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Cable railing is all the rage on lakefront homes

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Tensioned cables provide both an unimpeded view and safety from the perch high above the water. LIQUID DESIGN





- Resources

Home design ideas: houzz.com/

DIY online: cablerailingdiy.com/

Lowes assembly kits: <http://tinyurl.com/koqw7v8>

Cable Rail, manufacturer: cablerail.com, represented by Fitch Lumber in Carrboro

One of the prize attributes of Heather and Robert McDonnell's home is their expansive lake view, enjoyed from almost every room in their house. When the couple decided to renovate last year, enhancing that view was a top priority.

That's when Heather McDonnell became enamored of the look of horizontal cable railing for the deck. She saw photos on Houzz, an online design idea site. There she learned that cable railing, thin stainless steel cabling strung horizontally and attached to posts, offers a much less obtrusive alternative to traditional wooden or metal balusters.

"We have (glass) lanai doors out our back that lead to the deck," McDonnell said. "The deck is on the same level as the house and the lot slopes down to the lake. The cable railing greatly enhanced our view and sight lines. It opened things up for us and complemented the style of our design because of its neutral and sleek look."

Upkeep offsets initial cost

Though cable railing can run two to four times the cost of traditional wood or metal balusters, the maintenance is lower and lifespan is greater than traditional railing, said John Morgan, a general residential contractor and president of the Urban Building Group in Charlotte.

"Horizontal (cable) railing is an increasingly popular choice for homeowners with decks and outdoor panoramic views of lakes, mountains and scenic backdrops," Morgan said. It's also popular inside homes where there are loft areas or larger indoor stairways.

Morgan said that N.C. Building Code requires protective railing for stairs; decks and lofts at a minimum height of 36 inches and railing that will prevent a sphere greater than 4 inches in diameter from passing through the individual rails. That's for the safety of children and pets. Cable railing is strung taut enough and retains tension through individual fittings that affix to wooden, steel or composite posts.

Ipe (pronounced e-pay) is a long-lasting hardwood that is a popular choice for outdoor use, Morgan said, and can also be used for the "cap" rail or handrail that is placed atop the railing.

Cable railings also can be used in small spaces to keep the feeling of openness and to let light move through the rooms. Those were factors that led Liquid Design in Charlotte to use steel rod railings at the Celadon townhouses condos in the city's Wesley Heights area.

Steel rods look similar to cable railing but are wider in diameter, much less flexible and can cost less. Like cable railings, the look is well suited to contemporary designs.

The floor plans at Celadon are deep and narrow. The challenge was to come up with a design that kept the space from looking like a tunnel, said Michael Standley of Liquid Design.

"The rails were used to provide the sense of a divider but still allow the light to flood into the two spaces on either side," Standley said.

DIY is an option

For homeowners, DIY options are available. Direct from the manufacturer options include Cablerailingdiy.com, a site complete with video tutorials, a number of material choices and all the tools needed to complete your job.

Big-box stores such as Lowe's and Home Depot carry kits that come in pre-measured lengths and all the materials (no tools) to complete the job.

Morgan cautions do-it-yourselfers that irregularly shaped decks or interiors can pose problems and post spacing/tension calibration can be challenging for those who are new to working on such projects.

Anne DeCocco of DeCocco Design recently added a screened porch to her North Raleigh home. The porch is elevated and offers views of her wooded lot and garden. DeCocco chose cable railing because it gave her an unimpeded view of her semiprivate lot.

"I absolutely love a contemporary vibe in traditional spaces, especially metal finishes," said DeCocco, who described her home as low country traditional. "I believe the enthusiasm around cable railing is growing for two reasons: First, it provides an updated and contemporary solution to enhancing your view. Additionally, the design is so clean it really goes with any style of architecture and existing home style. Cable railing offers a perfect complement."

Check with contractors

For homeowners involved in remodels, renovations or new construction, their prime contractor is typically the best source for identifying and installing the appropriate product for their project.

Those in the "just looking" stage or who haven't yet chosen an installer may wish to look at manufacturers online and work through their local representative to identify area installers and outlets where they can see the product first hand.

Scott Willis is a manufacturer's representative for Feeney Cable Rail, a national distributor and manufacturer of cable railing systems since 1948. Willis covers all of North Carolina and has distributors and installers in the Triangle and beyond.

"Our sales have taken off over the past two years more than 250 percent," he said. "Ninety percent of our sales are for exterior railing systems as people see how the product delivers on the view. As outdoor living continues to be a priority for folks in the Carolinas, cable railing is a low-maintenance, one-and-done installation product that they can pretty much forget about as they enjoy it over the years."

Cable Rail sells marine-grade stainless steel railing that Willis said ranges from \$25 to \$95 a linear foot depending on post and cap rail choices, fittings and other factors.

For the McDonnells in Lake Wylie, S.C., after their safety concerns were satisfied, it was all about the aesthetic.

"We absolutely love it, said Heather McDonnell. "And as I now pay more attention to these things, every remodel on the lake that I see has cable railing. It just is the way to go for a great view."

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