used for each top and bottom rail.



Cost: Materials for the glass sections totaled about \$50 per lin. ft. (compared to about \$42 for the aluminum sections). In both cases, the option of using balusters from a manufacturer outweighed the labor cost of fabricating them. Jellema also estimates the choice of clear cedar rather than STK (select tight knot) added about \$6 to \$8 per lin. ft.

2 WIRE PANELS FOR A WIDE-OPEN VIEW

When budget concerns arose, North Carolina builder Michael Chandler corralled the cost of this 600-sq.-ft. deck project by using agricultural wire—goat panels—for the guardrails rather than the custom metalwork initially planned. The panels are made of $\frac{7}{32}$ -in.-dia. wire in a 4-in. grid pattern that's stiff enough to stand in for traditional balusters. The ends of each panel are inserted in holes drilled into the posts or, along the bottom, in a 1-in.-dia. rigid-steel conduit that serves as the bottom rail. Rope lights tucked under the top rails provide illumination.





Cost: Materials for the horizontal sections, including the rope light, totaled about \$10 per lin. ft. Also known as “feedlot panels,” the wire sections used in this railing are available from agricultural suppliers in 16-ft. by 4-ft. sections for less than \$50 apiece.