

BUYER'S GUIDE TO WINDOW TREATMENTS

The best-dressed windows combine looks and functionality – here's everything you need to know to choose well

WORDS GEORGIA MADDEN

From framing a view and boosting privacy to cutting your energy costs – a great window treatment can do it all. It's also the perfect way to finish off a room. “A fabulous window treatment is just as important an investment as a sofa – it can totally transform a room and bring the overall design scheme together,” says Elise Harper, interior decorator at More Than Curtains.

With so many options to choose from – curtains, various types of blinds, and plantation shutters, just to name a few – it's important to consider your needs. Ask yourself these questions before making any decisions: Are you looking for privacy from neighbours or a busy street? Do you need full light control? Insulation? Acoustic control? Do you have young children and/or pets and require a fabric that's easy to clean? Read on...

SOFT TOUCH Need privacy but don't want to block out light? Go for sheer, floaty curtains in a natural fabric such as cotton or linen.



curtain styles

“Curtains are the best window treatment for energy efficiency as they completely wrap the window, preventing cold from the windows entering the room in winter and keeping the heat out in summer,” says Frances Cosway, head designer at White Pebble Interiors. And they're not just for traditional homes, adds designer Gabrielle Reinhardt at Berkeley Interiors. “Curtains in natural linens in shades of soft grey and muted pastels look contemporary and add a gentle softness to a space. Meanwhile, for a cosy bedroom or sitting room, nothing compares with luxe velvet curtains.”

If you want the flexibility to have softness during the day and full light control at night, consider a layered window treatment. “It gives you the best of both worlds,” says Lucia van Gerwen, interior designer at More Than Curtains. “I'll often specify blackout roller blinds for privacy and light control combined with sheers in front for ambience.”

headers

The heading style of your curtains – the way they're sewn at the top – affects how they fall. This determines how they look in a room, and how compactly they stack when opened. The main options are:

S-fold A sleek, casual and contemporary style with no pleating. The fabric folds in an 'S' formation in front and behind the track. This style tends to require more stacking room than other heading styles.

Inverted box pleat A tailored look with a flat pleat. There is very little bulk to this style and it tends to be quite low-key and understated, making it suitable for both traditional and contemporary homes.

Pinch pleat A double- or triple-pinch pleat is better suited to classic interiors. The bulk of the pleat is at the front of the heading with two or three neatly pinched folds 100mm from the top of the curtain.

Euro pleat This updated version of the pinch pleat has a more informal feel.



IN THE FOLD A popular style, S-fold curtains look ultra-modern and add another layer of texture and interest to a space.

The pinch is at the top of the heading rather than lower down, making it a great option to showcase a large-scale pattern or print. Both Euro and pinch pleats look spectacular on rods with rings.

Pencil pleat A pencil-pleat heading is achieved by sewing heading tape onto a flat curtain and pulling the string until a gather appears. It has a much more relaxed, unstructured feel.

curtain lengths

There are no hard and fast rules on the correct curtain length – it really comes down to personal preference. “Many designers like to specify curtains so they're overlong or ‘puddling’ on the floor. This looks very elegant but can be a high-maintenance option if installed on tiled, timber or laminate floors because they

drag on the surface and can gather dirt and dust on the hems,” says Elise. An ideal curtain length, she says, is 10 millimetres off the floor. “This creates a neat look and holds its shape well.”

hanging height

“The best spot to hang a curtain rod depends on your window and the height of the ceiling,” says Elise. “In older homes with lower ceilings, I like to install rods just below the cornice to give the illusion of height. In newer homes with higher ceilings, you can hang them anywhere you like, whether it's just above the architrave (the moulding at the top of the window), halfway between the architrave and the ceiling or under the cornice. But never below the architrave – this is a dead giveaway of a bad DIY job.”



HIDE AND SEEK Hidden or ceiling-mounted curtain tracks create a sense of height and drama. They're also practical if there's little or no wall space above a window or door.



ROLL UP Roller blinds are an affordable, fuss-free option for any room. They are available in various colours and fabrics.

roller blinds

Roller blinds are the most popular choice for Australian homes as they're easy to operate, take up very little space, come in a huge range of fabrics and are easily motorised. Roller blinds give you complete privacy when closed and can effectively block out the light, particularly if you choose a blackout fabric.

Their fuss-free look makes them a great fit for contemporary homes, says Frances. "They're modern and streamlined, and have a clean aesthetic. They're also versatile enough to be used in any room and work well with other window treatments, such as curtains and sheers. But they're not ideal for 'dressing' a window. In that case, a roman blind would be more suitable."

If you're looking to cut your heat and cooling costs, you might consider a roller blind in an energy-efficient honeycomb fabric (also known as cellular fabric). This high-performance fabric is made of honeycomb-shaped cells that trap air to help regulate your indoor air temperature.

roman blinds

For a soft, sophisticated look, consider roman blinds. They're ideal for larger windows and come in all manner of fabrics and textures. "Roman blinds are a little more formal than roller blinds, and are often made in feature fabric to add impact to a room scheme. A roman blind in a statement print can bring so much personality to a room," says Frances. "You can also add lovely trims for extra colour and interest," adds Gabrielle.

Roman blinds are a great choice for traditional and period homes. "Installed in the window reveal, they can showcase beautiful heritage architraves. They are also suitable for windows with furniture below them as they don't protrude beyond the window," says Elise. Roman blinds are a smart option for small rooms as they don't take up space on either side of the window.

Bear in mind that when roman blinds are up, your window will be completely exposed, so it's best not to install them in rooms where privacy is paramount.

MOTORISATION

Love the idea of opening or closing your blinds or curtains at the touch of a button or from your smart phone? If so, consider automating your window treatments. "One of the reasons why automation has skyrocketed is the quality of lithium rechargeable batteries. That means roller blinds, roman blinds and vision blinds [a twin-layer design that gives more control over light or privacy] can now be motorised affordably," says Amelia Taylor, head of product and communications at Wynstan.

"Trudging around the house opening and closing each blind or awning is enough to make anyone cranky," adds Amelia. "Our system is called Wynmotion and uses state-of-the-art smart motors to connect to any of our remotes or a smart home system." Automating window treatments is also a clever way to eliminate unsightly cords and chains, and makes operating hard-to-reach windows a breeze.

PHOTOGRAPHY: COURTESY OF IKEA (ABOVE) AND WYNSTAN (FAR RIGHT); TOMMASO RIVA (OPPOSITE)



SMART IDEA Wynstan's Wynmotion Smart Home System (left) lets you control motorised window furnishings via an app.



plantation shutters

If you're looking for a casual coastal look, plantation shutters are the way to go. They're also unlikely to date. "This style is practical, too – you can angle the blades for privacy while capturing light and breezes," says Gabrielle. On the downside, they're not great insulators and do have light bleed. However, "They can reduce floor space in floor-to-ceiling applications as they require a frame installed. Plus the frame blocks some of the light," says Frances.

Plantation shutters come in various materials, including timber and PVC, which can be painted to match your interior. PVC is more affordable than timber, and better for wet rooms.

Quality varies, so don't automatically go for the cheapest quote. "Shutters will be on your window longer than a normal blind so it's worth spending more to get a product that will last," says Simon Meyer, managing director at Blinds by Peter Meyer and Weinor Australia. Be wary of shutters being marketed as timber that are in fact timber veneer with a less-than-desirable MDF core.

venetian blinds

For an affordable, low-maintenance and easy-to-install window covering, venetians are hard to beat. They're generally made from timber, aluminium or PVC, and can be tilted to provide privacy or capture light and breezes. Timber venetians can be used throughout the home, while aluminium and PVC are suitable for wet areas.

"Venetian blinds are a more casual window treatment," says Frances. "They're fine to use in a living room or wet room, but as they don't provide complete light block



out, they're not suitable for bedrooms. Also be aware that venetian blinds provide minimal insulation from heat and cold and, like plantation shutters, do not allow as much light into a room as other treatments."

Slat widths come in a range of sizes. "We offer 46mm, 60mm and 85mm sizes in our custom-painted and stained cedar venetian ranges," says Simon. "The 85mm size can give you the look of plantation shutters without the price tag." Blinds by Peter Meyer also offers polystyrene venetians, which gives you the look of real timber for less, in a material that's 15 per cent lighter than PVC to accommodate larger window sizes.

Now, with your windows fashionably (and practically) dressed, all eyes will be drawn to the view inside your home as much as the one on the outside. **LD**

DOUBLE DUTY In bedrooms and living areas, consider layering window treatments so you have plenty of light control. Shutters or roller blinds and curtains complement each other well.