



The Ultimate Window Covering Buyers' Guide

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Blind Ambitions

Your Ultimate Window Covering Buyers' Guide

Buying window coverings is not an everyday occurrence. It's a good idea to learn about the process so when the time comes, you are equipped with the knowledge that will allow you to get the very best products and services for your money. No matter what your budget allows, it should be done right. While it is impossible to learn all there is to know about custom made window coverings in a brief period of time, this guide will teach you what you need to know to get the most from your window covering professional. You don't need to be an expert on window coverings. You just need to be an expert at *purchasing* window coverings. That you can become by reading this guide.

Custom made window coverings are a major purchase for your home. They can cost a great deal of money and should last a long time. The blinds or draperies you choose should do a number of things for your home.

1. They should provide the amount of privacy that you require for each particular room.
2. They should protect your flooring and furniture from sun damage and fading due to exposure to the sun.
3. They should provide the amount of room darkening that you require for each particular room.
4. They should reduce or eliminate glare on your television or computer screen.
5. They should provide a good deal of insulation on windows to keep out heat in the summer and cold in the winter.
6. They should definitely add to the beauty and décor of your home. They can make a bold fashion statement and become a focal point for any room, or they can be more subdued and just blend in, allowing other features of the room to dominate.

All the benefits of window coverings will have varying degrees of importance, depending on the room and the individual.

An important first step in choosing the right treatment for any window is to determine which purpose or function is most important to you. That will vary from room to room, from house to house, and from individual to individual. Someone living on a busy urban street will likely place a higher priority on the need for privacy than someone living in a secluded country setting. So you get the point. Decide what is important to you and prepare to communicate this information to your window covering decorator. Always remember, the idea is to get the most value for your money. Value, in the case of window coverings, means the right combination of function and aesthetics within your particular budget. Providing value is the job of the window covering professional. Your job is to make sure he or she does theirs.

SELECTING A WINDOW COVERING CONSULTANT

The most important decision you will make involving your window coverings will be choosing from whom you wish to make your purchase. You must choose a window covering decorator and thusly choose the company he or she represents. It is extremely important to feel comfortable with your window covering decorator. You must trust that he or she possesses the proper knowledge, experience, and skill to guide you to the right purchasing decision.

A professional decorator should inspire confidence. They should carry the tools of their trade and have access to a company showroom where you can see many of the available products. They should be able to make shopping for window coverings a pleasant and enjoyable experience. By redecorating, you are adding beauty and value to your home. You should have a good time doing it. The professional window covering decorator should be able to produce photos, illustrations, and letters of reference without you even having to ask. They should be very pleasant and courteous at all times. If they don't treat you with kindness and respect before they have accepted your money, they certainly aren't likely to do so after they have been paid. Don't be afraid to ask about their experience and training. Don't be afraid to ask any questions at all. Sometimes it can be easy for a decorator to forget to explain things that are not common knowledge to the average consumer. Once you have chosen a decorator in whom you can place your trust, let him or her know about your decorating tastes. Some shoppers just need a little guidance and reassurance on their own choices, while others have no idea of what they want, and need the decorator to choose for them. Let the decorator know what is important to you. Offer your colour preferences and style preferences. Remember, it is your home. In the end, you should get what *you* want, what makes *you* happy.

It is also a good idea to let the decorator know approximately how much money you are expecting to spend. You have chosen a decorator that you like and trust, he or she should now be providing you with the best value for your money. Since there is a huge range in the amount of money that can be spent on any given window, the decorator should be aware of your budget constraints. This information could save you both a lot of time.

Considering it may have been a long time since you last shopped for window coverings, ask about new products and features. Remember, what the decorator may have been selling for several years could be very new to you. The decorator should have a keen grasp of what products and colours are the newest and most fashionable.

QUESTIONS YOU NEED TO ASK

It is important that your decorator conveys to you all the important information related to the products you are considering. In the window coverings business, surprises are not a good thing. If there are limitations or problems that accompany a certain type of drape or shade, you need to know this information in advance. Asking the right questions will make sure your decorator provides you with this important information. Different styles of window coverings will have various advantages and disadvantages. You need to find out what they are from your decorator.

QUESTIONS SUCH AS:

- What is the warranty?
- If anything is likely to break on this shade, what would it be?
- On which side are the controls located?
- How far past the window frame does the blind or drape extend?
- What are the washing instructions?
- Are there any additional options that may be of interest to me?
- Are there any obstructions to consider such as window cranks and locks, baseboard heaters, cupboards, or bookshelves?
- If draperies, what is the fullness (amount of fabric used to make the drape)? This is an area where one retailer may try to cut corners in order to provide a lower price than their competitors. Be very careful.
- Are the draperies being lined? Most should be.
- Did the decorator hold the fabric up to the window to view it with the light filtering through it (this can significantly change the colour tone or eliminate or sometimes enhance the pattern)?
- Is there any significant light or privacy gaps? This will vary from product to product.

By asking the right questions, you can ensure that the decorator does his or her job properly and provides you with all important information. These questions must be asked in advance, not after the window coverings are installed.

PRODUCTS

While there is not enough room in this guide to provide in-depth descriptions of all the available products, we will touch on the categories, all of which have several variations or styles from which to choose.

1. Hard Window Coverings

This category includes horizontal blinds of many kinds, vertical blinds, roller shades, pleated or cellular shades, and shutters.

Hard window coverings are more often considered more functional than soft window coverings. They usually have greater flexibility in cutting light and providing privacy. Horizontal blinds and vertical blinds now come in different vane sizes and can be made from fabric, aluminum, vinyl, wood and faux wood materials. The faux wood blinds are less expensive than real wood. Roller shades now come in a variety of fabrics and usually have a chain controller clutch system for raising and lowering the shades. This type of operating system is far superior to the old-fashioned spring loaded system that never seemed to work very well. In recent years, sheerweave roller shades have become extremely popular in offices, restaurants, sunrooms and cottages. The sheerweave is a mesh-like vinyl fabric that allows you to see out, while at the same time significantly cutting heat and glare. Just be sure to remember that if you can see out during the day, those outside can see in at night when the lights are on.

Determine ahead of time if this type of shade gives you enough privacy. Pleated and cellular shades are very popular, the cellular shades being amongst the very best insulators for your windows. These shades fold or accordion up and take up very little space when they are in the raised position. The cellular and pleated shades can come with the option of operating by drawing down from the top, as well as up from the bottom. This very popular feature allows you to see out when you wish, while still preventing people from seeing what is going on inside. All of these blinds and shades come with a variety of operating system options. Make sure your decorator gives you the opportunity to choose the system that works best for you. Also remember that if any part of the blind or shade is to wear out over time, it is likely to be the lift cord. Be specific in asking what the warranty is on the cord. Many manufacturers only warranty the cord for three to five years, even though the blind comes with a "lifetime" warranty. Vertical blinds are still available in both fabric and PVC but are not nearly as popular as they once were. There are similar, but better, products now available that add fabric over top of the vertical vanes to give a softer and more formal look, while still providing the privacy of vertical blinds. Shutters are becoming very popular and can be made out of PVC, wood, and aluminum. Shutters are simple but very elegant. They act as an excellent insulator and are easy to use and maintain. They are also greatly suited for windows that will be opened in mild weather, as shutters will not blow around in the wind and make noise being in the open window like shades or draperies will.

There have been many advances in recent years in the operating systems for hard window coverings. Blinds and shades can now come with standard cord lock systems, continuous cord

loop systems, retractable cord systems, and totally cordless systems. Each of these can add to the convenience and ease of operation, and safety, depending on your need. In addition, pretty much all of these products can be motorized and controlled with a remote control, or a wall switch. They can also be made to work with home automation systems and operate from your computer, cell phone, or tablet, and can be operated by these devices no matter where you are. You should always ask your window covering consultant about all the available options with the products that you have chosen. It is usually too late to ask to have the options added at a later date.

2. Soft Window Coverings

This category includes all kinds of draperies, valances, and soft fabric window shades such as roman shades. There is a huge array of drapery and valance styles. You really need to rely on your decorator to show you the many styles, but these kinds of treatments can truly add a great deal of style and fashion and can incorporate deep lavish colours and intricate, ornate hardware if desired. There are many more fabric choices available in draperies than in hard window coverings. This huge array of choices allows you, with the help of your consultant, to choose very distinctive patterns and colours that will bring together all the colours and textures in your room. If your decorator is trying to push you into blinds or shades when you really want draperies, that decorator is probably lacking the expertise to provide you with what you want.

You should always ask how a drapery treatment functions. Some styles are not meant to move or draw at all. Other styles are meant to draw but do not do so very well. There are a couple of very new products on the market that now allow styles that did not previously move or draw very well to do so with great ease. New style pleats on different tracking systems can now allow you to draw and stack draperies with greater ease than ever. Tab drapes, ripple fold drapes, Athena drapes, and even sheers can be made to operate now, better than they have before. Ask your consultant. Be sure he or she makes you aware of how well and conveniently your draperies will operate.

In recent years the companies that manufacture blinds have been very successful in producing hard window coverings that now possess some of the features of soft window coverings. Products such as silhouettes, luminettes, and privacy sheers put sheer fabric over either horizontal or vertical vanes to provide the function of a blind, mixed with the beautiful light diffusing qualities of a sheer drape. The results are stunning, functional, and easy to operate. Once again, you must make sure that you are aware of all the options, as well as all the limitations that accompany these products. Today there are more choices than ever before in terms of window decorating. That makes it more difficult than ever to sift through all the options. Possessing a little bit of knowledge, being armed with the right questions, and being aware of some of the things that can go wrong, you are now equipped to get top value. Find an excellent window coverings consultant, then use your knowledge to make sure he or she does a great job. Remember too, it should be fun, so relax, enjoy, and look forward to the beautiful new window coverings that will brighten up your home for many years to come.

Blind Ambitions is a leading Winnipeg retailer of custom window coverings since 1990. The showroom and office are located at 895 Century Street, inside the Bill Knight Flooring building.

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