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The Best Way to See Fireworks Is Above the Fray

I love a good pyrotechnical display, just can't stand the crowds.

posted by [John Stark](#), July 3, 2013 [More by this author](#)



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I had no idea how popular I was going to be when I bought my condo in Boston 14 years ago. It's the top flat of a New England "triple decker." The wood structure was built in the late 1800s and is on the crest of a hill in the city's Jamaica Plain section. I was new to Boston when I moved there, having relocated from Birmingham, Ala.

My back deck looks out over Fenway Park and downtown Boston. Better still, I have one of the best views of the city's annual Boston Pops Fourth of July Fireworks Spectacular. I've been away from Boston for two years, but I am moving back to my condo this summer for good. I can't wait.

I didn't know when I bought my place that it came with fireworks. I didn't find out until that first June, when neighbors began asking me if the event was still on.

"What is this event that everyone's talking about?" I asked the people who lived on the first floor.

"Oh, we'll be there for it," they said. "We'll just come up the back stairs with the kids. By the way, do you need anything, like soft drinks, wine or chips? Marshmallows for the grill?"

Bostonians, as I was about to find out, take the Fourth of July wicked serious.

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I wasn't unfamiliar with the Boston Fireworks Spectacular. It has been broadcast on national television for decades — this year marks its 40th anniversary. I've watched it on TV from San Francisco, New York and other cities where I've lived. Now I can enjoy it by just opening a sliding glass door in my den, then stepping onto my screened-in deck.

The celebration takes place on the Charles River Esplanade in the city's Back Bay section. The explosives are launched from barges starting at 9:30, following a concert at the Esplanade band shell by the Boston Pops Orchestra. Once the cannons have been fired at the climax of the "1812 Overture," the first flares pierce the night sky.

My first Fourth of July in my new digs was on a Sunday. My doorbell began ringing around 9 p.m. I was greeted up until showtime by a dozen or so spectators of all ages, some of whom I didn't know. A few even brought their dogs.

"Turn your radio on," I was told, once everyone was standing on the back deck or sitting in my den looking out a window. The fireworks display is always choreographed to taped musical

selections. "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" traditionally accompanies the grand finalé.

I honestly thought the fireworks would be no big deal. But there was far more bang for my buck than I expected. It wasn't as if they were exploding in my face. It was better than that. Seeing them from my deck was more like being in the center box at an opera house. The view was sweeping and unobstructed. You could put the phantasmagoric bursts in perspective. You could see just how much of the night sky they commanded. It was breathtaking.

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From then on, I always opened my deck to friends and neighbors on the Fourth of July. My tenants have kept it that way in my absence. Some years I'd have cookouts to accompany the fireworks. Other years, just wine and beer, or martinis and cosmos.

At one point I created a VIP section. It's located on the roof of my building. No children or pets are allowed up there. There are no railings. To access the space, you have to do some maneuvering, which involves climbing through a broken window in the attic. I always put a blanket on the tar roof for everyone to sit on. I bring a radio up there so we can hear the musical accompaniment — and bug spray for the mosquitos. It's not just the fireworks that put on a show. The bats do too, swooping and soaring like acrobats through the thick night air. And if you lie on your back, you can usually see a falling star or two.

One year I did something dumb. I decided to watch the fireworks at the Esplanade. I locked my front door, rounded up some neighbor kids, got on the subway and headed to the river. So did a half-million other New Englanders. The park was so jam-packed that you couldn't move. There were long lines to the porta-potties. You could barely even see the fireworks through all the leafy trees. People who had unobstructed views of the pyrotechnical display had staked out their spots on the riverbank days in advance.

I never did that again.

It's so much better seeing the fireworks from my condo with my friends and neighbors, celebrating our independence above the fray.

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