



# A Savored Place

**THIS PORCH IS UGLY.** The polyurethane stain appears to have been applied (by the house's previous owners) from a distance of several feet. It's splattered on unevenly. The posts and rails have bare spots. At first, I felt this had to be rectified, the porch prettified. But over the years, my negligence has come to resemble a kind of right thinking: No one who stands on this porch ever looks at the uneven stain. Their eyes are drawn beyond the rails to the dual-ridged peaks of High Point Mountain in the distance, to the sky above it, to the clouds that hang over its ridges, to the treetops. The porch rails can remain ugly. They ultimately have no effect.

My favorite moments on this porch take place on those summer evenings when there is no breeze at all. I might have some coals heating. I sit in a chair facing the pond and woods, and try to get as still as my surroundings. The only intrusion during a moment like that is the awareness of its increasing rareness.

Every June, I stand on this porch at dusk, looking out on a yard blinking with lightning bugs. Other times, I watch turkey vultures soaring on drafts hundreds of yards up. Some nights, coyotes howl. Other nights, it's barred owls doing a call-and-response. On a windy day, the treetops creak.

When friends come to eat here, they say, "What a wonderful spot you have here." There's an impulse to take credit, to feel gratified or proud. But it is and it isn't a spot that we "have." It's a spot that is, to which good fortune has brought us, my wife and me. The porch lets us savor it. On this porch, we learn to accept inconsequential imperfections.

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