

A Survey Technologist's Guide to Architectural Terms

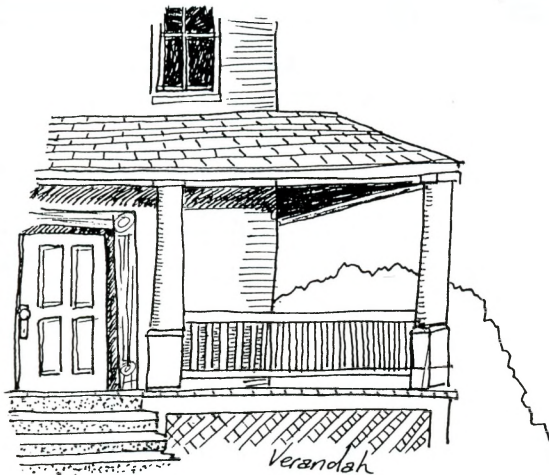
BY RICHARD JORDAN, O.S.T.

There's a question that every party chief and draftsman faces at some time or other: What is this part of the building called?

Is it a porch or sun porch, a verandah or stoop? And what's an oriel and a porte-cochere anyway?

Fortunately, in surveying we don't need to know a lot of architectural terminology, but we should at least be certain about the terms that are commonly used on field notes and plans of survey.

Anyone researching the topic will soon find that there may be more questions than answers.



It's not that we have a shortage of terminology - the English language has a rich vocabulary of architectural terms, many of them borrowed from languages around the globe, from French and Dutch to Hindi.

The problem arises because we use the terms loosely. The Gage Canadian Dictionary, for example, equates porch, sun porch, verandah and stoop.

So where does this leave us when we want to describe an entrance structure? Are there any terms we can use with a measure of certainty?

Most dictionaries describe porch as some sort of covered or enclosed entrance to a building. It's a word that came to us from a French adaptation of

the Latin word porticus meaning a covered colonnade or gallery.

Similarly, verandah (from the Hindi word varanda) means a roofed structure, open at the sides, found along the front or sides of a building which serves as a shelter from the sun or rain.

This is as far as we can take these definitions: A porch may be open or enclosed but is always associated with an entrance. A verandah is always open at the sides but may not always be near an entrance.

I prefer the simple distinction made by a number of survey firms - an enclosed roofed structure is always called a porch and a roofed structure that is open at the sides is always called a verandah.

This fits in nicely with the definition of sun porch - a structure enclosed with glass or screen designed to admit plenty of sunlight.

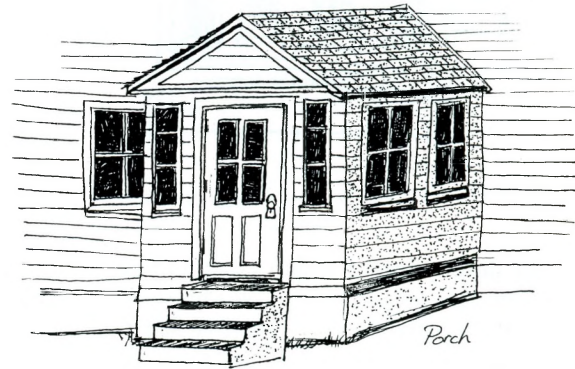
The word stoop is the perfect term to define a simple entrance platform (with or without stairs) that is unroofed. It's a North American adaptation of the Dutch word stoep

but its usage seems to be limited or declining. The reason is that stoop also has other, less pleasing, meanings such as "to lower or degrade oneself morally" or "to demean oneself". Still, it's a legitimate and precise term that can be used.

Two other "porches" found on larger buildings should also be mentioned.

A portico (again derived from the Latin porticus, coming to us this time from the Italian) is a grand entrance, open at the sides, with a roof supported by columns.

A porte-cochere (French for coach door) is a large structure usually found at the main door of



a building. It provides a ceremonial entrance and a sheltered space for loading passenger vehicles. The term is also sometimes used to describe a door into an otherwise enclosed courtyard.

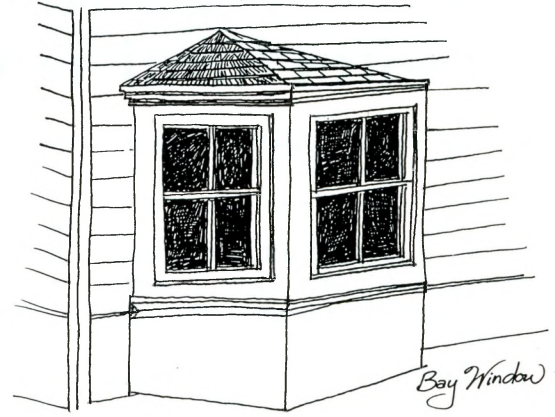
It is worth noting that specific terms for entrance structures may be written into zoning by-laws. An Ontario Land Surveyor once described a low concrete step (a stoop in the above classification) as a porch on a plan of survey. His client came back a few days later saying that the survey had caused him problems with the local planning authorities because his porch was too close to the road. The problem was solved by amending the plan of survey so that the "porch" became a "raised concrete pad."

Another potential source of problems in field notes and survey plans is





Bow Window



Bay Window

the description of windows - especially those that project from a building.

Ironically, an old French word for porch (oriel) is also at the root of a modern term for a window. An oriel window is a structure that projects from a wall, often from the upper storey of a building. Oriels are often small and supported underneath only by a metal bracket or a corbel (a decorative stone anchor).

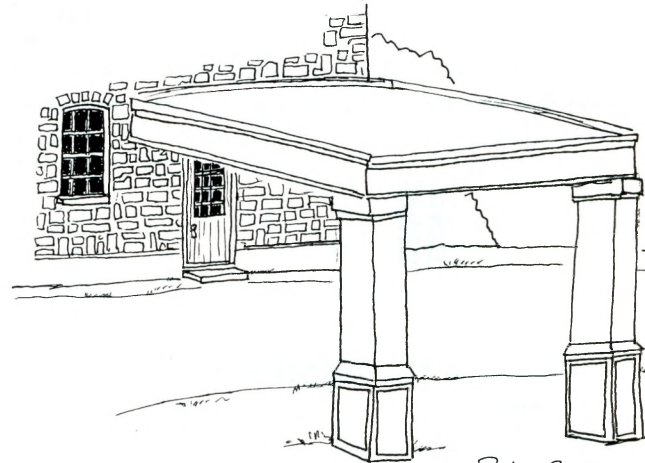
A bay window is a larger structure that can resemble an oriel window.

The purpose of a bay window is to add both light and space to a room by projecting out from a bay of a building, a bay being the space between the building's pillars or columns. If the projection is free-hanging from an upper

storey, it might be called an oriel, but if the foundation also projects out underneath the window, it can only be called a bay window.

A bow window is simply a curved bay window.

In the dictionaries you can find another more colourful meaning for "bay window" and "bow window" which has unfortunately gone out of our language in the past hundred years. They were once terms commonly used to describe a man's beer belly!



Porte-Cochere



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