

## Stepping Back: Five Ways To Incorporate a Stair

by Elaine Laney

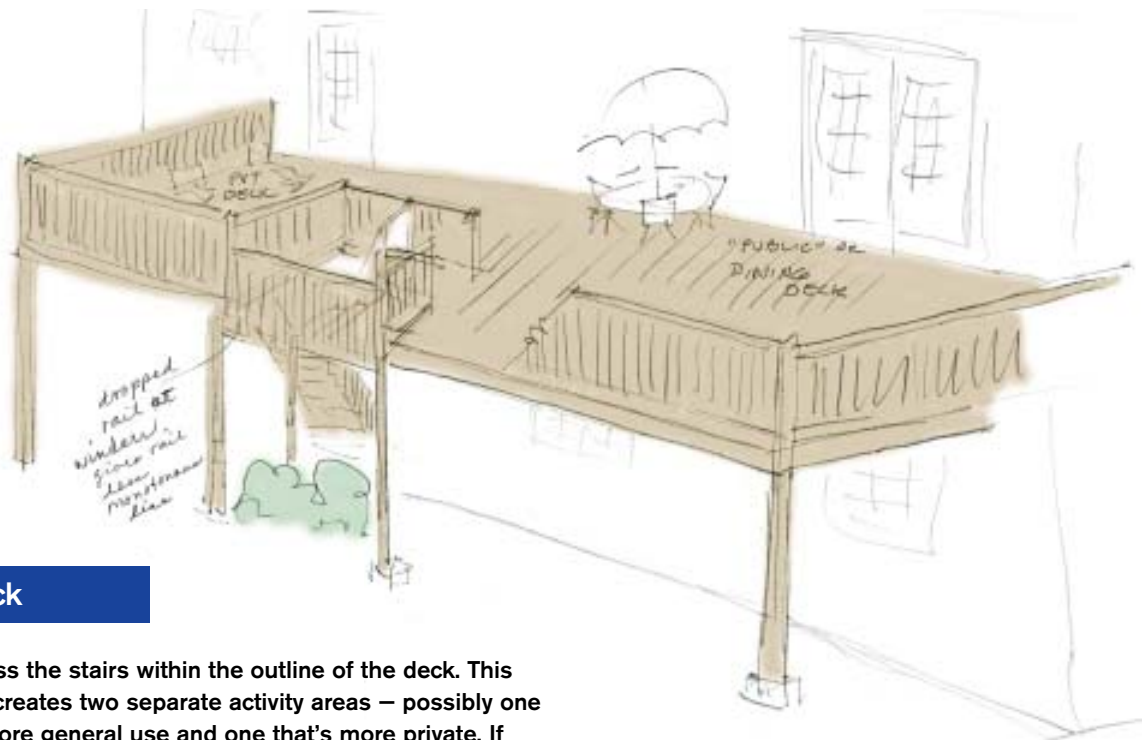


Decks are great places to hang out, but they can also double as a go-between from house to yard — for emergency egress or as a pathway to gardens, lawns, play areas, or terraces. Therefore, even if the elevation of the deck is only a few risers above the surrounding grade, you need steps. And when the distance from deck to grade is an entire floor height or more, there's a real possibility that the stair will appear ungainly or massive.

How do you keep the stair from looking like an afterthought — stuck on the deck like the tail in “pin-the-tail-on-the-donkey”?

Here are a few ideas I'll call Tuck, Hide, Spill, Camouflage, and my personal favorite — Go Organic.

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### Tuck

Recess the stairs within the outline of the deck. This also creates two separate activity areas — possibly one for more general use and one that's more private. If the lower level can be accessed from the grade below, direct the stairs to end in line with a door or terrace below. If there is insufficient headroom below the deck, direct the stairs into the yard.

## Hide

Pull the stair back to the face of the exterior wall so that it's less noticeable from the deck, yard, and surrounding homes. The balustrade can be a rail-height solid wall, to further insure that the stair stays "hidden."



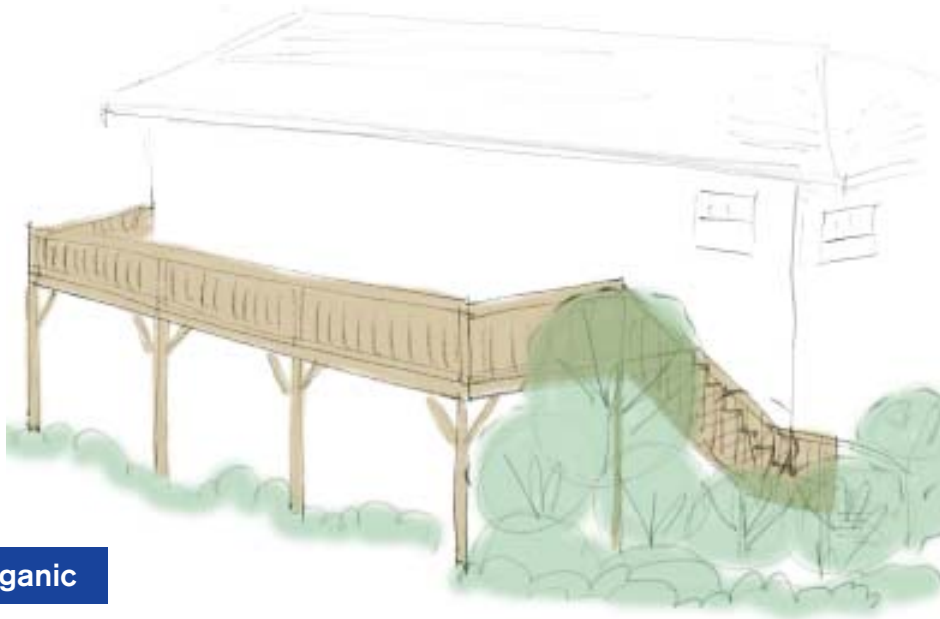
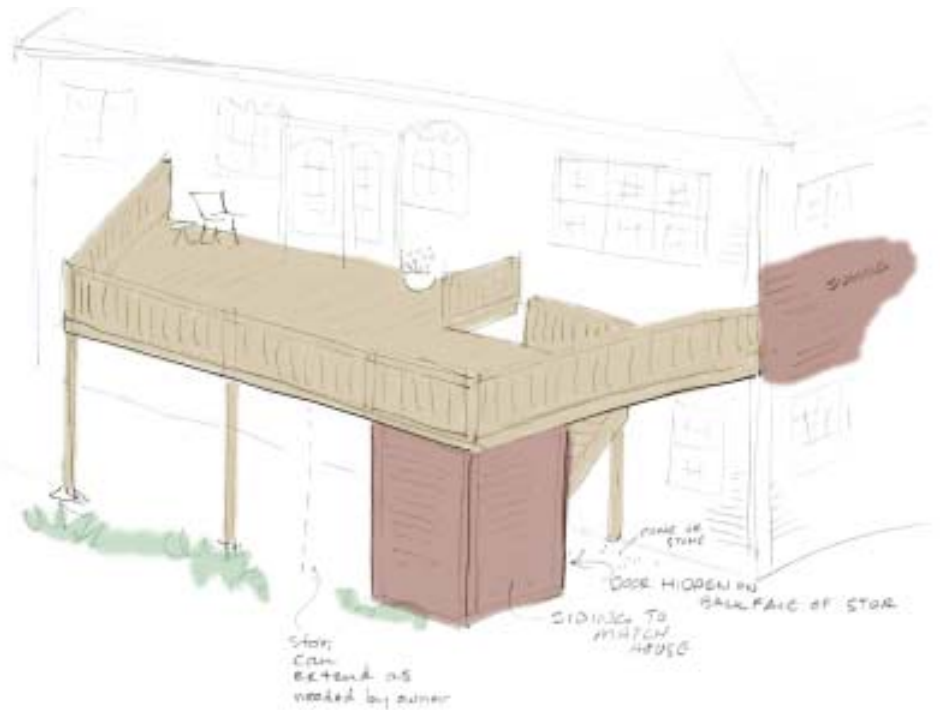
## Spill

Low decks, especially those low enough that building codes require no handrail, can spill out onto the lawn or terrace. This could be done on one or two sides, or on three sides as shown. The treads look better if made large enough to sit on and become home to some seasonal dish gardens or flower baskets. This design literally draws you toward the area beyond the deck.

Steps can be on 45° angle @ corners also

## Camouflage

For a high deck, this provides space to add a storage closet below deck level – handy for deck furniture or yard tools. Viewed from the yard, this design reduces the visibility of the stair and makes use of the space below deck without enclosing the whole area – which is seldom advisable.



## Go Organic

For a mid-height deck, too high to “spill” and too low for the other strategies, an “L”-shape stair with an abundance of evergreen screening not only softens the structure, but is lovely to look at. Add berry-producing plants, and the natural food will attract birds for viewing. Shrubs should be kept no higher than rail height for a view of the yard or other features beyond, unless you are deliberately trying to block the view of the neighbor’s garage. This becomes a site-specific decision for the homeowner. ❖