

BLINDS- SIDED

You can improve a room's looks by dressing up windows nicely

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It's an open and shut case — if you're looking at adding blinds to your home, you're probably considering wood textures.

And the faux woods have the added attraction of resiliency in areas, like kitchens, where they might get direct water contact. They won't warp, like natural wood, according to Kirk Osler, owner of the Blind Shoppe.

"And they're about 35 percent less in cost than real wood," said Osler, whose Livonia business offers shop-at-home convenience Monday through Saturday in metro Detroit.

"You get the same look without spending so much," he added.

Look at the choices

In the last five years, the world of blinds has exploded with choices for the decorator offering verticals; horizontals; minis, which are 1-inch slats, and micros, which are half-inch slats, and silhouettes featuring fabric pieces encased

between two sheers. They also have purchased more 2-inch horizontal blinds over the last 18 to 24 months, Osler added.

"It has grown faster than any other area in the window treatment business in the last few years," Osler said. "Verticals, overall, have dropped quite a bit since this 2-inch horizontal market took off. I'll go through an entire new home and put in horizontal blinds in every window with the exception of the door wall, which would be vertical."

Seven or eight years ago, he said, it was common to do entire homes with vertical blinds.

Sun control

Horizontal slats offer more privacy and allow for the most control over sun rays by slightly tilting the slats. "With vertical treatments, you basically have to close the entire blind to keep the sun out of the house," Osler added. The top-down, bottom-up pleated styles are growing more popular, too, explained Bena

Hodge, sales associate for Blinds to Go in Westland.

"People can't see in the home but you can have the light come through the top," she added. "Those are also insulating, because they're made of honeycomb."

The multitude of materials used to make blinds is another area of evolution in the business.

"We probably sell 90 percent vinyl and 10 years ago we probably sold 75 percent fabric," Osler said.

The vinyl can be cleaned easier than the fabric slats, which often need to be taken to a professional dry cleaner.

While neutral tones of whites and off whites remain the most popular hues chosen in blinds, the color possibilities can match any painter's palette. Most owners of newly constructed homes, however, tend to add color to their windows with their toppers and draperies accompanying their blinds.

Silhouettes by Hunter Douglas feature 2-inch horizontal fabric slats suspended

between two layers of sheers. They can be rotated much like a blind to control light and privacy. That style is getting more and more attention lately.

"They combine the best of both worlds of blinds and draperies," Osler said. "It gives the look of draperies with the operations and control of a window blind."

They offer an elegant look and are commonly used in living rooms, dining rooms and master bedroom suites.

Fabric also sought

Customers also look now at fabric more closely and critically.

"Consumers want functionality of hard window treatments, but the softness of a fabric and the warmth of a fabric," explained Steven Katzman, president of American Blind and Wallpaper Factory in Plymouth.

Hunter Douglas also offers Luminette, a product a lot like the Silhouettes, but with a soft fabric sheer vertical blind.

It has the functionality of a vertical blind, but comes in a wide assortment of soft, sheer fabric often used in door walls or large windows, Katzman said.

Pointing to the company's Web site, www.decoratoday.com, Katzman said American Blind and Wallpaper Factory recently launched an exterior vinyl shutter line on the Web site.

"Consumers are trying to coordinate exterior vinyl shutters and fabric awnings with the interior window treatments," Katzman said. "I see the trend moving away from hard window treatments to the soft window treatments that add more warmth and character to a home."

"All things come around. Back in the early to mid-1990s soft window treatments with more curtains and draperies were hot. Venetian blinds became popular in the mid- to late 1990s."

Referring to the Silhouettes and Luminette Privacy Sheers, Katzman



Adding beauty: Silhouette window shadings add elegance to this room.

added: "Now we're going back to a more traditional and softer look using the technology of what we learned to add the hard and soft. It's the charm of the old with the functionality of the new."

Let's get small

The cost conscious might choose the 1-inch horizontal mini blinds that people in the business refer to as the "old stand-by." On the other end of the cost spectrum are the micro-mini blinds in glass panes, which are offered by Pella Windows.

"Twenty-five years ago you may have seen 75 percent of the homes with draperies and 25 percent would have had blinds," Osler said.

"Today, you will probably see 90 percent of the homes have some sort of blinds. As blinds have evolved and come down in cost, draperies have gone up."

Blinds beat drapes in manageability, too, he added.

"If you want them up and out of the way you can put them up and out of the way," Osler said. "But draperies are always there."

Actually, a lot of people are using draperies with blinds, according to Louise Richter, district manager of House of Blinds and Drapery in Farmington Hills.

"People want to soften the harder treatments and add dimension to the room," she said.

Color with draperies

Draperies add color to the window cover, which is usually blinds, Richter added.

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STAFF PHOTOS BY PAUL HENDERSON

Shed a new light: Kirk Osler sits in front of Vignette blinds by Hunter Douglas that Osler installed recently in a home in Plymouth. These Roman-style shades are popular with homeowners.



True colors: Osler also installed these green pleated shades in the same home. Homeowners now can choose various styles and shades or between horizontal and vertical blinds.



Simply red: Millenia Custom Vertical Blinds from Hunter Douglas pack color into this spacious home office. The blinds are shown in one of many vinyl styles available in a rich red wood tone called Rosewood.



Filtered light: Woven wood shades figure prominently in this breakfast nook in a semi-sheer bamboo grass design called Hokkaido. The shade is one of many offered in the Provenance line of Hunter Douglas.

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