

Wonderful Ways with Windows

Trends and Treatments

Linda Adler, Family and Consumer Sciences

Stilylishly dressed windows make a room seem complete and add the finishing touches to the overall decor. Some treatments are dramatic and become the focal point of a room while others are subtle and complement existing decorating features. Options for today's window treatments seem limitless.

Window treatments serve various functions in addition to their aesthetic qualities. They can control light, affect air circulation, insulate against weather and noise, and provide privacy. They can also enhance a beautiful view or camouflage an unpleasant one. When selecting a window treatment, carefully consider which function(s) should be the first priority.



History

New building construction and remodeling of older buildings keep the demand and interest for updated and practical window treatments in the forefront of interior design. Historically, fabric window treatments meant pinch-pleated draperies. Then 4-inch rod pocket curtains came into style and were soon followed by more options in decorative rods and poles. This trend led to an emphasis on tab-top curtain treatments, shirred curtains, and scarves. Unique window treatments are now possible simply by selecting different combinations of curtains, top treatments, and accessories.

Blinds and shades have also changed over the years. Venetian blinds and Austrian shades of the 1950s gave way to Roman and fabric shades. Puffy balloon and cloud shades were replaced with mini-, vertical and micro-blinds. Today horizontal, 2-inch wood blinds are enjoying a revival, and shading innovations and energy features are available in different styles. Many designers now use a combination of blinds or shades with fabrics in top treatments, side panels, and curtains.

Fabric

Soft fabrics and layered window treatments add a cozy, comforting mood to a room. Interesting color, texture, and pattern combinations show up in both casual and formal styles. Many fabric choices are available, including printed formal and plaid sheers, embroidered and crushed voiles,

fancy batiste, and a variety of laces. These fabrics are often layered with sheer curtains. Pattern choices in fabrics are limitless. Popular themes found in fabric motifs include:

- Floral and fruit patterns with an occasional butterfly.
- Classical and Renaissance motifs, softened by draping the fabric and accenting with scarves, trims, and accessories.
- Prehistory or ancient history motifs, including fossils, engravings, and ancient drawings.
- Classic stripes, simple plaids, and tone-on-tone solids in interesting textures that mix well with other fabrics and add dimension to the soft looks.
- French country and toile patterns in a variety of colors.
- Sheers with a tone-on-tone pattern, perhaps on a crushed voile surface.

Polyester and cotton are dominant fibers used in window fabrics. Sheer curtains are most often 100 percent polyester with special chemical treatments sometimes used to create iridescent or soft faux suede finishes. Both 100 percent cotton fabric and blends combining cotton with polyester, linen, silk, or rayon are popular choices. Cotton finishes vary widely and may include a sateen finish, brushed for a soft hand, and dramatically woven into damasks or brocades. Other options, such as wool and plush velvets, are seasonal favorites or used for special areas.

Trim

Tassels and trims are the crowning jewel in decorating. Interest in trims goes through a 60-year cycle. We're on the upsurge of that trend at about year 40, so trims will peak in popularity in about another 20 years. Although trims move in and out of fashion, designers always prefer one type or another. Some use a spare, tailored look with simple cording, while others design romantic or traditional detailing with lavish amounts of trim to bring out colors or architectural features within the room.



Watch for trims on all types of fabrics and treatments. Trims come in all sorts of materials from jute to silk, from cotton to leather. They add interest and draw attention to draperies, top treatments, swags, and scarves. Delicate fringe outlines scarf and swag edges, while tasseled fringe adds interest to sheers. Welting cord and braids add distinction to cornices and valances. Layers of cords and tassels become accents over curtains and valances. Braided cord tie-backs, tassels, buttons, and rosettes accessorize window treatments and coordinate with table linens, lamps, bedspreads, and furniture. Creativity with trims is the key to a one-of-a-kind window treatment.

New ideas on the trim market include multicolored versions of basic trims and tassels. Look, too, for an increased use of metallics, oversized tassels and cords, unusual combinations such as jute and velvet, "jeweled" trims using sequins and beads, and whimsical trims using real shells or even tiny toy boats.

When selecting trims, look for quality. Tassels should be hand-tied and no glues used. Dye lots on trims should be consistent. Good workmanship is important. There should be few, if any, breaks in piece lengths, and there should be no hanging threads.

Ask what materials are used to make the trims. Some silks tear easily and can fade in the sun. High-quality rayon, wool, cotton, and linen are durable and withstand time and sun exposure. Another factor to consider is care and maintenance of the window treatment. Care instructions for the trim, as

well as for the fabric itself, must be taken into account. If a dry-clean-only trim is used on a washable sheer curtain, then the sheer curtain must be dry cleaned. This problem could be solved by attaching the trim so it could be easily removed during laundering.



Consider the cost if you're planning to add trims to decorator fabrics. The cost of the trim may exceed the cost of the fabric itself. Add it up first! Be sure to figure the total cost of the window treatment, including trims and accessories, before making a final purchase decision.

Top Treatments

Valances and cornices continue to play an important role in window decor. Soft and structured top treatments are used either by themselves or combined with draperies, curtains, blinds, or shades.

Top treatment styling varies greatly. You'll see pleats, points, scallops, cuffs, gathers, tabs, ties, and layers. Drapery workrooms create many unusual treatments, but no-sew and quick-sew techniques offer lower-cost options. Experienced sewers may use structured sewing methods and more detailed styling, while new sewing aids are available for those with little time or limited sewing skills. Linens, towels, and sheets offer quick remedies for curtains and top treatments. No-sew methods drape, fold, knot and shape fabrics into the desired style, while various tapes, pins, tacks, hook-and-loop fasteners, and holders secure the fabric in place.

Swags, cascades, and jabots are classics that appear individually and in combinations. Styling variations include formal, casual, overlapped, tied, and crossed options. Swags and cascades take on a new ambiance when slipped through sconces or draped over various rods and poles.

Cornices add variety and interest. Wooden cornices come in various styles with natural or painted finishes or covered with fabric. Use them separately or combined with other fabric treatments over blinds and shades.

Hardware and Accessories

The vast array of accessories provides one of the most dramatic changes in window treatments. Although decorative poles have traditionally been used, fancy finials and rings add variety and interest. Choices now include decorative brackets, end caps, scarf holders, sconces, and hold-backs along with window art and jewelry. Use these items either alone or in combinations.

Wood, acrylic, brass, and wrought iron hardware and accessories are available in a variety of finishes for casual or formal styles. Unfinished wood poles can be covered with wallpaper or fabric or decorated with a paint finish (plain, sponging, ragging, or color washing). Pole sizes vary in length and diameter. Finials in a design of your choice individualize each treatment. Concealed and decorative tie-back holders and swag holders add still more options.

Don't forget the more traditional sash, curtain, café, tension, and traverse rods. Some decorative traverse rods can be converted into poles. Sash and tension rods are good choices for layered looks because they can be placed close to the glass. Use tension rods for inside-frame installation to avoid damaging the woodwork. They're also handy for metal frame windows and for frequent movers. Magnetic brackets are also available for metal frame window installation.

Several child safety features are available. Prevent accidents by using break-apart tassels on blind pulls. They'll snap apart when a small amount of pressure is applied. Some companies have replaced chain draws with a wand that's not as accessible to children and pets. Your current window treatments can be adapted for safety by adding such items as cord clips and tension tools or ties. A power remote control system eliminates cords and their danger. Remote control features are popular for convenience, too.

Blinds and Shades

Select a window treatment for both function and style. How important are privacy, light control, insulation/energy efficiency, and maintenance? Which blind or shade is best suited for the job? How will this fit in with your decorating plan? What are the options on price and selection to achieve the desired look?

Manufacturers offer many new products in a wide variety of styles, colors, and innovations. For instance, some blinds repel dust. One model reduces static electricity, which in turn helps to keep dust from collecting on the surface. Another has an ion alignment that repels dust particles. When shopping for blinds, especially the 2-inch or larger slats, these dust repellents could be an important factor.

Retail stores and designers have creative styles and innovative mechanics to update traditional products. They offer many variations of blinds and shades in an assortment of features and qualities. Many can be automated for ease of use and energy management. Prices vary according to size, material, styling, and installation.



Motorized Systems and Remote Control

A major trend for window treatments is in the area of motorization. These systems can be activated by remote controls, wall switches, timers, and monitors that read the level of sun intensity. They're convenient for large windows, for operating banks of blinds, or simply when adjusting from a seated position. They also eliminate wear and tear on traditional cord and pulley systems for window coverings. And because there are no loose hanging cords, children and pets are better protected.

Other important advantages of automated window systems include security with blinds that raise and lower for a "lived in" look during the day through timers or even by computer. Motorized blinds with comfort control can also sense a rise in temperature caused when sun conditions increase. They help protect your home investment in flooring and furnishings from ultraviolet damage. This in turn also saves energy and household dollars.

Features/ Qualities	Blind and Shade Types						
	Pleated	Wood	Vinyl, Mini, Aluminum	Vertical	Window Shading	Cellular	Woven
Selection	Good	Stain, Paint					
Decorator Finishes	Wide Color Selection	Excellent Textures/					
Patterns	Limited Vertical or Horizontal	Very Good	Very Good				
Light Control	Options Available	Very Good	Very Good	Very Good	Very Good	Options Available	Good to Very Good
Energy Efficiency	Good	Very Good	Good	Good	Very Good	Very Good	Very Good
Price Point	Moderate to Expensive	Moderate to Expensive	Low and Moderate	Moderate to Expensive	Moderate to Expensive	Moderate to Expensive	Moderate to Expensive
Moisture Factor	Must Consider	Must Consider	Not A Factor	Must Consider	Must Consider	Must Consider	Must Consider
Maintenance	Vacuum or Dust	Dust	Dust or Wash	Vacuum or Dust	Vacuum	Vacuum or Dust	Washable, Vacuum
Cords/Tapes*	Hidden Cord Option	Option (Check Cost)	Options	Options	Hidden Cord Option	Options	Hidden Cord Option
Adaptable To Special Window	Good	Limited	Limited	Limited	Limited	Good	Limited
Remote Option	Raise & Lower	Tilt Available	Tilt, Mini - Lift & Tilt	Vertical Tilt	Lift & Tilt	Raise & Lower	Limited
Other		Warm Appearance		Appearance of Draperies	New	Wide Widths	Decorative Trims

Styles, prices, and options vary from company to company.

*Safety Cord Options available for most styles.

Shopping Decisions

Window treatments are an investment, so take time to plan ahead. Identify the functional requirements of the treatment. Evaluate your decorating desires and investigate options with price, selection, and quality in mind. Compare prices and products at three or more places before making a decision. Also, be sure to have large fabric swatches or samples for an on-location home comparison before buying.

Read advertisements and literature carefully. Compare information that's given. What information isn't given? Get answers to questions before making a purchase. Sources for window treatments are as varied as the choices of styles and colors. Department stores carry a reasonable selection of standard-size draperies, curtains, top treatments, blinds, shades, rods, and accessories. They usually offer special orders on custom sizes of blinds and shades. Prices range from moderate to high, depending on the final selection. Mass merchandisers have similar selections at low to moderate prices without the special order option.

Home improvement stores generally stock the lower-end products in limited colors and offer other options as special orders. Traditional catalogs offer a good selection of moderately priced products in standard sizes and some selections in custom sizes. Selections offered through specialty catalogs come in a wider range of sizes and unique styles. Catalog descriptions usually give excellent ordering and product information. Prices range from moderate to high end.

Ways to Reduce Cost

There are several ways to cut costs. Consider these options:

- Always compare value or quality to price.
- When using a blind or shade and the drapery doesn't need to close, use stationary side draperies and save on rod cost and fabric.
- Sales on fabrics, hardware, ready-made treatments, and on blinds and shades can usually be found.
- Review all the options. With the selection available to consumers, there are many ways to achieve the same functional requirements and the desired aesthetic appearance.
- At least twice the window width in fabric is needed for curtains. Scanty curtains, draperies, or top treatments do not drape, hang, or move well. Choose a style of fabric within your budget.
- Make an informal window dressing using a tablecloth, piece of lace, or bed sheet.

The electronic world provides a new shopping alternative to consumers. Television shopping networks and Internet sources are growing rapidly. Be sure to get mailing and e-mail addresses, phone numbers (toll-free numbers are often available), and all pertinent product and ordering information, including warranties and return policy. Check with the

Better Business Bureau for complaints. Prices vary greatly, so comparison shopping pays off here, too. Interior designers and custom treatment businesses are also good sources for window treatments. Prices may be higher, so expect quality fabrics with stain-resistant finishes, insulated linings, weighted hems, and quality construction. They'll answer questions, offer design advice, and explore your options. When getting price quotes, be sure that the quote includes measurements and installation and that this information is written on the contract.

Do-It-Yourself Projects

Traditional patterns, quick-sew products, and no-sew techniques offer alternatives for different skill levels. Books, videos, and how-to publications are available from the Cooperative Extension Service, libraries, and manufacturers. It's easy to achieve a desired appearance today with the trends toward scarves, casual looks, and simple top treatments combined with blinds and shades.

Always consider the availability of fabrics and supplies needed for the project. Compare costs for all supplies and construction time compared to other options. Carefully measure and purchase all needed fabrics, trims, and accessories on the initial order as dye lots and finishes can vary. Be sure to check manufacturer's instructions on hardware, accessories, blinds, and shades for installation methods and measurements needed. Make your job easier by using some of the new installation products, a hollow wall anchor, and other products available through drapery shops.

Sources:

- Babylon, Donna. *How to Dress a Naked Window*, Krause Publications, 1997.
Griggs, Lamar and Tawater, Bobbie. *The Designer's Guide to Window Coverings*, G.T Designs, Fort Worth, Texas, 1986.
Paine, Melany. *Curtains & Shades*, Reader's Digest Association, Inc., Pleasantville, NY, 1997.
Randall, Charles T. *The Encyclopedia of Window Fashions II*, 1987, 1989 Second Edition.
Yeager, Jan. *Textiles for Residential and Commercial Interiors*, Harper & Row Publishers, New York, 1988.
Creative Window Treatments, The Home Decorating Institute, Cy DeCosse Incorporated, 1992.
Creative Window Treatments, based on *Creating Your Home*, Betterway Books, 1996, Eaglemoss Publications Ltd., 1996.
Window and Wall Ideas, Better Homes and Gardens, Spring 2004.
Window Fashions, G & W McNamara Publishing, White Bear Lake, Minnesota. Various issues 2003 and 2004.

Revised from *Window Treatment Trends* authored by Linda Reece Adler, Extension Specialist for Home Furnishings, University of Kentucky, and Debra B. Cotterill, Family and Consumer Science Extension Agent, Mason County.

Product names used in this publication are for information only and do not imply endorsement of the products named nor criticism of similar products not mentioned.