

# Good Homes Interior-design course

## PART 18: CREATE PERFECT WINDOW TREATMENTS



'Many of us search for a window treatment by meandering through shelves laden with roll upon roll of linen, cotton, velvet and silk fabrics.

Without prior planning, however, a fabric store won't hold all the answers. Your choice of window treatment will affect a room's light, heat and privacy, and budget will also be a factor in your final decision. Blinds, for instance, use much less fabric than double-width curtains so they'll cost less. The key is to make time at the planning stage to ensure you find your ideal choice.'

*Deborah Drew*

Deborah Drew (above), presenter of BBC TV's *DIY SOS*

BBC  
ONE





Use a bold print to create a focal point in a large room.

Curtains in Arcana 2308, £24.50 per m, throw on bed in Ramosa 9627 and 9628, £28 per m, chair covered in Akita 2313, £24.50 per m, cushions in Arcana 2308 and Akita 2313, both £24.50 per m, all Harlequin



▲ **Aercolanium** 150cm wood pole, brackets and finials in powder pink, £320, Byron & Byron



▲ **Hampton** 150cm dark oak pole, brackets and finials in gilt-leaf finish, £490, Byron & Byron



▲ **Wimpole** 150cm dark oak pole, brackets and matching finials, £400, Byron & Byron

## Know your options

Curtains and blinds can be custom-made to your exact requirements or bought off the shelf. Ready-made designs are widely available on the high street and are a cost-effective option, but you will be restricted to a limited range of fabric options and standard sizes only. If you're happy to spend more for a made-to-measure service, many fabric retailers and stores, including John Lewis and Laura Ashley, provide curtain and blind-making services. Alternatively, you can use a mail-order company such as Prêt à Vivre, Eclectics or Hillarys, where the cost includes a home visit to measure the windows and in some instances also includes professional installation. Bespoke designs are the best option if you want decorative headings and embellishments, such as pelmets and swags, or are considering a combination of fabrics.

## Consider DIY

Simple curtains and blinds are quite easy to make yourself. You can stitch ready-made heading tape onto fabric, then all you need to do is pull the cords to create the pleats. This option gives you the greatest choice of fabrics and savings on make-up costs. ➔

## WHAT'S BEST FOR YOUR HOME?

The window treatment you choose depends on the function of the room and the shape of the window. You also need to consider the following:

★ Practical factors will dictate your choice of fabric. For instance, washable ones, like cotton or polyester, are best for rooms where humidity will be likely, such as in kitchens or bathrooms. In south-facing rooms and conservatories, colourfast designs fade less. In a bedroom, thicker fabric and lining help to block out light.

★ Think about how much natural light you want in a room. Heavy

curtains may restrict light, even when they're pulled back. Blinds fitted into a recess will shade the top half of the window unless fully retracted – but you can avoid this by hanging them above the window frame.

★ Consider the length you want. Curtains are more of a focal point when they're full length but, where space is limited, sill-length blinds or curtains may be more

practical. In stairways, kitchens and bathrooms, safe operation must be taken into consideration – flowing curtains can be a fire hazard and restrict movement.

★ Determine the length of your track or pole. This should be the width of your window, plus an additional 30cm (up to 15cm on either side) to allow enough space for the curtains to stack back, but heavier fabrics may need more room.





Make a window look taller by adding a border to the bottom of your curtains.

Made-to-measure Aswan marble curtains with bottom border in Chatsworth Natural, trimmed at the seam with Coma Strawberry, from £302 for a single-width pair of curtains with a 250cm drop, Prêt à Vivre



Use swags to create a frame. Raw silk antique copper curtains, with swags and tails, from £334 for a single-width pair of curtains with a 250cm drop, Prêt à Vivre

## Choose your fabric

Before deciding on a fabric, buy 50cm each of your strongest contenders – or borrow larger pieces from the retailer – to give you a better idea of how the finished curtains will look in your room. If you want a patterned design, think carefully about the scale. A bold floral print, for example, could be overbearing in a small room with low ceilings, while a small motif might be lost in a curtain that covers a large window.

Lining adds weight to fabric, which will make it hang in neater folds and can also have insulating qualities, making the room warmer at night. Blackout lining has a rubberised backing that completely filters out light, so it's ideal for bedrooms and, contrary to its name, comes in white or cream. Alternatively, you can use an attractive fabric as lining to create reversible curtains that look just as good from the outside as they do from inside.

## Pole, track or wire?

Available in wood or metal, curtain poles can be bought off the shelf or made to measure. They are the sturdiest option for heavy fabrics and come in a huge variety of styles, so they work well with classic or modern styles of décor. You can choose from a wide range of finials to attach to each end of the pole, allowing you to add an individual touch.

Tracks are a cheaper alternative to poles. They are operated with a cord so you don't have to handle the curtains when drawing them, but they can be

## MEASURING FOR CURTAINS

If possible, mount the track or pole in place before you start. This should be attached about 5-12cm (2-6in) above the window frame, with the ends projecting approximately 10-15cm (4-5in) beyond each side. Draw up a diagram of your window on paper and make a note of its

dimensions, including the width of the window, the distance from the track or pole to the sill and floor, from the top of the window to the sill and floor and, finally, the width of the wall space on either side of the window, where the curtains will be stacked back when not in use.



◀ Pretty finials add a finishing touch to curtain poles.

Pewter finials (from left): small pine cone, £60, oak leaf, £97, starfish, £55, leaves, £47, branch, £65, all Papilio



prone to sticking and aren't ideal for heavy fabrics. If you are on a budget, two easy and low-cost options for lightweight curtains are to thread them through metal eyelets or hang them from clips attached to tension wire suspended from the ceiling.

## Pelmets, swags or tails?

As well as providing decoration, pelmets are perfect for hiding the workings of a track making a neater, finish for your window. Solid wood pelmets add elegance in formal rooms and come in a range of painted or gilded finishes. You can use fabric-covered pelmets cut in various shapes to create a softer look that's ideal in a bedroom. These can match or co-ordinate with your curtains.

Valances are gathered or pleated versions of a pelmet and are good for more relaxed rooms. They can be shaped, frilled or fringed – but whatever design you choose, make sure it complements the curtain fabric and style of the room.

Horizontal swags and tails that hang over the side of the window can make your curtains a real focal point and are ideal for rooms with tall windows and high ceilings. Drape them over poles or hang them from a pelmet board, then add glamour by adding fringes or braiding and matching tie-backs for a professional finish. Getting the proportions right is key to achieving success with this look, so you'll need to plan carefully – swags should measure one-fifth of the overall curtain length from top to bottom and the tails should be at least twice the length of the swags. ▶



'Bay windows require careful consideration. One option is to hang curtains on a corded track and finish with a pelmet or valance. Alternatively, try pencil-pleat headings on a steel pole bent to fit your bay.'

◀ **Match tie-backs to your curtain pole for a professional finish.** Bay window pole, from £80 for 3m, brackets, from £15.50 each, brass rings, from £2.65 each, bending, £45 per bend, The Bradley Collection

## CALCULATE FABRIC

The amount of fabric you require for your curtains will vary according to the type of heading you choose (see Which Heading?, right).

Gathered headings generally require fabric that is two-and-a-half times as wide as the pole or track, while simple slot or tab-top headings use less fabric – around twice the width of the pole or track.

Multiply the length of the pole or track by the required gathering allowance

(for example, two or two and a half) and divide this figure by the width of the fabric (usually 120-140cm) to give you the number of panels of fabric you'll need for each window. Round it up to the nearest full number. Add a hem allowance of at least 7cm and a heading allowance of 10cm (8cm for the width of the header tape, plus a 2cm seam tucked underneath the tape to prevent fraying) to the overall length.

## WHICH HEADING?

**1** Tab-top headings have fabric loops so the pole can be threaded through them. Also available in contrasting leather or suede, which adds a stylish touch to a contemporary room scheme.

**2** Metal or plastic eyelets also allow the curtain to be threaded onto the pole. They add a modern look and are useful if you want to keep your window treatment simple, or if you have chosen a bold, geometric fabric.

**3** Pencil pleats are a popular heading that suit both modern and traditional settings. A deeper pleated version is also available, which looks particularly stylish on long curtains that are made to cover tall windows.

**4** Tie-top headings allow the curtain to be tied to the pole, which creates a relaxed look that's ideal for cottages. This heading is most suited to curtains that aren't used regularly, as the ties make it difficult to slide the fabric along the pole.

**5** Box pleats are a simple, modern treatment that can be created with special tape that shapes the fabric into neat, flattened boxes. These can also be fluffed out to create cylindrical goblet-shaped pleats.

**6** Triple pleats are also known as French pleats and are ideal if you want your curtains to stack back to the side of the window as far as possible, maximising the amount of daylight that enters the room.

**7** Clips allow curtains to be hung from tension wire and are available in a number of different sizes and finishes. They're great if you're on a tight budget, but are only suited to lightweight fabrics.







## Living & dining rooms

These rooms generally have the largest windows in the house, so you are limited only by your imagination. However, you should consider how much direct light your room gets – in south-facing rooms, the fabric you choose may benefit from protective lining to help block out sunlight, while dark rooms are best teamed with a simple dressing made from a lightweight fabric. Awkwardly shaped windows may look neater with a made-to-measure blind or shutters.

## Children's bedrooms

The sleep patterns of children can easily be disturbed by summer's lighter nights, so it helps to use a combination of Roman blinds and curtains or line curtains with blackout fabric in kids' rooms. Anna French, Malabar, Harlequin and Voyage all have collections of colourful fabrics designed for children.

## Find the right blinds

Blinds can be ordered to fit different window shapes. Effective at blocking out light, they work well on their own, especially in kitchens and bathrooms, or can be combined with curtains for a decorative effect. There are various different kinds.

**Roman** blinds are fabric panels that are drawn up into a series of deep horizontal folds supported by batons. They are lowered and lifted by cords threaded through rings attached to the batons. They're an elegant, unfussy and practical option for any room and blend with a variety of decorative styles. You can have them made to measure, buy ready-made versions or make them yourself with a blind-making kit, available from John Lewis, Rufflette or Merrick & Day.

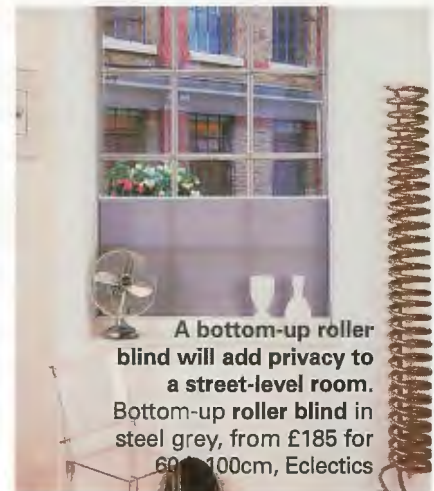
Complement a roller blind's fabric with a co-ordinating border. Bespoke roller blinds, from £90 for 25 x 25cm, Laura Ashley



▲ **Roman blinds are a great option for bay windows.** Roman blinds in Fairlawn (green), £61 per m, Jane Churchill



Layered blinds allow you to control how much light enters the room. Zante Roman blind, from £73.84, Rufflette



A bottom-up roller blind will add privacy to a street-level room. Bottom-up roller blind in steel grey, from £185 for 60 x 100cm, Eclectics

## MAKE SURE YOUR BLIND FITS

If you want your blind to fit into a recess, ensure you measure the width of the recess at the top, centre and bottom in case there are any irregularities, as is often the case in

older properties. Use the shortest measurement for the width, to ensure the blind will be fit in the space, then do the same for the length. If you're fitting blinds

outside the recess, use your sill as a guide for the width, and hang the blinds 5-30cm above the window. Decide where you want the baton to go and measure from there to the sill.



**Roller** blinds are made from stiffened fabric that's wound round a roller and are weighted when pulled down at the base with a wooden lath. With their clean, simple lines, they're a practical choice for narrow windows and a simple option for modern interiors. They come in a range of fabrics and can be custom-made or bought ready-made.

**Bottom-up** blinds are a useful version of the roller that can be pulled up from the base and secured in place at any point on the window. They provide privacy without blocking out light completely, so are especially useful for overlooked rooms that require privacy but also plenty of light.

**Roll-up** blinds are made from two panels of fabric and are a mix of the roller and Roman styles. They roll up from the base to reveal a contrasting reverse fabric and are a stylish yet simple option, popular in kitchens and bathrooms. They also come in pinoleum, a material traditionally made from fine strips of pine that are sewn together. Light filters through the weave, creating a soft, dappled effect, making this a popular choice in rooms where good overall shading is needed, such as conservatories.

**Venetian** blinds come with either wood or aluminium slats, linked with cord or tape. By pulling a cord, the slats can be angled to filter as little or as much light as required, and this flexibility makes Venetians popular for studies or conservatories. They can be custom designed or bought ready-made.

**Vertical** blinds have slats that hang vertically from a head rail and can be angled, with the added advantage that they can be pulled back completely to the side, making them ideal for French windows. Available in a wide range of materials, from stiffened fabric to wood and aluminium, they are generally custom-made to fit the window.

Get back to nature with a subtle leaf patterned fabric. Roll-up blind made from Nature Study linen and Lichen plain check, both £35 per m, Vanessa Arbuthnott



Use wooden blinds to add warm tones in a white bathroom. Rosewood Venetian blind, from £90 for 25 x 25cm, Laura Ashley



'A popular choice for kitchens, Venetian blinds are available in a variety of materials such as natural and painted wood or aluminium, with 25mm or 50mm slats. The only downside of this particular type of blind is that they can trap a lot of dust and need regular cleaning.'

Choose a modern pull cord for a finishing touch.

From left: glass icicle, £26.95, glass ball, £18.95, glass cylinder, £23.95, leather cylinder in Black, Chocolate and Ivory, £22.95 each, aluminium cube, £12.50, all New House Textiles





## What's best for kitchens?

Kitchens are prone to clutter and condensation, so window treatments should be neat and waterproof above all else. Blinds take up the least amount of room, are easy to keep clean and work well with any style of unit. If you prefer curtains, choose a simple, gathered heading on a pole. If you have French windows, dress them with floor-length curtains made from a lightweight, washable material that can be tied back at the sides – avoid billowing fabric as it could be a fire hazard.

## Options for bathrooms

Privacy is essential in bathrooms. Avoid semi-sheer curtains or blinds, as they will be see-through at night when the lights are on. Opt instead for a roller, bottom-up or roll-up blind, or sill-length curtains or shutters. When choosing fabric for a blind, take into account the high levels of humidity in bathrooms.

Another option is opaque window film, which is available in sheet form and can be bought imprinted with various patterns. It can be cut to the size of the window pane and smoothed into place, creating the look of etched glass. Try mail-order companies such as Brume, House Goggles or Etch=FX.

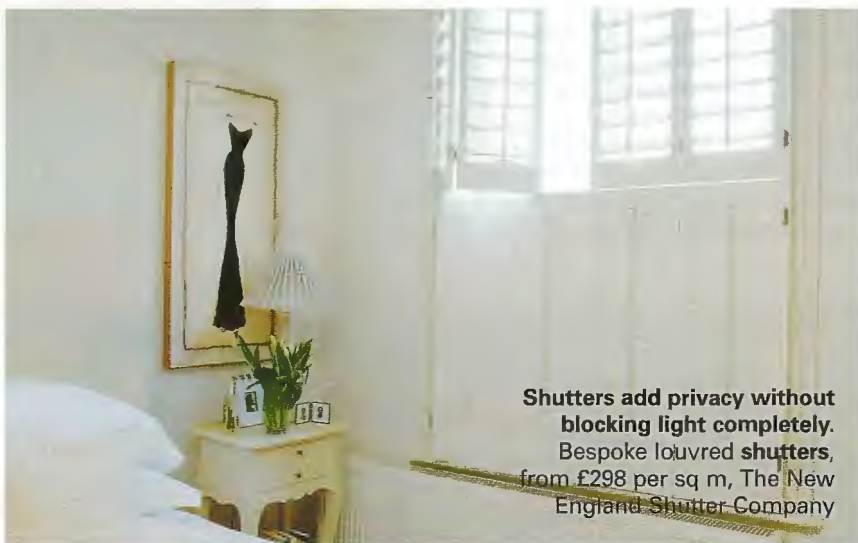
## Consider shutters

Traditional shutters with flat, solid, hinged timber panels are most often found in Victorian properties. These days, louvred designs are generally more sought after because they are more flexible, thanks to adjustable slats that can vary the amount of light entering the room. Both designs can be custom made from wood or MDF and painted in your choice of colours.



**Folding shutters are perfect for tall bathroom windows.** Bespoke teak shutters, from £298 per sq m, New England Shutter Company

**Simple, horizontal Venetians suit a modern kitchen.** Silhouette Venetian blind, from £146 for 610 x 1,016mm, Luxaflex



**Shutters add privacy without blocking light completely.** Bespoke louvred shutters, from £298 per sq m, The New England Shutter Company

## ADVICE FOR AWKWARD WINDOWS

Make a **small window** look larger by extending curtains beyond the sides of the frame. If there's space above the windows, fix a deep pelmet so it sits just above the top of the frame to add height. Full-length curtains with vertical stripes will give an illusion of length.

Preserve the character of an **arched window** with a matching arched pelmet that follows the curve of the window. If

you extend the pelmet beyond each side of the window, you can fix a straight track underneath it. The curtains will open and close normally without losing the effect of the arches.

For a **square or round bay window**, wrought-iron poles are the most cost effective. These are made-to-measure with special brackets that allow C-shaped rings to pass over them. Alternatively, mount a

corded track to a lath (board) and mould it to the shape of the bay. You can then fix a 5cm strip or 'fascia' covered in fabric to the lath, to hide the track when the curtains are opened.

If you have **different sized or shaped windows** on the same wall, choose a treatment to suit the size and proportion of each window, but don't mix heading styles, as this will make the windows look uneven.





◀ Choose a colourful design. Larkfield single tassel in red/beige, £68, Jane Churchill

◀ Add texture with feathers and beads. Double tassel, £25, Laura Ashley

▲ Perfect for a neutral scheme. Mother-of-pearl and chocolate tassel, £12.99, Rosebys

### Co-ordinate accessories

Tie backs that match the curtain fabric are a good choice for traditional window treatments in a formal room scheme. They can be decorated with braids, cord and tassels. Increasingly popular, jewelled tie backs and heading clips decorated with shells, pebbles and Perspex baubles add a pretty touch to lightweight curtain fabrics.

Wood, metal or glass holdbacks drilled into the wall allow the curtain fabric to be gently draped over them and are a modern, sophisticated alternative to fabric tie backs. They come in a variety of finishes to match curtain poles or blend with the rest of your décor.

### Use sliding panels

Inspired by the paper screens popular in Japan, full-length sliding panels are weighted at the bottom and hung from slim tracks fitted to the ceiling so they can be drawn open and closed like curtains. A novel way to create privacy in a home with wide patio windows, they also make great room dividers.



Use decorative sliding panels to divide a large room into separate areas. Bespoke Kyoto sliding panel in Briar Honeycomb, £616, Eclectics



Decorate plain curtains with interesting accessories. Aurelia tie backs, £28 each, Laura Ashley



## ESSENTIAL CONTACTS

- ★ **Luxaflex** (0800 652 7799; [www.luxaflex.co.uk](http://www.luxaflex.co.uk)) is the UK's largest manufacturer of made-to-measure blinds. Instructions on how to fit them are also available on its website.
- ★ **Hilarys** (0800 916 6516; [www.hilarys.co.uk](http://www.hilarys.co.uk)) sells a range of blinds and shutters. All prices include measuring, making and fitting.
- ★ **Marks & Spencer** (0845 603 1603; [www.marksandspencer.com](http://www.marksandspencer.com)) stocks both ready-made and made-to-order curtains and blinds.
- ★ **Laura Ashley** (0870 562 2116; [www.lauraashley.com](http://www.lauraashley.com)) offers an Express Service that can supply curtains or blinds within seven days.
- ★ **Merrick & Day** (0870 757 0980; [www.merrick-day.com](http://www.merrick-day.com)) sells a range of curtain accessories and fittings. The company also runs curtain-making courses from its offices in Lincolnshire.
- ★ **John Lewis** (0845 604 9049; [www.johnlewis.com](http://www.johnlewis.com)) stores offer a curtain- and blind-making service that includes measuring and fitting.
- ★ **Prêt à Vivre** (0845 130 5161; [www.pretavivre.com](http://www.pretavivre.com)) provides bespoke window dressings. Measuring and installation available on request.
- ★ **Simple Curtains** by Katrin Cargill (£12.99, Ryland Peters & Small) offers easy-to-follow, step-by-step curtain-making instructions.

NEXT ISSUE  
CREATE AN OPEN-PLAN  
LIVING SPACE