

Window Dressings

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By HILARY WALDMAN, Courant Staff Writer

Nancy Cuomo had no trouble furnishing the elegant 5,400-square-foot home in Durham that her husband built for the family in 2003, but when the windows were still bare two years later, Cuomo knew she needed professional help.

Her frustration was not unusual. Even for the talented do-it-yourselfer, dressing the windows can be daunting. Fabrics, patterns, designs, even rod styles can present a dizzying array of choices.

And unlike furniture and rugs, which you can see, touch and even rearrange on a showroom floor, it can be difficult to visualize how a swatch of fabric or even a ready-made sample will look on your particular window.

"There are so many options today that it can be overwhelming," says Heather J. Paper, author of "Decorating Idea Book" (Taunton Press, \$24.95).

But it does not have to be.

There are several practical considerations when choosing window treatments. Is privacy an issue? Should the treatment block the sun or maximize its light? Is the room formal or informal? Will the windows be a focal point or a subtle accent?

The answers will eliminate many possibilities and help bring you closer to a decision, Paper says.

Budget also helps narrow the choices. Sheer panels covered by a fancier top treatment can make a window look rich, while sparing the cost of yards and yards of expensive drapery fabric, suggests Grace Horelik, owner of Window Expressions by Grace in Farmington.

Adding beads, trim or tassels to less expensive sheers is another way to achieve elegance on a shoestring.

But cost is not the only factor.

In the Cuomos' home, Nancy's husband, Tony, designed and hand-carved the wide moldings that trim each of the many enormous windows. He had one request for window-treatment designer Valentina Guenther, of Valentina's Home Designs in Durham: Don't cover the trim.

To please both clients - Nancy wanted to block the sun that was fading her furniture and rugs - Guenther created pleated panels in coral-and-cream striped silk for the living room. She hung them from a chunky 2-inch rod that extends well beyond the window frame. The extra-long rod allows the Cuomos to gather the curtains on the walls alongside the window, leaving the view and the window trim unobstructed when the drapes are open. When the sun is high, Nancy slides the drapes shut.

Window treatments and hardware can accent or even improve the dimensions of a room. If, for example, a window looks disproportionately small for the room, try hanging the rod at ceiling height to create the illusion of a taller window. If you have transoms above your windows and want to show them off, you can hang a rod along the molding between the transom and the window. In the Cuomo dining room, large rectangular windows are topped by transoms to maximize the natural light. But to fit with the room's grand scale, Guenther envisioned a floor-to-ceiling treatment, covering the transoms to accent the full height of the windows. Then, to let light into the room, Guenther gathered the green-and-cream-striped silk drapes with oversize tiebacks that are more than 7 inches high.

Using large rods, finials and tiebacks on the windows in formal rooms can draw attention to the windows and make them appear larger, Guenther says.

"I would never have thought of the rod size and the rings," says Nancy Cuomo, reflecting on the many details she might have overlooked had she tried to do the windows herself.

With the price of custom window treatments starting at \$500 for a single window and rocketing upward from there, custom is not an option for many homeowners.

Making one's own treatments is the least expensive alternative for decorators at the other end of the budget spectrum. For those blessed with handiness, beautiful window treatments can be had for a fraction of the custom price.

All it takes, say Sue Sampson and Ellen DeLucia, is the ability to run a straight seam on a sewing machine. Because the fabric is usually tightly gathered, window treatments can be very forgiving. "If you have a little tuck in there, nobody can tell," DeLucia said.

Seventeen years ago, Easton neighbors Sampson and DeLucia created their first window-treatment sewing pattern for McCall's.

Since then, other pattern companies have borrowed their idea, and craft stores are stocked with templates for swags, valances and panels that lure do-it-yourselfers with the promise of a pleated valance in two hours.

But is there hope for those of us to whom a sewing machine is an alien object?

Sampson and DeLucia have created a Web-based window-treatment design service that allows customers to select from 15 styles and scores of fabrics. On their website, homedecinasec.com, customers can play with different style and fabric combinations and order swatches by mail. The draperies are manufactured at a workroom at about a third of the price of a custom order.

Several stores, catalogs and websites also offer ready-made or semi-custom window treatments for about two-thirds the cost of calling in a designer. Smith & Noble (smithandnoble.com) allows you to choose styles and fabrics and trim for a custom look. Calico Corners (www.calicocorners.com) offers in-home consultations for customers who live near their stores (there are stores in Avon, Westport and Wilton), and Country Curtains (www.countrycurtains.com) remains a tried and true source of tasteful, traditional styles through its catalog and stores (Avon, South Windsor and Westport).

As with most home-improvement projects, proper measuring is the most important step, and most stores, catalogs and websites offer detailed instructions and in-home help.

Not every window needs a treatment. But unless the view outside is spectacular or the window itself is architecturally striking, it's safe to assume that some sort of shade or fabric accent will dress up just about any frame.

"I call window treatments like icing on a cake," says Grace Horelik. "But this is very important. They bring the room together."

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PHOTO



Tassles

(RICK HARTFORD)



Arched treatment

(RICK HARTFORD)

Stories



Adding A Formal Touch

PHOTO



The toile valance is one of a number that lend an Old World look to the windows in the family's kitchen. Nancy and Tony Cuomo's lush window treatments were designed by Valentina Guenther of Valentina's Home Designs in Durham(www.valentinashomedesigns.com). (RICK HARTFORD)