



Add new window coverings for a quick fix to your room's decor. *Photo: Blinds To Go*

### Two-Way Window

Looking for a window treatment that offers light by day and privacy at night? "Layer panels over sheers," advises Janice Cairns, president of Breeze Home Fashions in Kennesaw, Ga. The combination offers maximum flexibility while creating a beautiful multi-dimensional effect.

## Window Covering Wisdom

How to find the best window treatment to suit your window, your room and your style.

by **Maryann Hammers**

Does your home feel a little dark, dull or dated? You may be tempted to repaint or renovate, but perhaps you need a simpler fix: new window coverings. Should you opt for plush panels or country curtains, sleek shades or stylish shutters? Here's an overview to help you decide.

### Drapes

Have a decorating dilemma? Drapery panels come to the rescue. Available in countless styles and fabrics, drapery panels can be purchased at most major retailers, or created custom-made.

"Panels can camouflage oddly placed windows—they can make rooms look larger or cozier," says Janice Cairns, president of Breeze Home Fashions in Kennesaw, Ga., a company that makes ready-to-install window treatments.

Drapes are functional and decorative: curvy prints liven up a room's straight edges. Sheer fabrics let the light in. Heavier fabrics offer privacy and protection from drafts. Want light by day, privacy at night? It's possible: "Layer panels over sheers," advises Cairns. Double drapery rods are designed just for this configuration and are available at major retailers.

### Blinds

Today's blinds come in a wide variety of materials and textures. "They're complete on their own, or can be embellished with a valance or side panels," says Heidi Cox, merchandising manager of Blinds To Go, a custom shade and blind manufacturer in New Jersey.

The most popular blind styles include:

- **Aluminum Mini Blinds:** Popular in kitchens, bathrooms and kids' bedrooms, these blinds come in various colors and thicknesses and at an entry-level price point.
- **Wood (Faux or Real) Blinds:** For a cozy, homey look, consider these wider blinds. "Match the color to your cabinetry for a custom look," Cox says.
- **Bamboo, Jute and Woven Wood Blinds:** The newest looks in blinds are all about texture. "These are a trendy alternative to wood because the colors are warm and inviting, but with unique textures and patterns," Cox says.

### Shutters

Similar to blinds, shutters have a clean, yet traditional look. Impressively functional, shutters can be customized to any size window or door, including curves and arches.

"Shutters are like wood furniture for your windows—they are good at privacy and light control, but the room doesn't have a soft surface to absorb sound and give the room a cozy feeling," says George Cronson, owner of Midas Fabric & Blinds, a custom window treatment company in North Carolina.

Also remember that unlike blinds, shutters are always visible. "You can open the louvers, but the shutter stays in the window, or you can open the shutters, which jut straight out into the room," adds Cairns.

### Shades

On their own, shades have a simple, elegant look. They can also be combined with curtains, panels, sheers or valances to create a layered effect. Some of today's most popular shade styles are:

- **Roman:** "They come in a variety of patterns and textures with built-in valances for a clean, complete look," Cox says. Choose from classic "waterfall" (more formal) or flat panels (more casual) styles.

- **Pleated:** Perfect for bedrooms, pleated shades offer privacy and light control. "For extra privacy, order a blackout liner, or the 'Top Down/Bottom Up' feature," Cox says.
- **Cellular:** Great for insulation, energy efficiency and UV protection.
- **Roller:** Made with decorative fabrics with integrated valances and upgraded mechanisms, these aren't your Grandma's white vinyl shades.

#### Top Treatments

Purely decorative, top treatments draw the eye upward and can give a room the illusion of height. Valances (available both soft and structured) are the most popular top treatments, followed by cornices (also available in soft and structured styles). Both types give windows a finished, polished look.

Top treatments help disguise window casings, and cover boring or unsightly hardware. They are frequently combined with panels, blinds, shutters and shades for a coordinated effect.

However, a top treatment isn't always necessary. "Pleated, tab-top or rod-pocket panels can stand alone for a simple, refined look," says interior decorator Kathy Gariboldi, owner of Reinvented Spaces in Raleigh, N.C.

#### Custom or Ready-Made?

Once you decide on the look you're going for, you can decide from custom- and ready-made options. Design experts agree that ready-made window coverings are the most cost-effective option. A variety of choices are available at major retailers and specialty stores. The drawback: retailers may not carry the exact fabric, style or size you seek, and you're responsible for installation.

Custom window treatments, while typically more expensive, offer more flexibility. "With custom, you get complete choice, designer guidance and the best quality," Cronson says. "Custom window treatments fit the window perfectly. If you want a unique look, then custom is the only way to go."



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