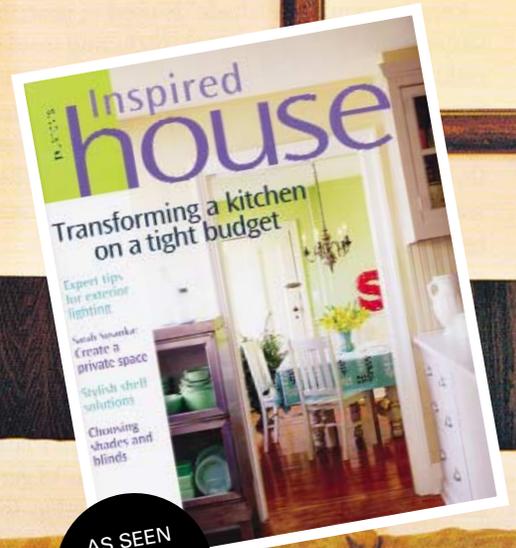


# Choosing & shades blinds

A buyer's guide to selecting window treatments that meet your needs with simplicity and style

BY DEBORAH WIENER



**A**s an interior designer, I've seen window treatments come and go—from miles of heavy drapes puddling on the floor like Niagara Falls to a minimalist's dream: nothing at all. In my opinion, today's trend toward simple sophisticated design is the way to go.

With shades and blinds, you can dress your windows in a clean, uncluttered way, enjoy unobstructed outdoor

views, and better control the light that comes in from the outside. You can always add swags or valances later if you like them, but I think shades and blinds look great all by themselves, and there are so many to choose from.

Blinds are considered "hard" window treatments. They have slats, or vanes, that tilt or angle to control the amount of light entering a room. They can also be fully opened, or pulled up, for an unobstructed view. Today,

most blinds come with a rod that twists to tilt the vanes and a pull cord that lifts them. (Note that pull cords are not recommended for use around children.) Blinds can have horizontal or vertical vanes (narrow ones are often called mini-blinds), and they can be made of vinyl, wood, and wood alternatives, or the old standby: aluminum.

Shades are “soft” window treatments that can be raised or lowered for privacy and light control without sacrificing the view outside. They may be opened from the bottom up or from the top down—or both (see sidebar, p. 32).

Keep in mind that “shade” is used to describe a wide variety of window coverings, including insulating cellular shades (made of fabric folded into distinctive honeycomb-shaped cells), fabric Roman shades (featuring flat horizontal folds and a pull-cord mechanism threaded through rings at the back), and “shadings” (hybrid window covers with movable fabric vanes suspended between two sheer fabric facings).

### Decisions, decisions

Your choice in shades or blinds depends mostly on your windows—where they are, the kind of light they let in, and the views through them. After that, it’s largely a matter of taste. Here are a few questions to get you started. Remember that needs often overlap, so you may have to give something up, like total privacy, to get something else, like full sun on a porch filled with plants.

**Looks** What kind of home do you live in and what is your overall style preference? Does your room have strong architectural features? You may want to consider 2-inch wood blinds. Do you lean toward layered, romantic



## Types of blinds (All price ranges quoted are from a single source, for a 30- x 48-inch window, excluding options)

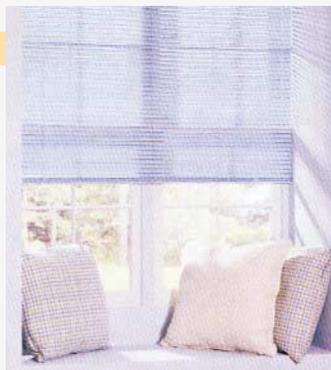
### MINI-BLINDS

**PROS** Economical ■ Available in a wide range of colors ■ Lightweight and easy to install ■ Hard-wearing

**CONS** Very inexpensive—and they often look it ■ Long lasting but difficult to clean ■ Overused

**COST** Half-inch aluminum mini-blinds are \$36-\$74

**TIP** I like the de-Light feature in blinds by Hunter Douglas; with cord holes set in the rear, light gaps are eliminated.



### NATURAL WOOD BLINDS

**PROS** Warm and rich in both casual and traditional rooms ■ May be stained or painted to match any decor ■ Variety of decorative tapes available to hide cords

**CONS** Heavy and prone to denting ■ Not suitable for cold or moist spots

**COST** 2-inch hardwood blinds are \$63-97

**TIP** You can get the look at a fraction of the cost with wood-core blinds coated with a vinyl finish, or with synthetics that look like wood.





**HAVE IT ALL** Get sun screening, the texture of a weave, and a soft fabric feel with this Roman shade (above) hand woven of natural fibers and edged with a silk-look trim. (Maji, from Conrad)

**LARGER THAN LIFE** An ordinary window can feel more substantial when it's covered with classic, 2-inch wood blinds (left) mounted outside the window casing. (Smith+Noble)

## MEASURE TWICE, ORDER ONCE

### INSIDE MOUNT, OUTSIDE MOUNT... WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

It makes a big difference when measuring for a good fit. Both shades and blinds can be mounted within the window casing (inside mount), or a few inches above the trim outside mount). You need to consider the depth of a window casing if you opt for inside mounts. If it's too shallow, your blinds might jut out too far. Outside mounts cover the entire window, and more if you like, making the window appear larger than it is.

Keep in mind that some manufacturers have very specific measuring instructions, so be sure to follow them. When measuring for either kind of mount, use a steel, not a cloth, tape measure.

### INSIDE MOUNT

Measure the exact inside width of the casing from one edge to the other in three different places, recording the narrowest measurement.

Measure the height in three different places from the top edge of the opening to the top of the sill. Record the longest measurement.

### OUTSIDE MOUNT

Measure the exact width to be covered, including the molding, making sure to overlap the window by at least 1-1/2 inches on both sides.

Measure the exact height to be covered, including the desired overlap. It's always better to round up rather than down, because you can adjust longer shades or blinds, but short ones will always look as if they don't fit.

## VERTICAL BLINDS

**PROS** A good choice for wide windows or doors ■ Available in a variety of colors, sizes and materials ■ Offers maximum light control

**CONS** Cumbersome when stacked back for opening ■ Hard to keep in place, especially with kids and pets ■ Falls off track clips easily

**COST** Vinyl vertical blinds are \$66-\$122

**TIP** In my opinion, they're noisy and dated looking.



## STANDARD BLINDS

**PROS** Wider (2- to 3-inch) vanes give them a classic feel ■ Great for deep windows ■ Reasonably priced

**CONS** Noisy when raised and lowered ■ Can be heavy to lift ■ Don't do much to absorb sound or soften a room

**COST** 2-inch aluminum blinds with fabric tapes are \$55-\$67

**TIP** I recommend these for clients who want a plantation shutter look on a budget.





## BOTTOMS UP!

**WANT MAXIMUM LIGHT CONTROL?** Consider the bottom-up option available on many window shades. It allows you to cover just the bottom of the window while leaving the top part open to allow natural light or fresh air to enter the room. This option works well in

bedrooms, bathrooms, home offices, and dining areas especially if these rooms face a street or a neighbor's house.

Some window coverings open either way, while others operate from the top or bottom only. Shades that open both ways have two sets of cords instead of one; each cord works in one direction, pulling the shade up or down. The downside is this: When a bottom-up shade is open, the cords show at the top. Many people, however, find that the convenience and control are worth it.

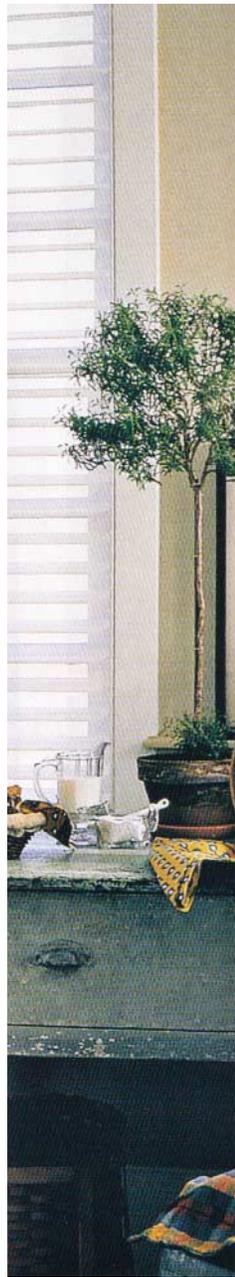
Virtually every window shade—cellular or pleated, in sheer or opaque fabrics or natural weaves—comes with the bottom-up option. Even soft-fold Romans can operate as bottom-up shades.

The price surcharge ranges from \$100 to \$300 per window shade, depending on the model of the shade and the size of the window. Is it worth the additional expense? The answer is yes, if just the right combination of privacy and natural light is important to you. —D.W.



**TOTAL VERSATILITY** Window shadings (top) suspend fabric vanes between sheer facings, providing total light control. (Silhouettes, from Hunter Douglas)

**CLOSE TO CURTAINS** Roman shades (above) can soften the look of a room and provide a contrast for harder architectural details.



## Types of shades

(All price ranges quoted are from a single source, for a 30-x48-inch window, excluding options)

### ROLLER SHADES

**PROS** Offer varying degrees of light control ■ Priced well ■ Available to match any decor

**CONS** Light gaps a problem in old-style shades ■ No cold or sound insulation ■ Boring; can make a room look unfinished

**COST** With a continuous-cord upgrade, \$49-\$79; without, \$34-\$64

**TIP** I love the continuous-cord lifting mechanism in newer shades. If I had to choose one treatment for a whole house, this would be it.



### CELLULAR SHADES

**PROS** Functional and attractive ■ Insulating feature works in both summer and winter ■ Take up little space when open

**CONS** Difficult to clean

**COST** Single-cell shades run \$48-\$110; double-cell shades, \$58-\$120.

**TIP** Cellular shades are also known as honeycomb shades. I love these shades: They're good looking, easy to live with, and versatile. As advertised, they really do insulate, both in terms of sound and temperature.





**SHEER PLEASURE** *Shadings diffuse light and work well with a variety of design styles, from formal to country. (Nantucket window shadings from Hunter Douglas).*

spaces? Sheer and soft shadings in muted tones are probably a better choice. Think outside, too. If your house has a symmetrical facade, you may want to choose the same coverings for all your windows.

**Light** Do you want lots of light but hesitate to let your windows go bare? Sheer shades do the minimum, beautifully. Need a completely dark bedroom to sleep well? Think blackout shades. Do you have fine furnishings that may fade, or does direct sun put a glare on your TV? Solar shades may be what you're looking for.

**Views** Do you have a view that calls out for framing? Consider a shade or blind that "disappears" into a header when open. Are your views less than picture perfect? No open weaves for your windows.

**Privacy** Is your home in an urban area, on a busy street, or close enough to another house that people can see in? Is your bedroom on the first floor? If you need privacy but like the idea of letting light in, you probably would do well to choose a shade with a bottom-up feature (see sidebar, facing page).

**Use** Who is using the room and how? A studio or craft room that gets lots of daily use will require natural light, so be careful not to block it. Children's rooms or busy family rooms require durable window coverings; consider something washable or remote-controlled. A little-used living room window can handle a soft-fold Roman that requires only gentle primping to look its best.

## PLEATED SHADES

**PROS** Less expensive alternative to cellular shades ■ Versatile ■ Offer a wide range of light control

**CONS** Light gaps caused by cord holes ■ Less energy-efficient than cellular shades ■ Not durable; can flatten out easily

**COST** 100 percent polyester pleated shades are \$47-\$68

**TIP** Because I think cellular shades are a better value, I almost never recommend pleated shades.



## ROMAN SHADES

**PROS** Hang flat when lowered; fold up neatly when raised ■ Good sound insulation ■ Available in any fabric under the sun

**CONS** Expensive ■ Folds require fussing ■ Must be taken down for washing or dry cleaning ■ Not suitable for high-traffic areas

**COST** Basic Romans are \$120-\$214

**TIP** I love Romans, especially when they are interlined, which makes them hang better and appear fuller. Less minimalist and more "finished" looking than some shades, Romans act more like curtains.



**CLIMATE CONTROL** Cellular shades feature single or double cells that insulate windows and keep rooms comfortable in very cold or hot weather. (DiamondCell Shades from Bali)

**Energy** If energy efficiency is a concern, note that some window coverings, like cellular shades, are designed to capture cold air and help keep heating costs down. Some, like solar shades, block UV rays and prevent rooms from turning into furnaces in summer. And others, like matchstick blinds, do little if anything to regulate a room's temperature

**Cost** How much you want to spend may be your single most important consideration when choosing window coverings. The range of prices is astonishing. If you have a tight budget, be creative. Decide which windows are most visible or important and spend your money on those.

If you have a lot of windows or windows close to vaulted ceilings—or if you simply want to change the atmosphere of your rooms easily—automated window coverings may be for you. (Learn about “wired windows” on our Web site: [www.inspiredhouse.com](http://www.inspiredhouse.com).)

Whatever your window covering challenges, shades or blinds may be the answer. Simple and attractive, they come in so many variations that there's bound to be one that will work for you.

*Deborah Wiener is the owner of Designing Solutions, a family-friendly design firm in Silver Spring, Md.*



## Shades (continued)

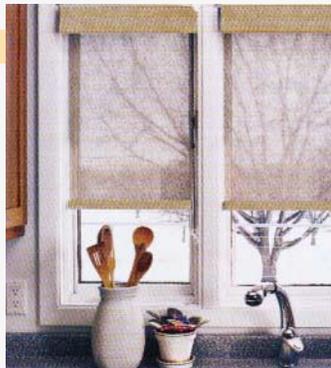
### SOLAR SHADES

**PROS** Diffuse light and UV rays  
 ■ Manage glare on TVs and home computers  
 ■ Keep rooms cool

**CONS** No privacy ■ Limited range of colors  
 ■ Folds require fussing

**COST** Basic solar shades are \$34-\$64

**TIP** In the industry, solar shades are given an “openness” rating, usually, 3.5 or 8 to 10 percent. The lower the rating, the more coverage you get.



### WOVEN SHADES

**PROS** Appealing natural materials ■  
 Cut-to-order option at some home stores  
 ■ Privacy liners provide more light control

**CONS** The more exotic weaves can be pricey ■ Appeal somewhat limited to informal settings  
 ■ Can be delicate, not very durable

**COST** Basic woven shades are \$106-\$167

**TIP** A leader in the field is Conrad, which offers a wide range of exotic weaves and materials in a full spectrum of colors.



# 6 WAYS TO SHOP

**IF YOU'RE NOT SURE** where to go for your window coverings—never mind whether you should opt for cellular versus pleated shades—you're not alone. So our *Inspired House* editors decided to explore the options for replacing the window shades in an old house—with privacy, light, cost, and looks as key considerations. Here's what we learned.

## 1. Online

**CHOICES** Anything is available if you know how to search for it. **TIME FRAME** Depends on your shipping option. **INSTALLATION** None. **PROFESSIONAL ADVICE** None. **COST** Overall, on the less expensive side, but don't forget shipping charges. **NOTE** After spending an hour or so online, we were confused. A search for window coverings resulted in dozens of Web sites through which we could order shades and blinds, but it was hard to find general information about product categories.

## 2. Catalog/phone

**CHOICES** Limited to "private label" products offered by the individual catalog. **TIME FRAME** We placed an order with Smith+Noble on a Friday, and our shades arrived Tuesday. **INSTALLATION** None. **PROFESSIONAL ADVICE** Limited.

**COST** Relatively low. **NOTE** Our experience doesn't represent catalog shopping as a whole. We strongly recommend requesting samples before ordering, so you can feel the fabric and test its translucency. We used the company's measuring instructions and were pleased with the service, the product, and the fit.

## 3. Off the shelf

**CHOICES** Very limited. **TIME FRAME** Immediate, if what you want is in stock. **INSTALLATION** None. **PROFESSIONAL ADVICE** None. **COST** Relatively low. **NOTE** We checked out Target, Home Depot, and Lowes but soon discovered product choices were limited, and only standard sizes were available. We learned we'd have to customize to fit old, irregular windows. Aside from this, store inventory tended to be low, and there were no knowledgeable salespeople on hand to answer questions.

## 4. Home Center

**CHOICES** Wider than off-the-shelf but not extensive. **TIME FRAME** About two weeks. **INSTALLATION** For a fee. **PROFESSIONAL ADVICE** Hit or miss, depending on who is working. **COST** Products are priced well, but measuring, installation, and delivery are extra. **NOTE** We sat down with a "home decor specialist" at Lowes and found her to be helpful, but we were still left with a lot of unanswered questions. Different treatments were demonstrated, but they were mounted on fluorescent panels in a harshly lit warehouse, so it wasn't easy to imagine how they might look in a home. We found the choices to be limited and weren't able to learn much about insulation or light control. We requested samples but were told we couldn't take them home.

## 5. In-home consultation

**CHOICES** Broad. **TIME FRAME** About two weeks. **INSTALLATION** Included. **PROFESSIONAL ADVICE** We got a lot of help, including ideas or alternatives that would save us money. **COST** More than online, less than a designer. We were offered a volume discount. **NOTE** A knowledgeable window specialist brought us a range of treatments, demonstrated them, and explained the pros and cons of each type. We were able to feel every kind of product, hold it to a window, and test its operation. We looked through sample books and asked very specific questions. We were told the consultation, measuring, and installation were all included in the price. (Look under "window treatments" in your local yellow pages.)

## 6. Interior designer

**CHOICES** Anything you can think of, including fabrics available to the trade only. **TIME FRAME** Depends on the designer's availability, fabric stock, and in the case of custom treatments, the workroom's schedule. **INSTALLATION** Included. **PROFESSIONAL ADVICE** A good designer will be able to explain your options, recommend coverings that are appropriate for your use, and most important, help you balance what you want with what you need. **COST** There is a mark-up on everything you buy through a designer. In addition, you pay for her time, which includes measuring, ordering, installation, and on-site "priming," if necessary. **NOTE** We asked designer Deborah Wiener what we could expect if we were to hire her (or any interior designer) to help us choose our window coverings. She said that a competent interior designer will come to your home, provide samples of a wide range of products (and be able to answer any questions), do all the measuring and ordering, and oversee the installation. You will pay for those services, through. So, if you are on a budget and can't imagine customizing your order in any way, Wiener advises you to save your money and not go this route.



## WINDOW SHADINGS

**PROS** Available with both horizontal and vertical vanes ■ Versatile; can be coordinated with furnishings ■ Forgiving; they bounce back when jostled

**CONS** Expensive ■ Difficult to clean ■ Trendy

**COST** Window shadings are \$175-\$239

**TIP** Children have been known to insert tiny objects into the sides, and once lodged, they're nearly impossible to get out.



# Wiring Your Windows, and More

Find out how to automate your window shades and drapes, and learn about a system for controlling all your house lighting, indoors and out

by Deborah Wiener

**A**utomated window coverings have been around for years, but because they're pricey (an upgrade can cost anywhere from \$300 to \$1200 per shade) and because you need an electrician to install some of them, they have not been that popular in the residential market ... until now. It seems homeowners are finding the convenience well worth it.

Why would you want to wire your windows anyway?

- You have a two-story foyer or great room with windows near the ceiling and no way to control the light through those windows.
- You're tired of opening and closing shades on 30-plus windows in your home.
- You want to change the atmosphere of your rooms readily and easily, at different times of the day.

## Batteries are one way to go

Battery-operated systems give homeowners remote operation of inaccessible windows without the additional expense of an electrician to do the installation. There's no wiring involved; batteries control a motor hidden in the headrail. These systems allow you to lift and lower window coverings as well as tilt blinds and verticals. Typically, this option is available only with lightweight fabric shades and blinds.

For windows beyond your reach, there are satellite battery packs available. The batteries are located lower down on the wall, in an inconspicuous place, and connected to the window covering by a small wire. Often the wire can be concealed by running it along the window frame.

The downside to battery-operated systems is that batteries have power limitations and may not be suitable for oversized windows that need greater "pulling" power. And if you don't choose coverings with satellite battery packs, it may also be difficult to do periodic battery replacements.

## Hard-wiring costs more

If you've chosen a heavy shade or blind, if you have oversized windows, or if the remote tends to get lost in your house, hard-wired window coverings may be the best choice for you.

Hard-wired shades are controlled like any other built-in electrical appliance; they're available with battery-operated, hand-held remotes or wall switches—or both. Currently, there aren't as many hard-wiring options as there are battery-powered choices on the market.

You may want to check with your manufacturer or retailer to see if the covering you've chosen can be hard-wired in your home

## Total light control is here

It's now possible to control all the light sources in your home—windows, lamps and light fixtures and even outdoor lighting—with one master control system. The "Radio Ra" system from Lutron allows you to set a different mood in every room—according to the room's use—at the touch of a button. Because the system works with radio frequency, no wiring is involved. You simply replace your existing switches with Radio Ra components.

This system truly is remarkable. You can turn off all the house lights from your bed with a master remote switch, pre-program security lighting or rely on the system's built-in astrological clock to turn outdoor lighting on and off at dusk and dawn. You can raise and lower shades at different times during the day to keep too much sun from damaging furnishings.

And you can do it all at once: pre-program the system for all your needs and one button does it all.

The system can cost many thousands, depending on the size of your home. But I predict that in a few years, a whole-house light management system that incorporates window coverings and lighting will be as routine as two-story windows and recessed lights!

For more information about wiring options for your windows, visit the following Web sites: [www.motorizedsolutions.com](http://www.motorizedsolutions.com) and [www.lutron.com](http://www.lutron.com).