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Selecting, Curtain, and Drapery Fabrics

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Margret Boschetti, Extension Specialist, Human Environment and Design

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SELECTING CURTAIN & DRAPERY



By Margaret Boschetti, Extension Specialist, Human Environment and Design

Curtains are traditionally a symbol of the "civilizing influence"—man's attempt to beautify his environment. Tapestries to provide warmth and beauty to the stone walls of castles were the forerunners of the curtains and draperies we use today. Besides making the home more livable and attractive, curtains and draperies must also be functional in meeting the requirements of your family for light control, air circulation, and privacy. An attractive window treatment can result from the wise selection and use, given color, pattern, and texture of materials and their coordination with the other furnishings in the room and the architectural background.

FUNCTION

Function is your first consideration. In determining what kind of curtains or draperies your family requires, ask yourself the following questions:

1. What type of light control do you need?

If you desire all the light obtainable for a dark room, try sheer or semi-sheer fabrics. If you want to limit the amount of light, look for fabrics that are heavier and more opaque. Draw draperies or linings hung separately behind sheer fabrics create flexibility—linings can be drawn to block out light when desired or left open to allow filtered light to enter.

2. What kind of air control do you need?

Window coverings should allow easy opening of windows, unless your home is air conditioned.

3. Do you need temperature control?

To add to comfort, you may want to consider using drapery fabrics or linings that have been treated for increased insulating qualities.

When windows are placed above radiators, some problems are created as the draperies should not obstruct the air current. A combination of side draperies and decorator shades works well. It is also possible to cover the radiator with a decorative grill and use a combination of shorter curtains over the grill and side draperies.

4. How is the view—from both sides of the window? What degree of privacy is required by the location of the window?

A bedroom or bathroom window treatment should insure privacy. Double-hung windows provide for privacy and air control. Elsewhere, curtains and draperies can be used to frame a beautiful view or to shut out an undesirable one.

5. What fabrics will be most suitable to your family needs?

Basic fiber properties are listed in Chart 1. These fibers frequently are combined to produce fabrics

with the special characteristics of all fibers used.

Improved finishes and new weaving techniques may also help to overcome some of the fiber limitations (Chart 2).

6. How long do you want to use the curtains and draperies?

If they will only be used a short time, less expensive fabrics or materials may be selected. Consider lined draperies when you want a more permanent installation. The lining will protect the drapery fabric from exposure to sun and fading. Hanging the linings separately allows for easy replacement.

7. What drapery hardware will you need?

Select hardware which will function well with the style of curtains or draperies selected. Don't forget

to add the cost of the hardware to the fabric and construction costs.

8. How much fabric will you need?

Some basic measurements for curtains and draperies are: (Figure 1.)

LENGTH

- Measure from rod to sill, to bottom of apron, to one inch from the floor or an architectural stopping point.

- The top of the curtain may extend to the ceiling, the top of the window frame or sash, or an architectural stopping point. Allow ½ to 1 inch above the rod for heading unless covered by valance or cornice.

CHART 1 — Performance Guide to Curtain and Drapery Fibers.

CHARACTERISTICS	100% COTTON	100% ACETATE AND SOLUTION DYED ACETATE	100% ACRYLIC AND MODACRYLIC
BASIC CONSTITUENT	Natural fiber.	Cotton linters or wood pulp treated to form cellulose acetate.	Ammonia, gas, salt water and air.
PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS	Depending on construction, harsh or soft hand. Drapes well.	Soft, lustrous. Drapes well.	Soft hand. Drapes well.
CARE AND CLEANING SPECIFICATIONS	Machine and hand washable. Needs ironing unless treated for drip-dry, no-iron finish.	Dry clean primarily. Can be hand washed in some constructions. Iron when nearly dry with warm iron. No-iron finishes can be applied.	Hand washable. Dry clean primarily. Resists spotting. Holds crease when wet. Dries rapidly. Little or no ironing. Spot and stain resistant.
ABRASION RESISTANCE	Good.	Fair.	Good.
DYEABILITY	Good.	Fair for acetates. Good to excellent for solution dyed acetates.	Fair. Can be dyed at low temperatures with good fastness properties.
CREASE RETENTION	Poor.	Very good.	Good. Excellent in modacrylics.
WRINKLE RESISTANCE	Poor.	Fair.	Good.
DURABILITY	Good.	Fair.	Excellent.
RESISTANCE TO MILDEW	Poor, unless processed.	Good.	Not attacked.
RESISTANCE TO HEAT	Excellent.	Poor. Tends to lose strength at high heats.	Susceptible. Iron only at low heat.
RESISTANCE TO FIRE	Burns & chars.	Melts & burns.	Acrylics melt & burn. Built-in flame resistance in modacrylics.
EFFECT OF SUNLIGHT	Fair.	Excellent color fastness in solution dyes. Average for regular acetates.	High resistance. Modacrylics retain color. Acrylics may darken after long exposure.
DIMENSIONAL STABILITY	Good if processed.	Poor.	Very good.

If rings are used, subtract the diameter of the ring from the length.

- Allow for matching the design in all panels. The "repeat" must go evenly into the length of each panel. Example: Length of panel (93 inches) divided by the repeat (20 inches) equals four repeats plus 13 extra inches.

Add 7 inches to 93 inches (100 inches) and divide by the repeat (20 inches). This will give you five complete repeats. Therefore, each panel requires 100 inches cut length to allow for accurate matching of the design for a 93-inch finished length.

- Allow for hems and headings.

- Measure both sides of windows to allow for architectural defects, such as a wall or window opening that is slightly higher on one side than the other.

WIDTH

- The fabric in all curtains and draperies should be at least twice as wide as the space to be covered to provide adequate fullness. Sheer fabrics may be three times the width.

- For draw curtains, measure the length or rod across the window, extension on the wall if any, plus "returns" (space from face of rod to wall usually 6 inches total) plus overlap at center front. The weight of the fabric and width of the window will affect the amount of extension on the wall needed to allow the draperies or curtains to "stack" (bunch or gather when draperies are open).

- For side draperies (set panels), the space covered includes side frames and glass or walls to edge of glass (or part of glass) and "returns."

100% GLASS FIBER	100% NYLON	100% POLYESTER	100% RAYON AND SOLUTION DYED RAYON
Sand, lime, borax and clay.	Derived from coal, air, water and petroleum.	Petroleum, natural gas, air, water.	Wood pulp or cotton linters reduced to liquid form.
Is translucent. Drapes rather stiffly.	Soft hand.	Strong. Soft hand. Drapes well. Holds shape. Blends can be permanently pleated.	Silk-like luster. Soft hand. Drapes well.
Washable. Drip dry, no-iron. Dries rapidly.	Washable, dry cleans. Little or no ironing.	Washable by hand or machine depending on construction. Holds crease when wet. Spots wash off in water. Needs little ironing. Some automatic drying.	Hand or machine washing or dry cleaning. Some finishes and processes now enable these fibers to be machine-washed and drip- or tumbled-dried.
Poor.	Excellent.	Excellent.	Fair.
Fair to good. Colors guaranteed for two years.	Good.	Very good.	Excellent.
Poor.	Excellent.	Excellent.	Poor to fair. Not permanent.
Excellent.	Good.	Excellent.	Fair.
Excellent.	Very strong. Holds pleats.	Excellent.	Fair.
Not attacked.	Not attacked.	Not attacked.	Attacked, if not treated.
Excellent.	Very good.	Very good.	Fair.
Fireproof.	Self extinguishing. Melts and burns when exposed to flame.	Self extinguishing. Melts and burns when exposed to flame.	Burns and chars.
None.	Good for bright yarns. Poor for semi-dull. Loses strength after long exposure.	Excellent behind glass. Loses strength after long exposure.	Excellent for solution dyes. Average for regular rayons.
Excellent.	Good, when properly heat set.	Excellent, when properly heat set.	Fair.

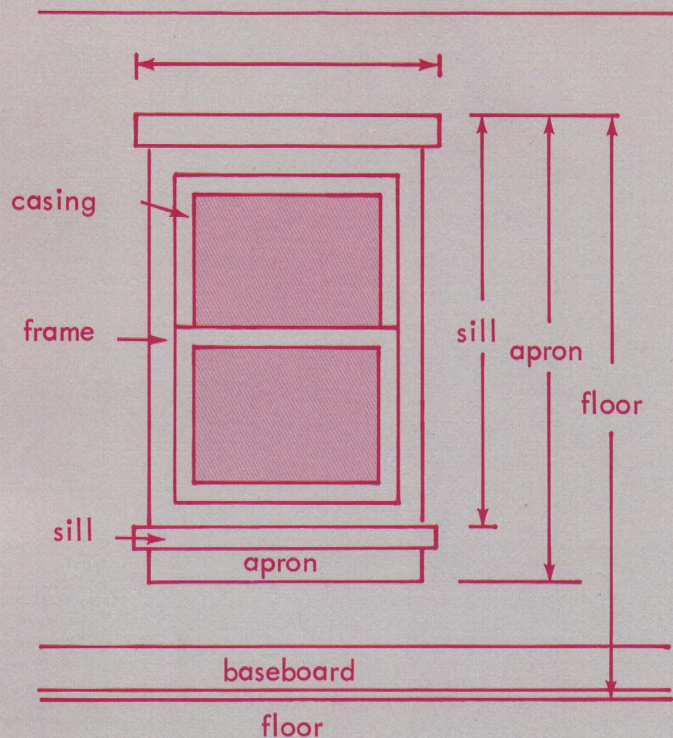


Figure 1. Where to Measure for Draperies.

DESIGN

Curtains and draperies play an important role in the total design of a room because their placement near the source of light, air and view will automatically attract attention. Your choice of treatment style, as well as color, texture and pattern of fabric will determine the amount of attention windows receive.

Window treatments can affect the apparent size, shape and character of a room, as well. Small rooms can appear larger if curtains and/or draperies are the same color as the wall. Rooms with low ceilings will gain apparent height when draperies are hung from ceiling to floor. Awkwardly sized and placed windows can be concealed with careful choice of treatment. Illusions can do only so much, however, and too often an attempt to conceal may have the opposite effect.

● To help you in your selection, keep these thoughts in mind:

1. When you want windows to appear as part of the room background, or when you wish attention focused on a view beyond the window — select unpatterned fabrics similar to the adjacent wall color.

2. When you want attention drawn to the window or window area in a room — select fabrics with a

moderate degree of contrast (either of color or pattern to the surrounding walls).

3. When attention is desired on the window treatment itself (as in the case of large rooms with no view and/or with little furniture) — select fabrics that are boldly colored or patterned.

KINDS OF WINDOW TREATMENTS

While your choice will depend largely on the basic architecture and your personal requirements of light, air, and privacy, you should know the basic types of treatment in order to select the one which will be most effective.

Draperies

Draperies, probably the most common type of window treatment, are available in several variations. Traverse or “draw” draperies are one type most effective in treating a large window area. They move on a traverse rod and can be left open as side panels or drawn to completely cover the window area.

Although most frequently used in the floor-to-ceiling length, traverse draperies are also effective in lengths to the sill or apron of the window.

When the view is very good and privacy is not essential, stationary panel draperies may be used. These hang on permanent rods, wide enough only for the drapery. Tier draperies, as the name implies, utilize several tiers of short draperies — each of which is controlled individually. Very effective in covering large window areas, they allow almost complete control of the amount of light entering your room, from very little to a great deal.

The sheer fabric casement drapery filters glaring sunlight, yet permits a see-through quality. NOTE: Although it is extremely important to keep all draperies full, this is particularly true of casement draperies. At least twice the width of the window is desirable.

The sheer drapery is often combined with draperies of a heavier fabric to form a window treatment called the over-and-under drapery. This type of treatment offers a maximum amount of privacy and can create a more formal room setting.

Curtains

Another category of fabric window treatment is curtains. There are four basic types.

An old favorite, the priscilla curtain, is still very popular and widely used today — especially in early American rooms. Ruffled on all sides, priscillas are

held in place with ruffled tie-backs. The curtain may be crossed or have inner ruffles that meet in the center.

Panel or glass curtains are similar to casement type draperies. However, rather than being pleated at the heading, they are "rod-run." They hang in straight panels, permitting light and air to enter while providing a degree of privacy.

An extremely versatile curtain, the **cafe curtain** is a shorty curtain scalloped at the top and hung by rings. It can be used in a variety of ways, with or without draperies, with or without shades or blinds, and is adaptable to a wide range of fabric types. In addition to adaptability, cafe curtains are extremely flexible, allowing maximum control of light and air.

The **tier curtain** is also a shorty curtain similar to the cafe curtain. Rather than the scalloped top, tier curtains are pleated or "rod-run."

Shutters, Blinds and Shades

Not to be overlooked when deciding upon a window treatment are the many varieties of shutters, blinds and shades which can be used alone or as

companions to fabric treatments. Only a few of the possibilities will be mentioned here.

Shutters are adaptable to almost any room in the house. They come with vertical or horizontal louvers, or with fabric panel inserts. In addition to being easy to care for, shutters offer excellent control of light and air without sacrificing privacy.

Venetian blinds are very good for controlling direct sunlight without blocking air circulation, but they are difficult to clean. Blinds are available in many colors and in vertical as well as the standard horizontal slats.

Among the almost limitless choices of window shades, two fabric types have many of the same advantages that curtains and draperies offer. The **Austrian shade**, for example, is an elegant covering that adds much softness to the window area. **Roman shades** are more tailored; they draw up on a cord into flat, accordian-type folds.

Standard window shades are available in stripes, colors, and patterns with unusual trims to make them decoratively adaptable to any type of room setting.

In selecting curtains and draperies to make your home more livable and attractive, the points to check are:

1. Functional control of light, air, and temperature.
2. Degree of privacy needed.
3. Suitability of quality and quantity of fabric.
4. Enhancement of room mood.

This Publication is Reprinted with Revisions from Circular 903, "Selection and Use of Curtains and Draperies" by Patricia Klobe, Extension Specialist, Interior Design, University of Missouri — Columbia

CHART 2—Fabric Finishes . . . and What They Mean.

A fabric finish should increase durability, or improve hand, drape, appearance and ease of care. How well it will serve these purposes depends upon what the finish is, and whether it was applied properly. You will learn here what these treatments are and how they should be cared for once a fabric has been put to use in your family.

FINISH/TREATMENT	CHARACTERISTICS	WHERE FOUND	DURABILITY	CARE
Water repellency. May also resist water-borne stains, wrinkles, soiling; crease retention. More comfortable than water-proof fabrics.	Most effective on smooth finish fabric. Tightness of weave also important in repelling water.	Mostly on cotton, rayon, woolens, blends.	Durable through several cleanings when applied during fabric processing. Some are temporary, renewed after each cleaning.	Frequent cleaning, followed by thorough rinsing, is important. Have dry cleaners use solvents.
Wrinkle resistance. Resists wrinkles in use, laundering. May also add crease retention; resistant to soil, stains, mildew; shrinkage control.	Most effective on medium and heavy fabrics.	Mostly on cottons; also on linen, rayon.	Lasts through many cleanings if applied during fabric processing. A few nonresin treatments are guaranteed for fabric's life.	Check labels before you use bleach; some finishes retain chlorine and yellowing occurs. Amount of ironing depends on personal standards.
Stain, soil resistance. May also add water repellency; resistance to wrinkles. Usually for water-borne stains only, but one resists oil.	Because soil remains on surface, it is more easily removed. Light colors become practical for home furnishings.	Mostly on cotton, rayon blends; also on suede. Newest use — silk.	When applied in fabric process, lasts through repeated cleanings. Renew most rug treatments professionally after cleaning. Renew aerosol home spray after laundering.	Because water-borne stains remain on surface, they can be blotted up. Oil-borne stains can be removed. After laundering press while damp.
Dimensional stability. Most prevent noticeable shrinkage; but is also applied to prevent stretching or sagging. May add resistance to soil, wrinkles, mildew.	All cotton shrinks some during first washing — 1 to 2% is acceptable. When treated, it will not shrink more than 2%.	Mostly on cotton; sometimes on rayon, linen, wool.	When applied in fabric processing, finish is permanent and survives laundering or dry cleaning.	Launder cotton. Wool blankets may be machine-washed, dried. Usual directions specify minimum agitation warm water.
Mothproofing. Prevents damage from carpet beetles, silverfish, too.	Almost all woolen carpets sold today are treated with this finish.	Mostly on woolens, especially carpets, blankets; occasionally silk.	Generally guaranteed for life of fabric when applied during processing of fabric. Aerosol home sprays last several weeks.	Dryclean or launder according to the directions on the label. Apply aerosol home sprays only to clean fabric.
Crispness retention. Generally, also adds resistance to soil; may also add resistance to mildew.	Especially helpful in damp, humid weather. Some finishes are merely sizings to add body to inferior fabric; will be removed in first laundering.	Mostly on cotton, some on rayon, linen.	Durable when applied in fabric processing. But a little of property lost in each laundering. Apply home spray before ironing; renew after laundering.	Starching is not needed when fabric is new. For high glaze sheen, iron when damp. In some cases, chlorine bleach should not be used; check tags.
Flame retardation. Not "fireproofing." Treated fabrics char, glow when flame is applied but do not flare up.	Home treatments leave fabrics stiffer but will not irritate skin. Cotton, rayon respond best; nylon, acetate, acrylics do not.	Mostly needed on napped, fleecy fabrics.	Usually treatment added professionally in each washing or cleaning. Home application is also possible; should be renewed after laundering.	Launder according to fiber and construction.

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