The
Complete Book
of

CURTAINS

DRAPES,

and

BLINDS

Design Ideas and
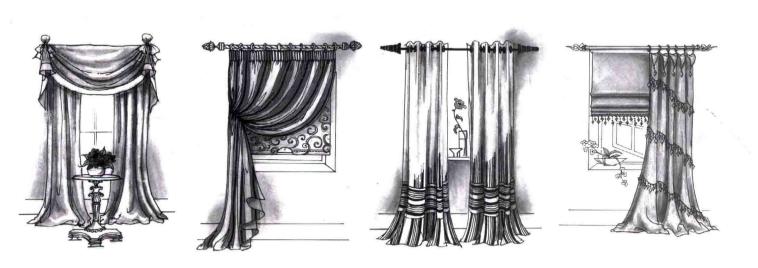Basic Techniques for
Window Treatments

WENDY BAKER

The Complete Book of Curtains, Drapes & Blinds

Design ideas for every type of window treatment

Wendy Baker

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How to use this book...

This is a giant book of ideas for window coverings. I know for sure that it will solve all your window problems and maybe a few others along the way! If you know my Sketchbooks—and most decorators have at least one of them in their library—then you will know that my bo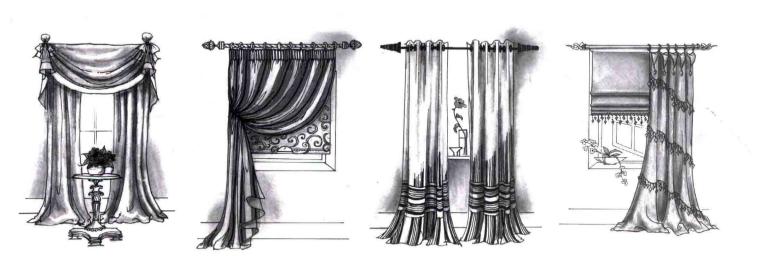oks are just filled with ideas for window coverings. These are always in the form of black line sketches—this way you can see the design clearly—and there are very few words. My books are not really for reading, they are there to lead you through the complicated business of selecting the right drapes or shade for a particular style of window.

The problem these days is that there is so much to choose from. Never have there been so many poles and finials on the market, never have the fabrics been so colorful and the prints so inspiring, the textures so touchable. It must seem daunting to be faced with so many choices when all you want is a simple pair of drapes—and this is where my book comes in. Everything that you need to know about selecting the best fabric, the correct pole and the right style for almost any window type is clearly shown in these pages. If you want to see what the design will look like in your color scheme, then color it yourself just like a painting book.

Chapter One is all about getting started. Here you will find information on making an initial plan of action, creating the perfect color scheme and choosing the right general style of drapery or shade for many different window situations. This section also has information about the different types of fabric that will be suitable for window coverings, and suggests how each could best be used.

Chapter Two covers all the essential information that will help you make your initial choices. In this chapter you will find everything you need to know about the different drapery systems currently on the market. It also looks at some of the finial designs available for drapery poles, and the basic variations for drape and valance headings, and for pelmets.

In Chapter 3 we are looking at those little finishing touches that will make your drapes extra special—trims, ropes, tassels, tie-backs and hold-backs. Most of the basic types are illustrated here, although each will come in an endless selection of colorways and with some minor variations. At the end of this chapter you will find a selection of full drapery illustrations, which will give you some great ideas as to how the trims and other finishing touches can be used to make your drapes unique.

In the next chapter we move on to headings. The heading you use will set the style of your drapes, so it is vital that you spend some time here to choose exactly the right design for your room. All the different heading types are featured actually on drapes, valance or pelmet, with the correct drapery system in place, so you can really get an idea of the full effect you might be able to achieve.

Chapter 5 covers a range of drapery designs. Here we look at both traditional and modern styles, using swags and tails, how to treat bay windows, Italian stringing, dress curtains, and some options for voiles. The captions highlight the main elements that are creating the look, so you will find it easy to understand how to get the same kind of effect yourself.

Of course some windows are just not suitable for drapes, so in Chapter 6 we look at some other options for window treatments. In this chapter you will find information and illustrations covering panels, café curtains, portières, difficult windows and other window dressing ideas.

If you are more interested in shades and blinds, go to Chapter 7. Again there are clear illustrations of all the basic shade types: Roman; Austrian; Linen fold; Cascade; Oriental; and London. In addition, this chapter also covers lambrequins and shutters, including wooden Venetian shades and shades for Velux® windows.

In the bedroom the drapes are often coordinated with the bed, so in Chapter 8 you will find some design ideas for many different bed styles, as well as a host of options for children's rooms.

Choosing exactly the right accessories can make all the difference to an interior design scheme. In Chapter 9 we look at some of the main accessories you could use, such as table covers, screens, pillows, throws, rugs and even flowers.

Finally, in Chapter 10, you will find the basic skills and techniques needed to create most of the drapes and shades shown in this book. There are entire books on drapery and shade making so this skills section cannot be completely comprehensive, but it will certainly allow you to make most of the designs yourself.

When you have chosen a couple of designs you think might work in your room, try coloring them up in the colors of the fabrics you will be using to see the full effect. You don't have to be an artist to do this, so don't be afraid! You can also try mixing and matching elements—although with the choice available in these pages I would be surprised if there wasn't something exactly right...

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Getting Started

Design plan...

Whether you are an interior decorator or a homeowner, the best advice anyone can give you before you tackle a new design project is: take your time; make a list of the basic essentials. Ask yourself a few questions... Do you have a clean slate or must you work around furniture that you already have, even if you don't really like it? Is your choice of fabric dependent on the color of your carpets? Do you have enough money to do the job properly, or will you have to make compromises? This may lead to some hard decisions, but it is essential to consider all these things at the start—if you begin without a plan you can go around in circles and that will work out expensive in the long run.

First, decide what sort of feel you want to achieve in the room—spacious and minimal with a loft feel, perhaps, or country cozy with a homemade look. Then look at what you are working with and how you could achieve the feel you want. For instance, perhaps the room is north-facing with cold light, or the ceilings are tall so it seems unfriendly. You can change the feel in the north-facing room by choosing a warm-toned fabric, perhaps with a texture, and emphasize those tall ceilings by selecting a fabric in a cool color, such as aqua or lime green, to give a feeling of airiness and space.

The first consideration in any interior design scheme is generally the flooring. If you need to keep the existing flooring find a spare piece if possible, so you can include it in your color board. If you can start from scratch, have plain wood floors or a neutral carpet and cover with simple rugs, which can easily be changed when you want a different look. Rugs these days are wonderful and not that expensive.

The next priority is your furniture and how it will fit in with your new design. Sometimes existing furniture doesn't work with a different color scheme and it can be costly to buy new. There are ways to minimize the effect of existing items of course—you could use throws to cover them up, or have them reupholstered. However, sometimes a clean sweep is the best option... and you can always photograph unwanted pieces and sell them on eBay! If you are keeping furniture and the upholstery is nearly new, again find a similar sample, or something similar, for your color board.

Finally, look at the walls. In general, changing the wall color will be the basis of your new scheme, but if you have a very special wallcovering that you need to retain you will need to include a sample—or something similar—on your color board.

The right color scheme...

My advice to anyone when choosing a color scheme is to play down the color palette to begin with—you can always add stronger colors as the scheme progresses. It might be fun at first to have a lime green wall and purple rugs scattered around, but six months later you will probably wish you had been a tiny bit more reserved in your color choices! It really is best to go for more muted tones. I don't mean beige, beige and more beige; perhaps try gray for a change—most colors work well with it. I created a lovely scheme with smoky blue for drapes and bed covers, walls two tones lighter and paintwork in a soft stone color. Add a rug in the same colors plus a muted pink thread running through the design, and it all looked dreamy.

If you are starting from scratch, choose neutral colors for the basics such as carpets and walls and a deeper tone for drapes and upholstery. Brighter items, such as pillows, can then be added later for emphasis.

Making a color board

The basis for creating any new color scheme is a color board. This doesn't have to be anything fancy, simply a board with samples of all the major items in the room, in the correct colors and approximately the right proportions in relation to each other. If you can't include samples of the actual carpet or wallcovering, something similar in the same color and tone will do. You can usually get small cuttings of fabric from suppliers before buying. When you have made your board, stand back and judge the overall effect. You are looking to achieve a generally muted effect, with perhaps just one or two stronger items to lift the scheme and prevent it being boring. Try to judge the color board in the actual room—different lighting conditions can make quite a difference.

Existing decor

If you are moving into a new house or flat and the walls are newly painted they will probably be white. Developers must buy cheap white paint in huge cans and they seem to slap it on everywhere—but at least this is better than ten years ago when everything was painted magnolia!
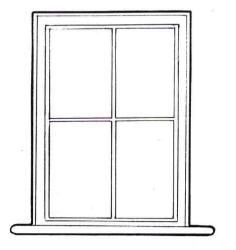
If you have a low budget you may decide to save money by "living" with the existing wall color but personally I think this is false economy. It doesn't take very long or cost much to repaint walls, then at least you are starting with the right base color. Perhaps just use a neutral color to start with—don't try to be too clever.

If your upholstery doesn't work with your new wall colors then throw a linen cover or rug over it, until you can afford to change or reupholster it. Otherwise don't tie yourself down with old baggage—move on. No, you can't alter those old drapes to fit your new windows: nothing looks worse than drapes that have been let down or that don't meet in the middle. Manage without drapes for a while until you have the money to do things properly. You can always hang a wonderful colored shawl at the bedroom window temporarily—and you might end up by preferring it like that anyway.

The right style of drapes or shades

It's important to consider the shape, size and function of your window before you decide on the style of drapery or shade to use. Below are a few window styles and some basic guidelines to bear in mind—there are many more sizes and shapes to consider, but if you use this as a rough guide you won't go far wrong.

Basic window

▶ A pair of simple drapes on a pole
▶ Short or café-style drapes
▶ A simple shade so as not to overpower the window

Recessed window

▶ Blinds inside the recess should be in translucent fabrics
▶ Pole or pelmet fixed on the outside of the recess—but only if there is enough space either side of the window to stack curtains when in the open position
▶ Short curtains on a swing-arm bracket

Cottage style

▶ Long or short drapes on a pole, but clearing the window frame to let in the maximum light
▶ Shades should be fixed clear of the window frame to allow maximum light

Tips

Never put short drapes on a Georgian window—in fact I don't really like to use short drapes anywhere, unless it is absolutely necessary.
For some ideas on how to treat difficult windows, see Chapter 6.