A DIYer's Experience with the Screened Walls Only Kit

June 2011

Greetings,

My name is Al, I am a DIYer (Do It Yourself) who recently purchased a screened walls kit from screen-house.com. My wife and I are very happy with our new outdoor living space. We had a ton of questions when we started and learned quite a few things along the way. So, I thought I'd share a few pictures and tips to help others like us, who want a quality screen porch but don't want to spend thousands of dollars on it.

The people at screen-house.com were easy to work with. My only gripe concerns their website; it was a little hard to find things (there is much to find!) but then again, I'm the type to look for my sunglasses when I'm wearing them! Anyway, in case you haven't found it already, the main page describing how the screened walls kits go together is located at:
http://www.screen-house.com/screenroom_three_season_walls.htm

Perhaps you are wondering if you can handle this job yourself. I'd say if you want a truly professional looking job, you need to possess slightly above average carpentry skills (or be willing to learn them). You should have and be comfortable using, the following tools:

Tools You'll Need

- Carpenter's level (a 4-foot metal one is what I recommend)
- Chalk line (to mark where the "U" channel goes)
- Chop saw with a metal cutting blade on it (required for making accurate and precision cuts)
- Cordless drill/nut driver
- Masonry bits for drilling into concrete; masonry fasteners (if necessary)
- Caulking gun
- Metal file (to smooth cut edges)
- Hammer, Screwdrivers, Drill, tape measure

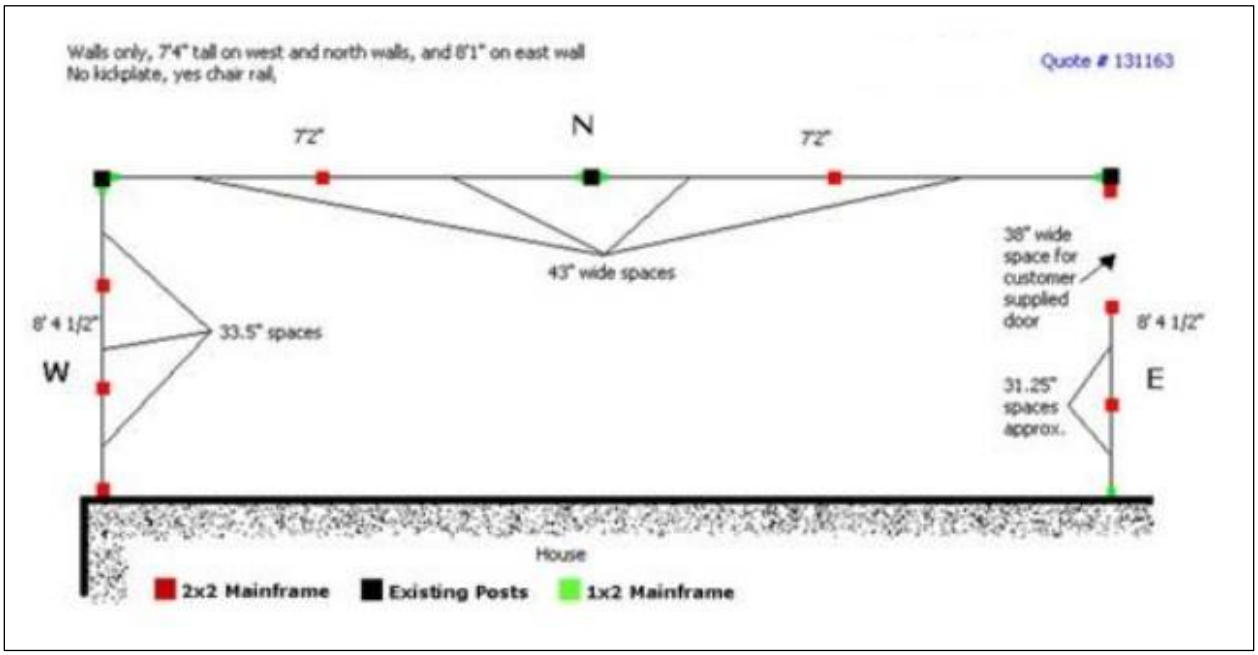
If you don't know what some of the above tools are for, my advice is, do not try this on your own! It does take some familiarity with basic carpentry tools and methods. That said, if you can follow instructions and work carefully, you can end up with something perhaps better than what the pros would give you – by giving a little extra attention to details, something that the "pros" sometimes overlook in their rush to finish your job and move onto the next.

Getting Started

Getting started is sometimes the hardest part! You have an idea of what you want, but aren't sure how it will actually be built. Fortunately, the folks at screen-house.com can help you with the basic design of a kit, based on your preferences. You will need to make careful measurements of the space the porch area and sending a couple of pictures of anything out of the ordinary is always a good idea.

We decided we didn't want a kick plate, because we wanted to maximize the view of our backyard. We're glad we included "chair rail", which is the 2x2 (H122) post installed horizontally about 32" off the floor. Also, we bought our own screen door so we planned the opening space for it.

Once they receive your measurements and your basic preferences, they will email you a to-scale diagram of the kit and a price. Here is the diagram they made for my project:



Original plan for my screened walls kit

Note that we changed the west side to have only one vertical support (H122).

An Overview of My Project

My screened walls kit was installed onto an existing covered area that has a concrete floor, 5x5 metal support posts, along an exterior brick wall of the house. Here is a "before" shot:

As you can see, I needed to fasten the “U” channel (H123) into fun surfaces like concrete and brick, and heavy steel posts! My only advice about that is, try the fastener first to make sure it will work for you. For example, I couldn’t get Tapcon screws to work for me even though I used the drill bit supplied with the screws. I think my concrete was so hard, as the bit struggled to make the hole just right (it wasn’t tight enough). I know others have used these screws with great success. You just have to try them and make sure they work for you.

I used a different type of fastener, the kind that expand into the hole you drill when you hammer its nail down. They look like this, when attached:

I found these worked consistently well with concrete or brick.

But how does it all go together?

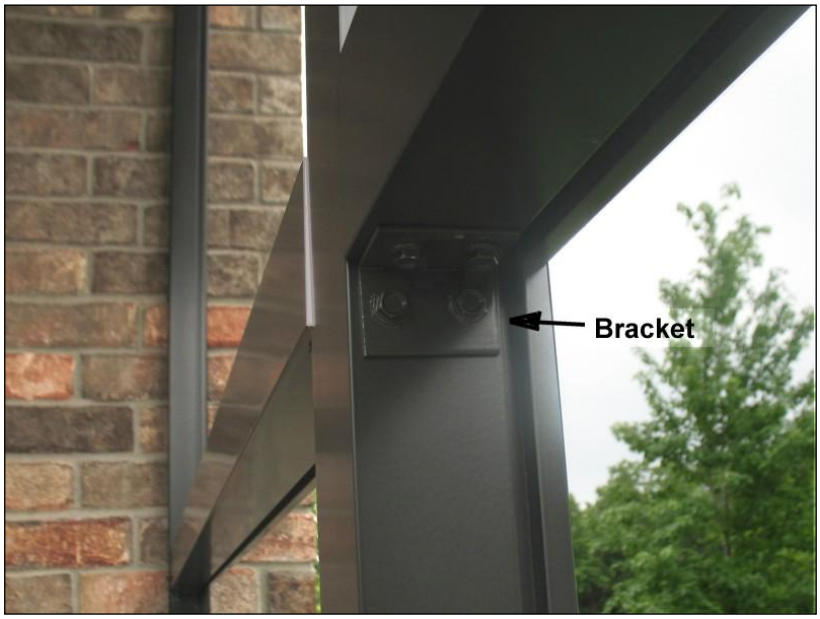
This system is actually a lot more flexible that I had imagined it might be. If your walls or posts are not perfectly plumb or straight, have no fear. The “U” channel is designed to allow you to tip the support pieces (H121 or H122) slightly if your wall or post is not plumb.

Your kit will come with a set of instructions, too. Basically you install the “U” channel (H123) along the bottom and top and sides, then install the vertical pieces (H121 if attaching to a post or other structure, H122 if it is a stand-alone post not attached to any structure). The main things to watch for:

Make sure to “plumb” the top and bottom rails so the vertical pieces will be plumb.
Be careful how far into the “U” channel you set the other pieces. They are designed to have space left between the bottom of the piece and the “U” channel piece. If you set them too deep, you will not have enough room for the spline. This is covered in the instructions they send, but worth a mention here. Remember: U-channel, then verticals. Then fit in the horizontal pieces.

Tip: If you are doing a “chair rail” like I did, do not put in fasteners mid-way long the surrounding vertical pieces. Why? They will be more flexible, allowing easier placement of the horizontal pieces. After the horizontal pieces are in, you can put a screw midway thought the U-channel into the vertical pieces, if you want to.

The horizontal pieces fasten with supplied aluminum brackets. They come plain, so I used the supplied touch up paint to make them match the rails (not that they show much, except above the door):



Progress At Last!

This shows the west side framing up, bottom “U” channel for the northwest wall is installed. Note that our floor slopes (purposely, for rain drainage) but the “chair rail” was installed level. You will want to make sure any horizontal pieces like that line up with themselves, so that you can’t really tell that they are separate pieces. Also, we left a few gaps in the sealant along the north walls so that water can run out (and later in the grouting for tile).

Door Framing

We purchased our door through a "big box" home improvement store. It is 32" wide. We made the opening 34" wide which was almost too wide, but worked ok once we added some door stop (molding) to catch the door and avoid having a gap. Here's the framing sans door. Note that we used a 2x2 (H122) post where the door attaches. We thought that might be stronger than an H121 (1x2) piece, but either would have worked.

Screening

Putting the screen in was fairly easy and my wife did most of it one day by herself! You may wish to consider heavy-duty screen if you have dogs or cats (we do, and did). The spline is particular to the framing so make sure you get spline with your kit (the spline sold at hardware stores is too small).

Finishing Touches… and Enjoy!

Some new patio furniture, a small water fountain, ceramic tile and plants make the room as comfortable and inviting as any room inside our house. We had quotes for the total job (without tile) for $3,000 - $4,000. Our kit cost less than $1,300. Thank you, screen-house.com !