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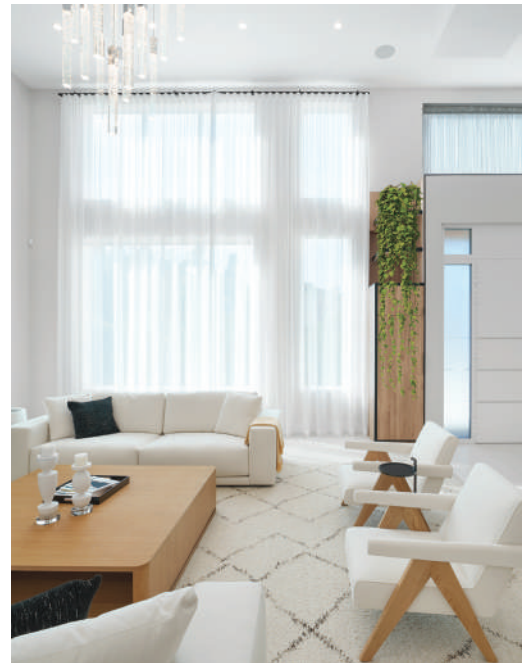
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ON THE COVER:

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Project: Private Residence in Los Angeles, California

Designer + Fabricator: Sunny Sun of Sunrise Window Fashion Inc.

Installer: Larry Fu and Fu's Drapery Installation Team



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Grace McNamara, Publisher

Soak Up the Shade

As summer takes center stage, windows become more than architectural features—they're design opportunities. They frame natural light, shape interior ambience and bridge the indoors with the outdoors. For interior designers and window treatment professionals, this is the season to shine—literally and figuratively.

Summer demands a nuanced approach: managing heat and glare while enhancing the sensory experience of a space. This year, the industry is seeing an exciting convergence of aesthetic innovation and functional performance, both inside and out.

Designers are leaning into layered solutions—sheer drapery over roller shades, or roman shades paired with side panels—to offer versatility throughout the day. Motorization and automation, once a luxury, are now a must-have in many projects, especially in sun-drenched spaces. Clients expect seamless control with minimal visual interruption.

More designers are stepping outdoors, incorporating functional shading elements into the exterior plan: motorized awnings, decorative shutters and solar screens that cool interiors while enhancing a home's visual interest. If you're not embracing exterior solutions, you're leaving money on the table.

This issue is loaded with ideas and inspiration to keep your business strong during these warm summer months.

Enjoy!

Grace

Grace McNamara
Publisher
Window Fashion VISION

Grilled Steak Salad with Garlic-Balsamic Dressing

Serves 4

INGREDIENTS

For the Dressing:

- 4 garlic cloves, smashed
- ½ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- ⅓ cup balsamic vinegar
- ½ tsp. granulated sugar
- ½ tsp. kosher salt
- ¼ tsp. freshly ground black pepper

For the Salad:

- 1 medium red onion, sliced into ½" rounds
- 1 tsp. olive oil
- Kosher salt and black pepper
- 1¼ lb. boneless rib-eye steak
- 5 oz. baby arugula or spinach (or a mix)
- 1 avocado, sliced
- 1 cup cherry tomatoes, halved
- 4 oz. crumbled blue cheese
- Torn fresh basil leaves, for garnish

INSTRUCTIONS

1. In a small saucepan, heat the olive oil and garlic over medium until the garlic is softened and fragrant, about 5-7 minutes. Let cool slightly, then transfer to a blender. Add the balsamic vinegar, sugar, salt, and pepper and blend until smooth and creamy. Store in a sealed jar in the fridge until ready to use. Dressing can be made up to 1 week in advance.
2. Preheat your grill to medium-high. Lightly coat the onion slices with olive oil and sprinkle with salt. Season the steak generously with salt and pepper. Grill the onions for 2-3 minutes on each side, or until nicely charred. Grill the steak for about 6 minutes per side, or until it reaches 130°F for medium-rare. Let the steak rest for a few minutes before slicing thinly across the grain.
3. Arrange the greens on a large serving platter or bowl. Layer on the sliced steak, grilled onions, avocado, tomatoes, and blue cheese. Finish with a handful of fresh basil and a generous drizzle of the garlic-balsamic dressing.

Adapted from Delish.com





A MOTOR Built for the Future

Our newest Somfy-backed platform, Zigbee, features an enhanced protocol for simpler install, app-based sales support, and easy integration into home automation solutions for a surefire entry to selling motors.

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draperathome.com



Smooth Moves



In this multimillion-dollar smart home in Los Angeles, high tech meets high design—especially in the formal living room, where motorized window treatments deliver comfort, privacy and style at the push of a button.

With soaring ceilings and an asymmetrical window layout, the space needed a solution that was both functional and beautiful. Designer Sunny Sun, a 2025 Grace Design Awards recipient, of Sunrise Window Fashion Inc. chose ripplefold sheers in a faux linen from Luxury Fabrics, custom fabricated to soften the light while highlighting the room's clean lines and modern architecture.

Mounted on custom black iron traverse rods, the drapery operates using Forest Drapery Hardware's Shuttle HD motorized track system. Tucked into a ceiling recess, the track stays out of sight while the fabric glides open and closed with quiet precision. Forest's Diamond Sense remote keeps control simple, and the system integrates with the home's broader smart technology to allow automated adjustments throughout the day.

Motorized roller shades on the lower windows add an extra layer of privacy without interrupting the clean, open aesthetic. There are no cords or clutter, just smooth performance and sleek design that fits effortlessly into the space.

"The goal was to achieve a balance of privacy and natural light with a clean, modern aesthetic that integrates with the home's smart automation system," said Sun.

From custom panel widths to hidden hardware, every detail was tailored to the space. The result is a seamless blend of form and function, designed to think for itself—a signature of Sun's award-winning work.



Designer and Fabricator: Sunny Sun of Sunrise Window Fashion Inc.

Photography: Aaron Liu

Installer: Larry Fu and Fu's Drapery Installation Team

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NEW AND NOTEWORTHY



Stitch Perfect

Panarea by Élitis brings playful precision to indoor-outdoor living. Woven in a jacquard that mimics hand embroidery, its bold stripes and geometric motifs shift softly in color for a layered, textural effect. Equal parts artful and durable, it's a fresh spin on performance fabric with a fashion-forward edge.

Elitis.fr

Glow Anywhere

Visual Comfort's collection of outdoor rechargeable lamps brings signature style to spaces without outlets. Designed by Sean Lavin, the cordless wet-rated designs offer up to 14 hours of LED illumination in seven silhouettes and three finish options, including hand-rubbed antique brass. With indoor looks and outdoor durability, they're made to move from poolside to patio to tablespace with ease.

VisualComfort.com



Fresh Start

Sunbrella is making cleanup a breeze with a new line of fabric care products made specifically for outdoor living. The collection includes a general Multi-Purpose Cleaner, targeted Stain Remover and Mildew Cleaner—each designed to lift dirt, fight grime and extend the life of outdoor fabrics. Whether you're freshening up cushions, umbrellas or awnings, these easy-to-use sprays help keep your setup looking crisp and carefree all season long.

Sunbrella.com

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Discover Smarter Shade Control

automateshades.com



Greener by Design

Rollease Acmeda's roller shade hardware systems are now Environmental Product Declaration certified, giving designers and builders verified insight into the product's environmental impact. Based on a full Life Cycle Assessment, the certification supports green building goals while maintaining the brand's high-performance standards. With flexible mounting options and multiple configurations, these systems are built to integrate seamlessly into any space while supporting sustainability.

RolleaseAcmeda.com



Privacy with a View

Smart glass is changing the way we think about privacy and light control at home. With the tap of a button or a voice command, this high-tech glass shifts from clear to frosted, offering instant privacy without blocking natural light. Available as fully integrated panels or retrofit films, it's a sleek solution for bathrooms, bedrooms, home gyms and more. Bonus: It can even help regulate indoor temps by reducing glare and solar heat gain.

SmartGlassInternational.com

All Under One Roof

Alendel Fabrics has officially opened the doors to its new Toronto headquarters, a 45,500-square-foot space that brings everything together. The purpose-built facility combines sleek offices, a modern distribution center and a sunlit showroom that highlights the brand's signature fabrics and curated hardware lines. Designed with Ware Malcomb, the space blends residential warmth with commercial edge and sets the scene for Alendel's continued growth.

AlendelFabrics.com



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Step-by-Step Guide

How to Make a Pillow with Double-Sided Mitered Corners Using a Striped Fabric

BY LINDA TULLY

This tailored pillow features precise double-sided miters that make a bold statement—especially when using striped fabric. In this how-to, Linda Tully shares her process, including expert tips for stripe alignment, pressing and sewing crisp corners with confidence. The project was created in response to a follower request, and we're always happy to spotlight the techniques you want to learn! A full video tutorial with detailed explanations for each step will be posted on Linda's YouTube channel, [YouTube.com@TullyDraperyShop](https://www.youtube.com/TullyDraperyShop), for those who prefer to follow along visually.



Step 1: Cut flange fabric 4" wide for a 1.5" finished flange size.

Step 2: Fold it in half and press. This gives you 2" of fabric to work with: the 1.5" flange plus .5" for seam allowance.

Step 3: To find where the stripes will match at the 45-degree miter, first fold over the flange and line up the stripes.

Step 4: Press the folded edge, then use an L ruler to square the outer edges and line up the creased fold inside the ruler.

Step 5: Open the flange to reveal the miter and align it with the adjacent edge of the L ruler to ensure everything stays square. Once aligned, press it into place. These creases will be vital in the next steps.

Step 6: Continue to set all four corners.

Step 7: Plan the pillow size according to the measurements inside the frame of the flange and add seam allowances.

Step 8: Cut the pillow front and back pieces according to your zipper plan.

Step 9: If desired, add a decorative flower appliqué from RM COCO fabric for a fun, custom touch.

Step 10: Now, you're ready to sew the miters. Open each corner (one at a time or all at once), then fold the right sides together to reveal the angles you already pressed.

Step 11: Draw pencil lines over the angles for accuracy and mark dashes .5" up from the edges. This is where you stop sewing to leave an opening for your seam allowances.

Step 12: Sew over the pencil lines and pivot at the tip. Backstitch before and after the tip, and at the beginning and end near the dashes.

Step 13: Cut off excess fabric.

Step 14: Continue sewing the other three corners. Clip extra fabric, press seams open and turn it right side out.

Step 15: The flange is now complete. Serge raw edges if desired.

Step 16: Now, you're ready to attach the flange to the pillow front. First, pin the flange in place.

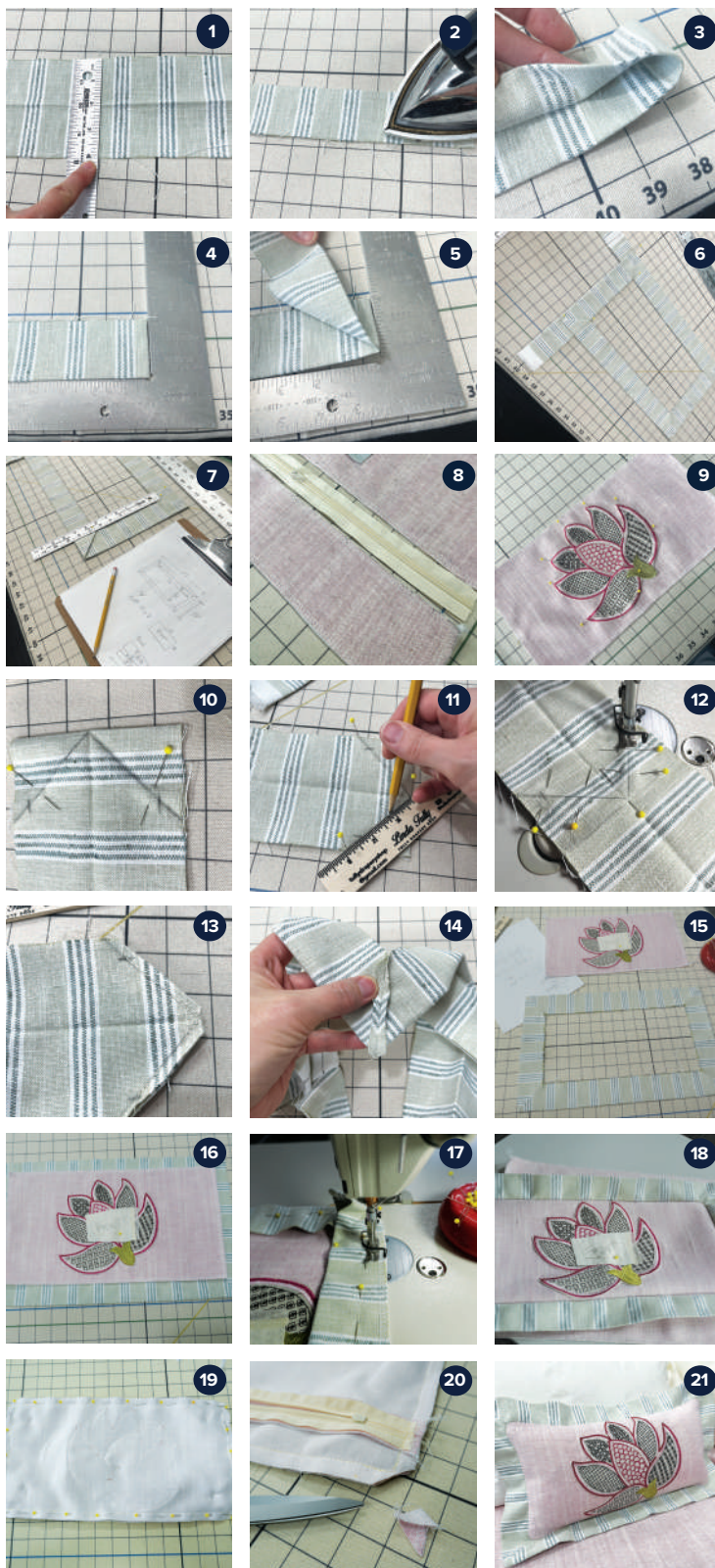
Step 17: Sew the layers together. Use a welt or zipper foot to get close to the corners.

Step 18: At this stage, the pillow front and flange are fully assembled. Sew in the zipper before attaching the back. Then, pin the flange corners down to reduce bulk and prep for adding the back piece.

Step 19: Pin the front and back together. Sew around all four sides, then use the zipper to turn it right side out.

Step 20: Clip corners to reduce bulk, then turn and press the finished pillow.

Step 21: Stuff it with an insert and rest your head on the finished product!



Located in Temple, Texas, **Linda Tully** creates bespoke window treatments and bedding specifically designed and fabricated for every project through her workroom Tully Drapery Shop. She first started in the business with Custom Coverings drapery workroom in 2000. She is a former IWCE speaker and has won many awards. Many of her award-winning rooms have been published in books and magazines. Linda is accomplished at designing, selling and fabricating all styles of window treatments. She has lived and worked in the interior design industry in nine states in the U.S., giving her valuable knowledge about regional styles and architecture.

» TullyDraperyShop.com

WIRED FOR THE FUTURE

Smart shades are becoming the new standard. Stay sharp, stay booked and don't get left behind.

BY ROGER MAGALHAES

Some days, it feels like the window covering world is moving faster than we can hang a shade. One moment, you're feeling confident after perfectly installing a cordless system. You know your stuff. The next, a client is asking if their blackout shade can talk to their smart speaker, adjust based on the time of day and maybe even help them sleep better by syncing with their internal clock.

Motorization and smart home integration? They're not just extra features anymore. They're becoming standard issue. And if you're not getting comfortable with them now, you're not just falling behind—you could be putting your business at serious risk down the road. It's a tough pill to swallow, maybe, but facing facts is the first step.

Time for a Reality Check

I've been doing this for more than 20 years, and I've seen products and trends come and go. But the biggest hurdle I see good pros facing? Resisting the evolution of the trade.

It's totally natural to get comfortable with what we know best. Cord loops? Got it. Drapery rods? Piece of cake. But when it comes to programming a shade with an app, connecting it to a home network or talking about Zigbee versus Z-Wave, it can feel like suddenly you're handed instructions written in a foreign language.

Here's the simple truth: The market isn't waiting for us to catch up. Clients today want convenience, seamless operation, quiet performance and systems that simplify their lives. If you can't deliver that, someone else will.

You Can't Afford to Ignore This

Forget the idea that smart home shades are just for mansions or tech fanatics. That ship has sailed.

Smart thermostats, video doorbells and voice assistants are showing up in average homes everywhere. The technology that powers smart homes (Zigbee, Z-Wave, Wi-Fi, Matter) is becoming the standard way things connect. As that happens, people just expect their window coverings to plug into that world too.

What does that mean for us? Motorization is quickly becoming the starting point, not the fancy upgrade. If you're not learning the ropes of automation now, you're building your career on a foundation that's, frankly, starting to crumble.

Nobody expects you to become an IT expert overnight. But you absolutely need to know how to install a motor properly, get it talking to its remote or hub and handle the basic steps of connecting it to a home system. And, yes, you need to troubleshoot common issues without hitting the panic button or calling someone else to bail you out on the job site.

Knowledge Is Your Best Investment

You know what gives you real security in this industry? Skills. The more problems you can confidently solve, especially the new kinds of problems clients have, the more valuable you become.

For us installers specifically, this shift means a new level of engagement on every job site. We're no longer just securing brackets and dressing fabric—we are the critical bridge. We're the bridge that empowers the dealer to confidently make the sale, assuring clients that their smart home vision is not just a dream but an achievable reality. And we are the direct link, the hands-on experts who ensure the product doesn't just look good but integrates flawlessly into the client's connected home, creating that seamless experience for the final consumer. Being the one who can confidently set up the motor, pair it with the client's system and troubleshoot any hiccups is what elevates us from simply "the installer" to the essential smart home solution provider right there on the ground. It's about connecting the dots, literally and figuratively, and becoming the go-to person for flawless operation and, ultimately, delighted customers.

Practical Steps to Stay on Top of Your Game

Feeling a little overwhelmed? That's normal. The key is to approach it step-by-step. Here's how you can stay current without feeling like you need a degree in rocket science:

- 1. Start Somewhere and Stick with It:** Don't try to learn every motor system on the market at once. Pick one or two major brands you like or see often in your area. Focus on truly mastering their core products, installation methods and programming before branching out.
- 2. Get Friendly with the Apps:** Modern motorization relies heavily on mobile apps. Get the apps for the systems you're learning. If you can, get a demo motor and practice setting it up, pairing it and programming it on your own time. Figuring things out in your workshop or living room is a lot less stressful than doing it live at a client's house with the clock ticking.
- 3. Go to Training!:** Manufacturer and distributor training events, whether online or in-person, are your best friends here. They're designed to teach you what you need to know, often with hands-on examples. Learning the right way in a class beats trying to muddle through the instructions on a ladder.
- 4. Adopt the "Never Stop Learning" Mindset:** This isn't just a catchphrase, it's essential for survival and growth. Technology keeps moving, so we need to keep learning. Dedicate a little time each week. Maybe read an industry article, watch a quick demo video or listen to a podcast about smart home tech. Small, consistent effort makes a huge difference.

- 5. Don't Be Afraid to Ask Questions:** Lean on the resources available. Online forums, industry groups, manufacturer tech support, even reaching out to peers you respect, ask questions! Learning out loud and seeking help when you need it is smart business, not a sign of weakness.

Remember the 'Why'

It's easy to get focused on the wires, motors and apps, but let's remember what motorized shades really do. They aren't just gadgets. They are powerful tools that make a real difference in people's lives.

Think about your clients who are older or have mobility challenges: Motorization gives them back control and independence. Think about young families needing precise light control for napping kids. Think about how automated shades can help manage heat and save energy, making homes more comfortable and efficient.

Your job isn't just the technical install. It's about understanding your clients' lives and using technology to make them better. That human element is why this work is so rewarding, and automation is a big part of delivering that enhanced living experience.

Are You on the Train or Watching It Leave?

Technology will keep evolving, that's a given. But here's the great news: so can you. We have the ability to learn, adapt and stay relevant, no matter how fast things change. So next time you see an opportunity to learn more about motorization or smart home integration, don't shy away. Ask yourself the important question:

"Do I want to be the last person selling manual shades, maybe wishing I'd learned the new tech ... or the go-to expert who clients call for the latest and greatest comfort and control?"

The future of window coverings isn't just around the corner. It's already here. To be a part of it, your shades need intelligence. And, just as importantly, so do you. Keep learning, keep growing. ■



Roger Magalhaes is the chief owl installer at Trading Up Consulting, the owner and project manager of Shades IN Place and an installation instructor for the WFCP Certification Program. He offers installation training and business coaching to people already in the window treatment industry and newcomers looking to gain an edge to be successful.



SMARTER SHADES, SMARTER LIVING

Automated window treatments aren't just convenient—they're a gateway to energy savings, better security and seamless smart home integration

BY JOHN MACKENZIE

Smart home technology is no longer just about convenience. It's about creating a more comfortable, efficient and responsive living environment. And when it comes to window treatments, automation is a game-changer. By allowing shades to operate on their own based on schedules or environmental cues, homeowners can enjoy a seamless blend of function and luxury that enhances daily living. Whether it's waking up to natural light, keeping the house cool in the afternoon sun or adding an extra layer of privacy at night, automated shades offer real, tangible benefits.

In this article, we'll break down how automation works, what it takes to get started and why now is the perfect time to help your customers make the switch.

What Makes a Shade Smart?

Simply put, adding automation to motorized shades means they can operate without any human interaction. Most often this happens as part of a scheduled event like raising the bedroom shades at sunrise or lowering west-facing shades when the afternoon sun becomes a problem.

Automation can be:

- As simple as a wind sensor that retracts an awning during high winds
- Or as complex as a whole-building system that tracks the sun's movement and adjusts shades accordingly

For most homeowners, getting started means adding a wireless hub, usually for a few hundred dollars, and running their shades as a stand-alone system.



The global smart home market was valued at \$121.59 billion in 2024 and is projected to grow to \$147.52 billion by the end of 2025. Some estimates suggest the market could reach a staggering \$633.20 billion by 2032

The real benefits come when shades are integrated with other systems in the home, often with devices customers already own. Explaining this helps highlight the value of motorized shades. Value is often the deciding factor when someone is considering upgrading from manual.

Why Homeowners Choose Automation

People may choose to automate their shades for different reasons, but they typically fall under three main categories:

- Convenience and ease of control
- Energy efficiency and cost savings
- Security and safety

Convenience That Goes Beyond the Remote

Convenience is the most obvious benefit. Customers can operate shades via smartphone, voice control or scheduled events. Using an app offers greater flexibility than traditional remotes or wall switches and allows control from anywhere. Many apps even confirm the action has occurred, giving peace of mind.

Integrating other devices like lights and thermostats allows customers to create “scenes” that run multiple systems with one command. For example, an “evening” scene might:

- Close the shades
- Turn on selected lights
- Adjust the thermostat

Most often a scene like this would be programmed to a time of day, but it can also be triggered using a “scene” button on an app or by asking a voice assistant like Google Home or Amazon Alexa to run the scene.

Smarter Shades, Lower Bills

Energy efficiency and cost savings are becoming more important to people and represent a big value when adding automation. As shading experts, we all know that window treatments can do a tremendous job in saving energy and making a home more efficient. Adding

automation to shades can lower them to keep heat out or raise them to allow heat in. When combining the shading system with a smart thermostat and smart lighting, the savings can be even greater. These savings can be significant with some studies showing as much as a 30% reduction in energy costs.

Added Security, Extra Peace of Mind

Security and safety are other great benefits of an automated smart home. While most of us may think of alarm systems, security cameras and video doorbells when thinking about security and safety, a variety of other devices can add real value to a system. A sensor that shuts off water when a leak is detected can save thousands in preventing water damage, a video doorbell can allow you to see who’s at your door before opening it and of course a fire alarm can literally save your life.

So Where Do Shades Fit in?

They can lower automatically when you leave, protecting your privacy. They can move on a schedule to make the house look occupied. And in emergencies, raising them can aid escape or give firefighters easier access.

The Bigger Smart Home Picture

You may be focused on window treatments, but understanding how they interact with other smart devices helps you sell on value not just price.

Smart home integration is now more accessible than ever. Thanks to new industry standards like Matter, devices from different brands are becoming more compatible and less reliant on multiple hubs or apps. What once required a high-end system is now within reach for many.

The Opportunity Ahead

There’s no question the smart home market is here to stay and has seen steady growth in recent years. The global smart home market was valued at \$121.59 billion in 2024 and is projected to grow to \$147.52 billion by the end of 2025. Some estimates suggest the market could reach a staggering \$633.20 billion by 2032.

Helping customers tap into that potential, starting with their shades, has never been a smarter move. ■



John MacKenzie is the CEO and co-founder of Cronopower, a Colorado-based startup that has developed an intelligent charging system for rechargeable battery motors. He began as an installer nearly 20 years ago and went on to work in both the residential and commercial sides of the industry. His true passion lies in product design and innovation.

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How fashion-trained artisan Irina Otto of IRICHKA is blending couture craftsmanship with modern window design



Irina Otto, founder of San Diego-based IRICHKA workroom and winner of the 2025 Grace Awards Upcoming Artisan of the Year, approaches every project with a fashion designer mindset.

Some careers evolve slowly, shaped by circumstance. Others begin with a spark. For Irina Otto, founder of San Diego-based workroom IRICHKA, it all started with a single project: helping a friend with her window coverings. It might have seemed like a small favor at the time, but it lit up a creative connection that had long been waiting to reemerge.

She had studied and taught fashion design and patternmaking in Ukraine before relocating to the United States, raising a family and ultimately finding her calling in custom interiors. By 2008, Irina launched IRICHKA and began building a business rooted in technical precision, creative vision and deeply personalized service.

A Designer's Eye, A Technician's Precision

Irina approaches every project the way she once approached bespoke fashion: with a deep understanding of fit, movement and fabric behavior. "I treat each window like a garment," she said. That philosophy shows up in the way she constructs every pleat, selects linings and troubleshoots fabric choices to suit a space.

But this is not a one-woman sewing operation. Over the years, IRICHKA has grown to take on larger, more complex projects, including commercial and motorized installations, thanks in part to Irina's credentials as a licensed contractor and her embrace of technology like Lutron automation. A small, dedicated team supports her, but Irina keeps the workroom intentionally hands-on. "Nothing goes out without passing through my hands," she said.

It's an approach that balances art and rigor. Clients take notice. Many have returned time and again, even bringing in their children and extended families for additional projects. "That kind of trust is one of my greatest points of pride," she said.

The Art of Innovation

For Irina, custom isn't just a process—it begins with a mindset. "There's no template," she said. "Everything starts with the client's space, their needs and their vision." From fabric selection to construction technique, each treatment is made to suit one window, one room, one moment in time.



Working closely with interior designer Audrey Kennedy of AGK Design Studio, Irina and her workroom team bring to life custom draperies that are elegant, highly functional and reflect a coastal California style that's relaxed yet refined.

Her signature pleating method exemplifies that philosophy. Developed through trial, precision and a fashion designer's understanding of form, the technique offers a structured, contemporary look while

keeping the stack minimal. It's ideal for layered applications or spaces where clean lines and a tailored finish are key. "It gives you that polished, architectural feel without the bulk," she explained.

Each method is a direct response to the unique design challenge at hand. "I'm always experimenting, adjusting my methods based on fabric type, weight and how it will live in the space," Irina said. Paired with her use of 3D-printed components to keep the backs of roman shades clean and precise, it's clear her version of custom is about more than visual beauty. It's about creating thoughtful, high-functioning design solutions from the inside out.

On Trend, On Purpose

Irina's favorite trends aren't necessarily the ones that dominate headlines. Instead, she's drawn to ideas that quietly enhance a design's integrity: seamless motorization tucked behind soft treatments, streamlined silhouettes made with couture-level care. This kind of thinking quietly enhances a design's integrity.

She's also noticed a shift among clients and designers alike. "People are starting to crave that sense of craftsmanship again," she said. "There's a longing for handmade, thoughtfully constructed pieces—like the couture side of fashion but for the home."

That mix of old-world quality and modern refinement is especially important in her outdoor projects, which she described as some of her most creatively satisfying. "I love how outdoor work challenges me to blend creativity and function, designing pieces that are elegant, strong and built to last," she said.

Recognition and Reinvention

At the 2025 Grace Awards, Irina was honored as the Upcoming Artisan of the Year. The recognition affirmed the quiet, often unsung excellence she brings to the industry. "We work in a quiet corner of the design world," she said. "So, I'm especially excited and hopeful to keep pushing it forward and showing what's possible."

That sense of possibility came full circle at the awards ceremony, where Irina wore a custom dress she designed and sewed herself. Made from Serena & Lily fabric with green lining repurposed from a past project, the dress was a celebration of her past and present.

"It felt like a perfect fusion of my past in fashion and my current work in interiors," she said. "Wearing that dress to the Grace Awards was one of those rare, unforgettable moments. It felt so aligned with who I am and what I love."

It's clear Irina isn't just sewing draperies: She's stitching together story, structure and soul in everything she touches. ■



To accept her Grace Award, Irina wore a custom dress she designed using Serena & Lily fabric left over from a past project.



YOUR BUSINESS, UPGRADED

Artificial intelligence tools are reshaping how industry pros manage projects, communicate with clients and stay competitive. Here's how to get started.

BY JENNA GAIDUSEK



I'm thrilled to kick off a series that will transform how you approach your design business. For many, AI has long felt like something reserved for tech giants or sci-fi.

As the design world evolves, so do the tools we rely on. If you're seeing buzzwords like "automation" and "AI-infused" everywhere, you're not imagining it. But what does it actually mean for your daily work?

You don't need to be a tech expert—you just need to know what's out there and how it can make your life easier. With so many moving parts in your business, from clients to installs, anything that saves time, improves communication, or keeps you organized is worth a look. Since I began teaching AI to designers in October 2023, I've been clear: AI isn't here to replace your creativity, it's here to enhance it.

Think of it as a supercharged assistant, trained in your business and brand voice. It's lightning-fast, great at repetitive tasks, and can analyze huge amounts of data

in seconds. While you can't hire someone to do what AI can, you can train it to support your workflow and help your team work smarter.

Why AI Matters to You: Beyond the Hype

As window covering and interior design professionals, your days are packed. You're juggling client meetings, sourcing materials, managing installations, sketching designs and handling endless administrative tasks. This is where AI steps in.

- 1. Reclaim Your Time:** Imagine cutting down the hours spent on tedious, repetitive work. AI can draft emails, organize schedules, generate initial quotes and compile material lists. That's valuable time you get back to focus on what you love—designing, connecting with clients and growing your business (offline and in the real world).
- 2. Boost Your Creativity:** AI isn't just about efficiency; it's a powerful creative partner. Stuck on a concept for a challenging space? AI can generate countless ideas, product mock-ups, explore different color palettes or visualize various window treatment styles in a room—faster than you could sketch them. It provides a starting point, sparks new ideas and helps you explore possibilities you might not have considered.
- 3. Enhance Client Communication and Visualization:** Selling a design is about telling a story. AI tools are becoming incredibly adept at creating realistic renderings and virtual walkthroughs from simple inputs. This means your clients can truly see their future space, understanding the impact of every fabric, furniture piece and window treatment. This level of visualization reduces doubt, speeds up decision-making and significantly enhances the client experience. It's real-time client communication that keeps your projects moving faster.
- 4. Scale Your Business Smartly:** Whether you're a solo designer or managing a growing firm, AI can help you do more with less. It can assist with marketing copy, social media posts





and even analyze market trends to identify new opportunities. This allows you to take on more projects, serve more clients and expand your reach without necessarily increasing overhead.

Real-World Applications for Your Business

Let's get concrete: How might AI show up in your day-to-day work?

Design & Visualization

- **Concept Generation:** Input client preferences (e.g., "mid-century modern, cozy, natural light") and let AI suggest layouts, color schemes and initial sketches.
- **Rendering Enhancement:** Transform simple 2D drawings, rough photos or hand-drawn sketches into high-quality, realistic 3D renderings showcasing window treatments, textures and lighting effects.
- **Mood Boards and Style Exploration:** Rapidly generate diverse mood boards to kick-start a project or refine a client's vision.
- **Product Mock-Ups:** Upload your materials and a product photo to create highly accurate, real-time mock-ups—anywhere, anytime.

Marketing & Client Management

- **Content Creation:** Draft blog posts about the latest design trends, write compelling website copy or generate engaging social media captions.
- **Client Communication:** Use transcripts to extract exact words (from your team or clients) and create meeting summaries, proposals, follow-up emails and next steps—keeping everyone in the loop and projects moving forward with less back-and-forth.
- **Market Research:** Analyze trends in interior design and window coverings to stay ahead of the curve.

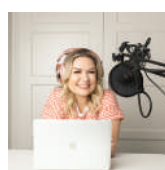
Getting Started: Your First Steps

The good news? You don't need to be a "techie" or make a huge investment to begin. My best advice? Start small and focus on one pain point in your business where AI could genuinely help.

- **Experiment with AI Inside Your Existing Tools:** Before wasting time exploring the endless sea of AI apps, start with what you already use. Whether it's Google, Microsoft or another business suite, you likely have access to their AI models that can instantly boost productivity. Google Gemini is integrated into Google Workspace, and Copilot is Microsoft's AI model.
- **Try Out ChatGPT (by OpenAI):** Upgrading to ChatGPT Plus for \$20/month pays for itself on the first day you use it. It's a great place to begin! (The free version won't do you justice for any of these programs—investing in pro-level access is well worth it.)
- **Identify Your Biggest Time Drains:** Is it writing client emails? Creating initial concepts? Researching materials? Pick one and see how AI can offer support.
- **Embrace the Learning Curve:** It's a journey, not a sprint. You'll learn how to "talk" to AI effectively (what we call prompting) and discover its capabilities as you go. (I've got plenty of training on this over at AI for Interior Designers™.)
- **Stay Curious:** The world of AI is constantly evolving. Commit to learning a little each month and you'll be amazed at your progress.

Over the coming months, we'll dive deeper into specific AI tools and applications tailored for the window covering and interior design industry.

For now, take a deep breath. AI isn't a threat; it's an incredible opportunity. It's here to empower you, giving you back time, sparking new creative ideas and helping you scale your incredible work. ■

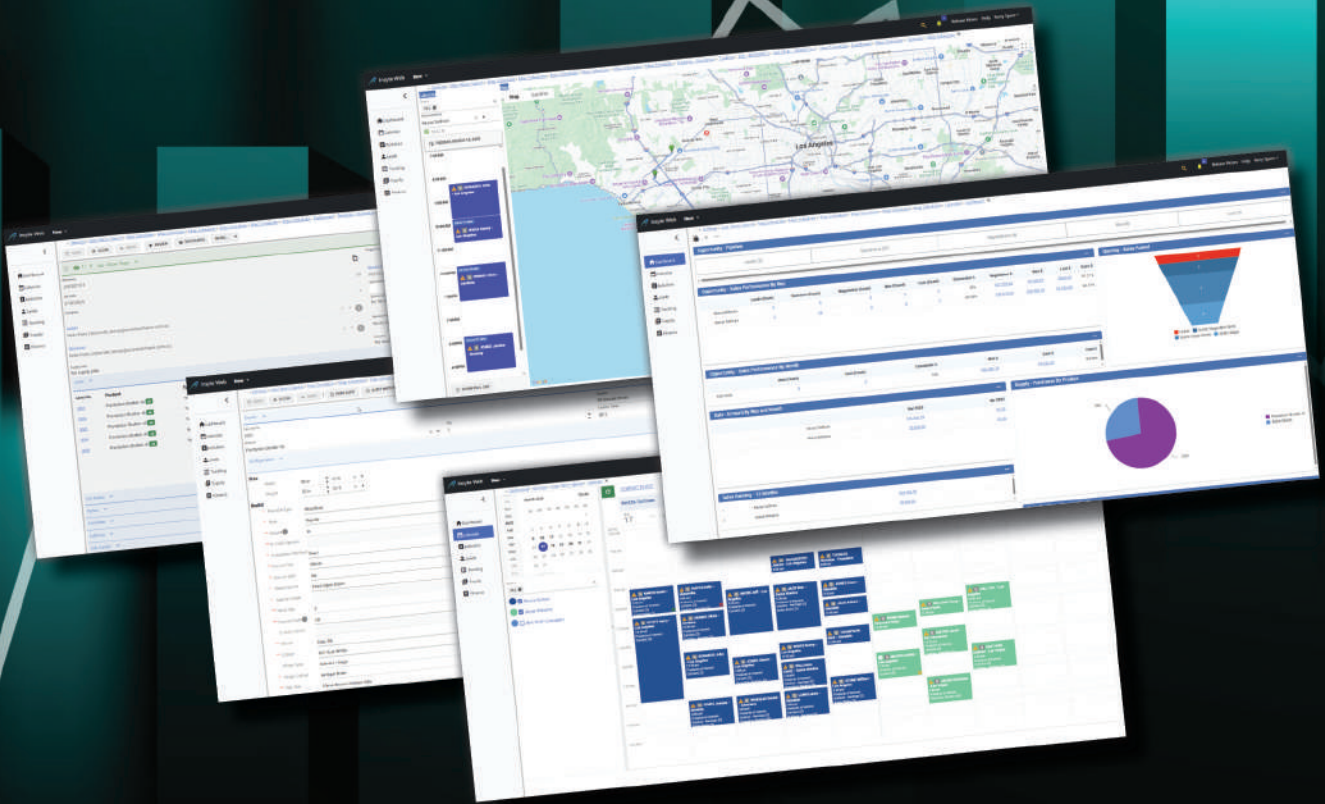


Jenna Gaidusek is a visionary entrepreneur, an interior designer and one of the most trusted voices in the world of design technology. As the founder of AI for Interior Designers™, Jenna has dedicated her career to helping creative professionals navigate the fast-changing landscape of artificial intelligence with practicality, confidence, clarity and a healthy dose of curiosity. Learn more at AIForInteriorDesigners.com.

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THE QUIET POWER OF MOTORIZATION

From energy savings to seamless automation, today's motorized shades are smarter, sleeker and more strategic than ever. Here's what you need to know.

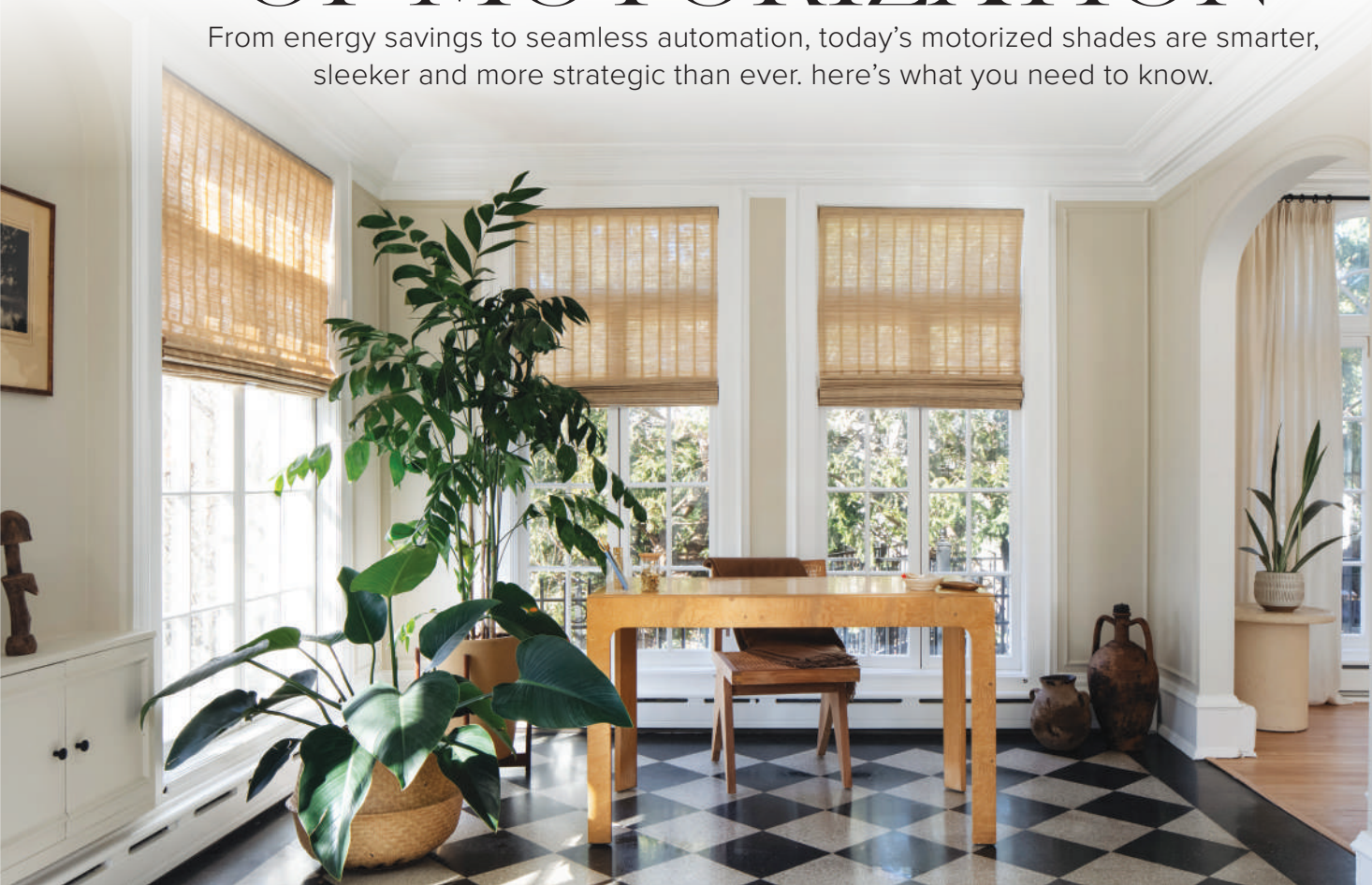


PHOTO COURTESY OF HOME ENVIRONMENTS

Once considered a luxury, motorized window treatments have entered the mainstream. In new construction, remodels and retrofit projects alike, clients are asking for smarter shading solutions that do more than respond to commands. They want systems that integrate fully with their homes. Yet even as adoption grows, some of the most valuable benefits remain overlooked—often by professionals who assume it's too complex or costly to sell.

Today's market tells a different story. With more intuitive controls, broader platform compatibility and a growing emphasis on user experience, motorization is becoming one of the most strategic categories in the window treatment industry. We asked leaders from Window Modes, Somfy, Coulissee and Bond to share what professionals may be missing and how to make the most of this fast-moving category.

IT'S NOT COMPLICATED. IT'S SMARTER.

One of the biggest misconceptions about motorized

window treatments is that they're difficult to sell or install. But technology and product design have advanced quickly, making systems easier to use and more flexible across a range of budgets and homes.

"Many still assume motorization equals complexity," said Tara Kennedy, director of marketing at Window Modes. "But today's systems are more intuitive than ever. Battery-powered options, app-based controls and simplified setup mean you can have advanced automation without wiring or renovation." With the right manufacturer support, she added, smart shades can be just as straightforward to install as manual ones.

David Parrett, vice president of marketing at Somfy, said the key is education and access to resources. "While it takes some learning and experience, motorization is not difficult. Utilize the resources available from fabricators and their preferred motor suppliers to ensure that projects are planned and executed properly." To make it easier for



PHOTO COURTESY OF ALINA HALLAQ

Parrett agreed. “Motorized window treatments are now a central component of the smart home. Consumers are increasingly expecting their window treatments to adapt to their connected lifestyle.”

At Coulisse, this idea is built into the company’s Motionblinds platform. “With the introduction of Matter and Thread, our motors can now be added to smart home ecosystems and work with devices like lighting, thermostats and cameras,” said Jop Vos, managing director of Coulisce Americas. The company also prioritizes acoustic comfort, developing hardware components that reduce motor vibration and lower sound levels by up to 15 decibels.

Shinar said expectations for integration now extend beyond the living room. “We see tremendous potential in the outdoor space. It’s rarely just a motorized screen or awning—there are often louver systems, ceiling fans, heaters and lighting involved. That creates an opportunity for dealers to upsell and deliver a more complete experience.”

FOCUS ON THE EXPERIENCE

When it comes to selling motorization, features and specs don’t always make the sale. What matters most is how the product enhances daily life.

“Lead with experience, not specs,” Kennedy said. “Demonstrate how automation improves comfort, sleep, convenience and energy savings. Focus on how it makes life better.”

Shinar put it simply: “Let motorization sell itself. Just get it into the home—even in a single room—and the next order will follow naturally. The convenience is better experienced than explained.”

That approach benefits professionals too. Bond’s team monitors user behavior to improve performance and design. “We double down on features based on how users interact with our products,” Shinar said. “We also meet with dealers and installers regularly to understand their pain points and develop solutions that simplify their jobs.”

At Coulisce, ease of use is a major priority. The company’s motors feature physical buttons and manual pull control so users can set end positions without relying on an app or remote. “These functions add convenience and flexibility, especially in systems where smart platforms may fall short,” Vos said.

WHAT COMES NEXT

Looking ahead, experts expect motorization to become even more intelligent. As artificial intelligence and automation technology advance, smart shades will shift

dealers to get started, Somfy has developed tools like its TaHoma pro app to streamline installation and reduce the learning curve.

Zohar Shinar, CEO of Bond, said simplification is also being driven by new players in the space. “We’re seeing a proliferation of motor technologies from suppliers who are more willing to innovate, take risks and move quickly to meet customer needs. This accelerates adoption among dealers and installers.”

“*Motorized window treatments are now a central component of the smart home.*”

— David Parrett, Somfy

FROM REMOTE CONTROL TO FULL INTEGRATION

Motorization today is less about pushing a button and more about seamless integration with the rest of the home. Whether it’s lighting or HVAC or AV systems, clients expect their shades to work within a larger ecosystem—and without added friction.

“Consumers don’t want more tech,” Kennedy said. “They want simpler solutions that work together effortlessly.”



PHOTO COURTESY OF IRICHKA

from reactive to proactive, adjusting in real time to support energy efficiency, comfort and health.

“Smart blinds and shades will become dynamic elements of an intelligent energy strategy,” said Vos. “They’ll help reduce heating, cooling and lighting demands, while improving comfort and well-being.”

Parrett believed the trend toward smarter shading is only going to grow. “As consumer awareness improves, we anticipate an ongoing increase in motorization attachment rates. This provides more revenue per window opening and delivers a satisfying experience for end users.”

Ultimately, Kennedy said the key is asking the right questions. “As long as you are partnered with the right vendors, you can meet your clients’ needs if you understand what they’re really asking for. Implementation becomes much simpler when you start with a clearly defined scope.” ■

Wired for Design

With a background in custom window treatments, interior designer Betty Brandolino of Home Environments is helping designers navigate the growing world of automation without compromising aesthetics

Betty Brandolino didn’t set out to run a smart home company. She started, like many in the industry, with a love for interior design and a specialty in custom window treatments. Over time, her work brought her into homes where technology and design weren’t always speaking the same language. She noticed that while clients craved smart features, designers often didn’t know where to begin, and integrators weren’t always attuned to aesthetics.

“I started in interior design and custom window treatments over two decades ago, and during that time I noticed a persistent gap between beautifully designed interiors and the seamless integration of smart home technology,” she said. “Designers were often unsure where to start, and tech installers didn’t always understand the nuances of design. That disconnect inspired me to launch Home Environments as a way to bridge the two worlds.”

A New Kind of Studio

Brandolino launched Home Environments, a Chicago-based firm designed to bring both worlds together under one roof. What began with a passion for high-end window treatments has evolved into a full-service smart home integration resource tailored to the needs of architects, designers, builders and their clients. Today, her team supports trade professionals with a seamless process that includes product selection, wiring plans, custom fabrication and final installation.

PHOTO COURTESY OF HOME ENVIRONMENTS





PHOTO COURTESY OF HOME ENVIRONMENTS

Breaking Down the Intimidation Factor

Brandolino knows that many professionals still hesitate when it comes to offering motorization. “One misconception is that motorized treatments are difficult to program or unreliable,” she said. “With the right products and installation team, motorized systems can be incredibly dependable and easy to use. Education is key, and we spend a lot of time demystifying the process for both clients and trade partners.”

Her advice to other designers is clear. “Don’t let the fear of complexity hold you back. Start by finding the right integration partners who understand your design priorities. The best collaborations happen when each party brings their expertise to the table,” she said. “Also, lean on manufacturers and showrooms for education, as they can offer product training, demos and support. Once you see motorization in action, it becomes much less intimidating. Clients are often more open than you think, especially when they see how seamless and luxurious the experience can be.”

Smart Shades, Smart Business

Before any smart features are installed, Brandolino’s team begins with a design-first conversation. “What’s the aesthetic? What are the client’s goals?” she said. From there, they map out the technical infrastructure—power requirements, integration points, control systems—and deliver detailed samples, drawings and timelines to keep the project on track. “We’re not just vendors,” she added. “We’re strategic partners.”

For those looking to expand into smart home offerings, Brandolino sees strong opportunities ahead. “There’s huge potential in bringing more awareness to how smart window treatments contribute to energy savings, comfort and wellness,” she said. “There’s also room for growth in retrofit applications with solutions that allow people to bring automation into existing homes without major renovations. The more we can simplify and personalize these offerings, the more the market will expand.” ■

“Homeowners today want more than just beautiful spaces—they expect them to be intuitive and responsive,” she explained. “With the rise of voice control, automation and mobile apps, clients are looking for solutions that make life easier without sacrificing style. Window treatments are no longer an afterthought. They’re part of the larger ecosystem, and people expect them to operate just as smoothly as their lighting or audio systems. That shift means we need to be thinking about automation from the earliest stages of design.”

She’s also seeing growing interest in features tied to wellness and energy efficiency. “Motorized window treatments that respond to time of day, sunlight or occupancy are becoming more common,” she noted. “Clients are asking for fully integrated systems where window coverings, lighting and climate control all work together.” As technology evolves, she said, designers will have even more ways to create personalized, high-performance environments.

Design-First, Tech-Forward

From the beginning, Brandolino envisioned Home Environments as a resource for the trade. “Our job is to make the technology disappear, both visually and functionally, so the design can shine,” she said. “We work closely with designers to select materials and finishes that enhance the space, and with tech partners to ensure performance and ease of use.”

A key part of her business model is the firm’s in-house drapery workroom. “Our in-house workroom was born out of a need for quality control and customization,” she said. “It allows us to deliver truly bespoke solutions with greater speed and precision. For designers and builders, it means a one-stop shop where fabrication, integration and design support happen under one roof. It’s also a creative hub. We collaborate closely with our partners to bring their vision to life without compromise.”

Betty Brandolino has over a decade of experience and is the founder of **Home Environments**, a firm specializing in custom window treatments and smart home integration. She blends luxury design with smart technology, delivering handcrafted solutions through her in-house workroom.



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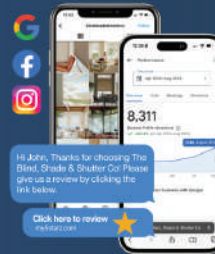
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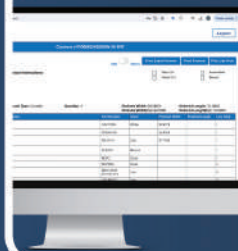
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From Swatch to Strategy:

300 Pros on the Future of Fabric

THE FABRIC SIDE OF THE CUSTOM WINDOW COVERING BUSINESS IS RAPIDLY EVOLVING—AND WE NOW HAVE THE DATA TO PROVE IT

BY LINDSAY BROWN, MANAGING EDITOR, *WINDOW FASHION VISION*

To better understand the current landscape, *Window Fashion VISION* surveyed more than 300 professionals across the window covering industry, including interior designers, workrooms, dealers, fabricators and installers. Our goal: uncover the trends, challenges and opportunities shaping the role of fabric in window treatment projects today. From performance priorities to sourcing challenges and sustainability to smart style—we're sharing the insights that matter most right now.

83%

of responders are directly involved in fabric selection, with over half making the final decision.

Fabric Is Still at the Center of It All

If there's one constant in custom window coverings, it's this: Fabric still leads the way. Whether it's drapery, roman shades, cornices or top treatments, fabric remains the defining element of luxury, performance and personality in a space.

Nearly every responder is actively involved in fabric selection, and more than half are the primary decision-makers on the fabrics specified for projects. That's a critical insight for fabric vendors, mills and distributors alike.

What Fabrics Are in Demand?

When asked what fabric types they use most, responders pointed to a core group of staples:

- Blackout fabrics
- Sustainable and eco-friendly fabrics
- Performance fabrics
- Linens, velvets and embroidered/printed patterns

This blend of function and fashion tells us today's buyers want fabrics that do more, look good, last long and feel aligned with their values.

Blackout fabrics were selected as the most frequently used types.

Where They're Sourcing—and Where There's Friction

Cut yardage remains the dominant purchasing method, and professionals rely on a mix of sources to get what they need:

- Online wholesalers
- Local distributors
- Fabric showrooms
- Direct-from-manufacturer channels

But the road isn't without bumps. The most frequently cited sourcing challenges include:

- High costs and narrow margins
- Long lead times and unreliable shipping
- Inventory risk from rapidly shifting trends
- Limited availability or transparency from suppliers

Performance fabrics and embroidered patterns are among the top five most-used categories.

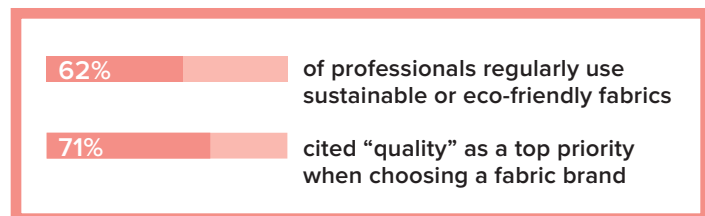
The majority of responders source fabrics from multiple channels, including online wholesalers, local distributors and showrooms.

It's clear that while creativity flows freely, logistics still lag. This creates major opportunities for fabric suppliers who can streamline ordering, provide dependable inventory updates or support smaller batch needs.

What Buyers Want from Brands

When asked what they look for in a fabric brand, three qualities rose to the top:

1. Quality
2. Availability
3. Price



These are nonnegotiables. But interestingly, close behind were trend-forward design and customer service. In other words, a stunning new line isn't enough, professionals want responsive support and reliability too.

Trends on the Horizon

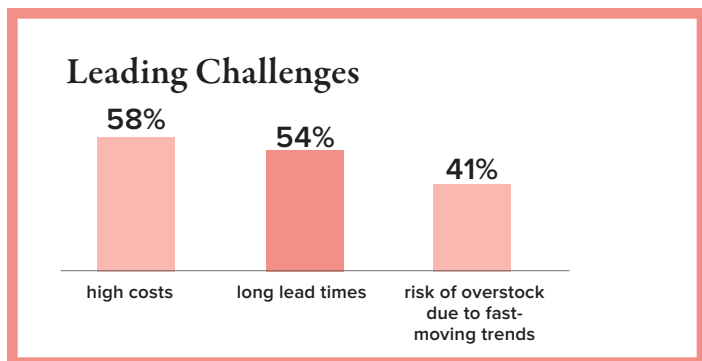
Color & Pattern Forecast:

- Earth and jewel tones are making a return
- Texture and pattern are taking center stage
- Designers report a growing appetite for versatile, calming palettes

Material & Performance Innovation:

- Recycled and cradle-to-cradle certified fibers
- Low-VOC and chemical-free materials
- Technical upgrades in fade-resistance and washability

Fabric innovation is no longer a luxury—it's a necessity for future growth.



The Call for Education and Confidence

One of the most consistent messages we heard: Fabric professionals want to feel more confident and informed when specifying materials. The most requested content types include:

- Fabric care and performance tips
- Product spotlights
- Vendor comparison guides
- Swatch access and sample libraries

The takeaway? As fabric options multiply, decision fatigue can set in. Simplifying the journey through education and storytelling isn't just helpful, it's expected.



What It Means for the Industry

More than 75% of survey respondents said they want to see more fabric coverage in *Window Fashion VISION* and more fabric vendors at the International Window Coverings Expo (IWCE). That's not just editorial feedback; it's a strategic opportunity.

Fabric brands who show up, speak clearly and support the designer-dealer-workroom ecosystem will earn loyalty fast. This industry is hungry for partners who understand the realities of day-to-day project work and who can innovate without adding complexity.

Final Thoughts

The fabric side of our business is as complex as it is beautiful. And, right now, it's in transition—from traditional yardage ordering to digital sourcing, from standard prints to sustainable innovation and from static design to performance-driven customization. For fabric companies, distributors and dealers alike, the message is clear: There's enormous opportunity, but it belongs to those who prioritize reliability, education and user experience.

If you're ready to lead, the time is now. ■



living outside *the lines*

NATURE, TECH, WELLNESS AND COLOR—THESE TRENDS ARE HEATING UP PATIOS AND PERGOLAS EVERYWHERE. ARE YOU READY?

BY ANIA MUNZER, ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER

Outdoor living is no longer a luxury—it's a lifestyle. As we head deeper into 2025, homeowners are reimagining their patios, yards and terraces as fully functional extensions of their interior spaces. From open-air wellness zones and rewilded gardens to tech-integrated outdoor lounges, the outdoors has become the new design frontier.

This transformation is creating an unprecedented opportunity for the custom window covering industry. Professionals who sell or produce exterior shading solutions—from awnings and pergolas to motorized screens and retractable shades—are uniquely positioned to meet this moment. Here's a look at the key outdoor living trends for 2025 and how they're shaping the future of exteriors.

1. The Wild Is In: Nature-Inspired Design Takes Over

In 2025, landscapes are embracing a softer, more organic look. The "rewilded yard" trend, spotlighted by Yardzen, favors native plants, meadows and biodiversity over trimmed hedges and turf lawns. These naturalistic spaces are rich in texture and color—and often come with new challenges for shade providers.

For the industry: Exterior window coverings must harmonize with these wilder backdrops. Think neutral-toned fabrics, earthy finishes and hardware that blends into the natural environment. Retractable shades, concealed tracks and light-filtering screens help preserve views without disrupting the aesthetic.

2. Outdoor Wellness Goes Mainstream

According to AD PRO's 2025 Outdoor Forecast, wellness is now driving outdoor design. Cold plunge pools, backyard saunas, yoga decks and open-air gyms are no longer niche. They're becoming essential features in high-end and midrange homes alike.

Implications for shade pros: Wellness spaces demand privacy and climate control. Exterior shading solutions—especially motorized screens, adjustable pergola louvers and zip systems—are ideal for regulating light and maintaining comfort in these serene spaces. They also add value by enhancing functionality across changing seasons.

3. Seamless Indoor-Outdoor Transitions

ELLE Decor highlights the rise of retractable walls,

sliding glass doors and covered patios that erase the boundaries between indoors and out. These fluid spaces require design continuity, and shading plays a crucial role.

What it means: Dealers and designers must treat exterior shades like part of the home's interior package. Coordinated color palettes, minimalist designs and finishes that complement indoor treatments will win over design-conscious clients. Matching roller shades, discreet motorized systems and dual-purpose installations are increasingly in demand.



4. Designing for Resilience

In light of climate change and environmental stressors, outdoor design is becoming more strategic. AD PRO emphasizes resilience—through fire-wise landscaping, durable materials and smart layouts—as a defining design value for 2025.

What this means for manufacturers and installers: Exterior shades must go beyond aesthetic appeal. They need to perform. UV-resistant and/or weather-rated fabrics, reinforced tracks and wind sensors are becoming standard requirements. Smart shading systems that respond to climate conditions automatically are especially attractive in regions prone to heat, wind or storms.



5. Outdoor Entertaining Evolves

Martha Stewart's 2025 Outdoor Living Trends report notes that today's patios are equipped with everything from built-in projectors to full-service kitchens. These multifunctional areas require zones that adapt for day-to-night use.

Opportunity for shading professionals: Wide-span motorized shades, layered drapery and pergola canopies with integrated lighting and fan systems can transform an exposed patio into a comfortable outdoor lounge. Custom shading enhances usability, protects finishes and creates ambience—all key for clients who entertain frequently.

6. Bold Color and Custom Style

While earth tones remain popular, many homeowners are

embracing more expressive color palettes in their outdoor spaces. From olive greens and terra-cotta to rich blues and patterns, exterior design is shedding its beige bias.

For the trade: Offer expanded color selections in fabric collections and powder-coated hardware. Partner with designers on custom touches—like valance trims, decorative hem bars or printed textiles—to meet rising client expectations for personalized outdoor aesthetics.

How These Trends Influence the Industry

These trends are doing more than changing what clients want—they're reshaping our businesses.

Here's how:

- **Design expectations are higher:** Exterior shades must align with curated outdoor spaces. Design fluency is now a competitive advantage.
- **Motorization is standard:** Especially in wellness zones and smart homes, clients expect automated control. This creates new sales opportunities—but also demands technical know-how.
- **Product durability is nonnegotiable:** Installers and suppliers must ensure every product performs under real-world conditions—heat, wind, rain and UV.
- **Customization drives conversion:** Flexibility in finish, size, control system and style gives pros the edge in a competitive market.
- **Profit margins are promising:** Outdoor shading projects are larger in scale and scope—meaning higher per-project revenue and repeat business from satisfied clients.



Exterior Solutions Are Now Essential

As outdoor spaces become more sophisticated, exterior shading products are evolving from functional accessories into must-have design and lifestyle solutions. For professionals who understand both the trends and the technical needs of today's outdoor spaces, the opportunity is enormous.

From naturalistic gardens to luxury spa patios, there's one thing these spaces have in common: they need protection, comfort and style. And the custom window covering industry is perfectly positioned to deliver.

2025 is the year outdoor shading moves from optional to integral. Let's help clients make the most of it! ■



YOU SEE NOTHING, RIGHT?!

INVISIBLY MOTORIZED THANKS TO A REVOLUTIONARY CONCEPT

When it comes to smart window decorations, compromises often had to be made, but this is now a thing of the past! Thanks to a pioneering new technology from Germany, regular curtain sets can now be easily motorized and additional side-mounted motor brackets are no longer required. The revolutionary Motor Technology 2.0 was developed by the traditional manufacturer BÜSCHE and makes what at first glance appears to be a complex product even more accessible. With absolute precision, the necessary recess for the motor connection is now simply milled directly into the profiles, making motorized curtain sets indistinguishable from normal ones from the front. The motors remain invisibly positioned behind the curtain and still require no additional ceiling or wall mounting.

Vesta now introduces its new Motor Technology 2.0, offering it in four motorized collections. MOTOPIA is a classic round aluminum profile that is available in over seven elegant finishes. The noiseless system can be equipped with various motors from a well-known manufacturer, all of which are, of course, Smart Home-compatible. The same applies to the PURTEC collection, which has won multiple design awards and impresses with its minimalist and highly functional design. It is available in five high-quality finishes, including the popular palladium, and can be mounted on the wall or ceiling.

The popular DECO R collection offers even more variety in terms of finishes, thanks to its rectangular profile, which is perfect for modern rooms and promises maximum design freedom with palladium, brushed gold, black and many other trendy finishes. The NOVI collection is a particular highlight, as the square profile with a dimension of 1" in the motorized version promises top performance in the smallest of spaces. The versatile curtain set is available in four finishes and can be attached to the wall or ceiling.

For Bret Jackson, general manager of Vesta, the newly interpreted Motor Technology 2.0, reduced to the essentials, opens up a new dimension in smart window decoration. He looks forward to delighting his customers with visual perfection, maximum design freedom and first-class quality. The latest technology makes motorization child's play, requires fewer components and guarantees continuous gliding channels and perfect wave decorations. Even bends and curves in motorized curtain sets are possible without compromise, allowing them to be perfectly adapted to a wide variety of room situations.



The family-run company from South Carolina knows what it is talking about: With more than 40 years of experience in drapery hardware, Vesta has always been characterized by quality and innovation. It is therefore not surprising that BÜSCHE products, with their high-quality standards, have a firm place in the exquisite Vesta range.

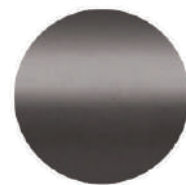
BÜSCHE looks back on over 150 years of successful company history and has been a pioneer in the field of motorized curtain sets for almost 20 years. The brand was one of the first to place the motor invisibly behind the profile, thereby establishing a new standard. The technology-loving Germans never tire of constantly improving their products and using the latest cutting-edge technology. This is also the case with the new Motor Technology 2.0, which has been conquering the European market since the beginning of the year and has established itself as a new benchmark.

For enthusiastic smart home users, Vesta now offers the right technology for innovative window decorations, meeting the highest standards of quality and service.

» VestaDraperyHardware.com



MOTOPIA FINISHES



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Take advantage of our customization capabilities. Orion's motorized drapery hardware is available in single or double track systems for ripplefolds or pleated headings in 5 powder coated finishes - white, antique bronze, silver, gold and black. Order your hardware with or without rings, any of our finials and coordinating glides with our ring option. If your project includes bays, bows or corners - no problem - we can bend your tracks and fascias.



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Dressed to Win

Meet the winning projects from the design category of the 2025 Grace Awards. These standout window treatments are anything but ordinary!

This year's Grace Awards, held in West Palm Beach, Florida, honored the best in custom window fashion, and the design category winners did not disappoint. With every pleat, panel, trim and track, these designers and fabricators showed how skill, vision and serious attention to detail can turn functional solutions into showstopping design moments. From cozy retreats to complex commercial spaces, these projects prove that the right window treatment doesn't just complete a room, it makes a statement.



CURTAINS & DRAPERIES

Bernard and Rosa Elena Robin

Gotcha Covered of Clear Lake

Faced with a dramatic, soaring wall, Bernard and Rosa Elena Robin of Gotcha Covered in Clear Lake, Texas, transformed a tricky architectural feature into a true design statement. With precise installation by Jeff Booser and Jason Marriott and premium drapery lining from Angel's Distributing, this project is a master class in form and finesse. Alternating fabric panels create a rhythmic pattern that draws the eye upward, visually elongating the space while adding depth and structure. The result is a refined, custom treatment that proves beautifully executed drapery can redefine a room and turn functional necessity into high-impact design.



BERNARD ROBIN

TOP TREATMENTS

10 ONE PRODUCTIONS, AARON KINBERG



Maria Bortugno

B Designs Interiors

With more than 25 years of design experience, Maria Bortugno of B Designs Interiors brought warmth, tradition and custom detail to this inviting retreat. Tasked with preserving the client's existing leather chair, ottoman, sectional and bookshelves, she reimagined the space through her signature layering of textures, fabrics and color. Custom window treatments crafted in collaboration with workroom partner Mary Loux and installed by Barry Mallory add softness and polish, tying the entire room together. Every detail from the pleated fabric lampshades to the elegant top treatments reflects Maria's thoughtful approach and refined eye for comfort-driven design.

COMBINATION

Sunny Sun Fu's Drapery

Sunny Sun of Fu's Drapery brought elegance and intention to this family room transformation. Solar shades offer light control and UV protection while maintaining the room's airy feel. A custom cornice box adds architectural polish and inverted pleated panels frame the windows with crisp dimension. Rich trims, tapes and gemstone accents sourced from Fabricut and Rowley Company tie into the room's handcrafted furnishings for a look that's cohesive, luxurious and timeless.

LARRY FU



decorative HARDWARE & TRIM



GARRETT COOK

Linda Tully

Tully Drapery Shop

Who says a small window can't steal the spotlight? Linda Tully of Tully Drapery Shop brought style and softness to this guest retreat, where concrete barrel ceilings and porcelain tile floors set an industrial tone.

She softened the look with washed linen panels by Schumacher, elegantly hung on forged steel tab posts by Helser Brothers. A flat roman shade in charcoal linen by Carole Fabrics delivers privacy and polish, while a self-valance trimmed in playful Pindler tassels ties the entire treatment together.



UP & COMING

Valery Huffenus Inspired Interiors

Valery Huffenus of Inspired Interiors reimagined this living room by removing outdated shutters to reveal expansive golf course views. Two-story gray silk draperies with Greek key trim from Kasmir Fabrics add height and softness, while Select Metal Hardware and a brightened coffered ceiling enhance the room's architectural appeal.



MICHAEL VELETVELET MEDIA

soft SHADES

Brenda Hite Baxter

Custom Drapery Designs

Brenda Hite Baxter of Custom Drapery Designs delivered a solution that's as functional as it is beautiful. Tasked with preserving sweeping views while hiding less desirable sights, she created custom top-down/bottom-up roman shades that offer flexibility, privacy and style. A bold leaf-and-bird print by Manuel Canovas brings in the colors of the surrounding landscape, while mitered stria banding adds polish and structure. Trim from Samuel & Sons and smooth operation via Rollease hardware round out the details. Carefully placed patterns and seamless valances complete the look, turning a room with big windows and bigger challenges into a warm, elegant retreat.



BRENDA HITE BAXTER

SPECIALTY

Dawne Paris Between the Seam

A curved 206-inch wall and a towering turret ceiling set the stage for this dramatic drapery design by Dawne Paris of Between the Seam. Working within tight constraints and bold architectural features, she partnered with Helser Brothers to engineer custom hardware that would accommodate the room's unique dimensions. The drapery, sewn in Taylor King's Lily Pad Nude with a Kravet flared skirt and Fabricut trim, was carefully installed by Mark Thurin to ensure a clean, structured finish. Together, these elements create a standout focal point that celebrates shape, scale and craftsmanship.

BETWEEN THE SEAM



Whole-Room INTEGRATION



Mary McCormick Flourishing Design

In this serene primary bedroom, Mary McCormick of Flourishing Design created a layered, luxurious environment that feels both timeless and personal. Custom draperies, bedding and woven natural shades work in harmony, anchored by ivory and blue wool panels from Rogers & Goffigon and trimmed in Samuel & Sons passementerie. A custom duvet and shams in Tillett's iconic Chrysanthemum silk, once a favorite of Jackie Kennedy, add a touch of legacy and sophistication. Finished with Thibaut grass cloth, a silk rug and an antique mirror, the space radiates warmth and quiet glamour.

HOLLY HUDSON

MOTORIZATION

Zina Shikhanova

ZCurtains

For designer Zina Shikhanova of ZCurtains, this motorized drapery installation was as much an engineering challenge as a design opportunity. Towering at 270 inches and constructed with 48 yards of fabric, the treatment adds striking vertical drama to a modern two-story home. Smartly integrated with Forest Drapery Hardware and Somfy automation, the drapery responds effortlessly to the touch of a button. A structural beam at the ceiling complicated access, forcing the team to install the track almost entirely by feel. The finished look is smooth, sculptural and so well executed it's easy to forget how complex it really was.



ALINA HALLAQ

Outdoor LIVING

Chris Cole
Cole & Co.

For this modern home, simplicity was the goal, but achieving it required expert coordination and custom retrofitting. Chris Cole of Cole & Co. collaborated closely with the manufacturer to integrate seven 15-foot-tall TEXTON exterior screens powered by Rollease Automate motors. Designed with 10% openness, the shades provide privacy and protection without interrupting the home's clean architectural lines. The installation blends so seamlessly into the structure that the shades nearly disappear when retracted. It's a project that proves understated design often requires the highest level of craftsmanship.

COLE & CO.



COMMERCIAL



ALINA HALLAQ

Zina Shikhanova ZCurtains

At a sprawling senior living facility, Zina Shikhanova of ZCurtains partnered with designer Rachel Eld to create a space that feels more like home than health care. From theater curtains to dining room drapery, each zone received its own thoughtful treatment using more than a dozen fabric types and curtain styles. The team tackled ceiling heights up to 250 inches and installed 50 custom valance boxes throughout the property. Despite the project's scale and complexity, installation wrapped in just two days and was completed exactly as planned.

LUXURY

Kelly Macaulay Custom Drape, LLCs

Perched above Nashville, Tennessee, in a two-story penthouse once owned by Kelsea Ballerini, this project delivers luxury with a little star power. Kelly Macaulay of Custom Drapes, LLC, framed the floor-to-ceiling windows with ripplefold panels in a silver-embossed geometric fabric, creating a subtle shimmer that shifts with the light. Sleek square hardware from Brimar adds a modern edge and blackout lining keeps things cozy and quiet. It's more than beautiful drapery; it's a love letter to the space's glamorous past and a bold new take for the clients who now call it home. The views may be showstopping, but the drapery more than holds its own.



JACLYN KING

THE Grace AWARDS WINDOW FASHION DESIGN & ARTISAN

HONORABLE MENTIONS

A round of applause for these creative talents who impressed us with their skill, style and standout work!

Curtains & Draperies

Leigh Skinner Anderson

*Willow Drapery
& Upholstery*

Top Treatments

Mary McCormick

Flourishing Design

Combination

Zina Shikhanova

ZCurtains

Decorative Hardware & Trim

Karen Macaulay

Custom Drapes, LLC

Soft Shades

Bernard and Rosa Elena Robin

*Gotcha Covered
of Clear Lake*

Specialty

Sunny Sun

Fu's Drapery

Whole-Room Integration

Aleksandra Jakubowski
and Tom Kiosewski

Avant-Garde Designs

Motorization

Amy Hunley

The Drapery Room

Outdoor Living

Melissa A. Hammann

Riviera Outdoor Decor

Commercial

Rachael Harvey

Refurnish

Luxury

C.J. Knapp

*Yours by Design Workroom
Deluxe Draperies*

Be sure to check out our upcoming September/October issue of *Window Fashion VISION*, where we will feature the 2025 Grace Artisan award winners!

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Smarter Software

WHY NOW'S THE TIME TO DITCH PEN AND PAPER FOR A MORE PROFITABLE WORKFLOW



As custom window treatments become more complex—and client expectations climb higher—businesses across the industry are facing a new reality: manual processes can't keep up. From quoting and scheduling to vendor coordination and fabrication, window treatment professionals are increasingly turning to software to improve accuracy, reduce errors and deliver better service.

Jobs today often involve dozens of SKUs, specialty configurations, layered products and ever-changing tariffs. Add to that the need to close sales on-site, manage mobile teams, and maintain vendor relationships and it's clear that pen-and-paper systems are no longer sustainable.

"Old manual processes are not sustainable; new and younger employees expect software support," said Brian McGrath, CEO of MyBlindCo. "In addition, if [owners] ever plan on selling the business, they must implement digital processes for sellability."

From Quoting to Closing

For many businesses, quoting is the natural place to begin their digital transformation. Accurate, real-time quotes can mean the difference between closing a job on-site—or losing it to follow-up delays. Software platforms today are designed to streamline quoting while keeping critical pricing details secure.

"Excellent in-home quoting tools increase closing ratio in the home by at least 27%," said McGrath, whose system

allows users to generate quotes, track jobs and manage customer information in one place.

Ray Soltis, founder of Solatech, emphasized quote accuracy and vendor integration: "Solatech legally partners with the vendors to provide accurate product quotes in the home to support closing in the home at an increased margin."

These systems aren't just calculators—they're connected tools that minimize rework and administrative drag. "The more efficient and accurate you are while working with your client, the more professional your presentation will be," said Soltis. "That has a direct impact on customer satisfaction."

Replacing Paper, Reclaiming Time

Efficiency is a major motivator for those making the switch from manual processes. "Customer service levels are increased by 100%. No bankers box diving to find a 13-month-old client," said McGrath. By eliminating paper forms, filing systems and redundant data entry, dealers can focus more time on sales and service.

One Solatech user reported saving 40 hours of labor per month after adopting the software. Others have seen measurable increases in margins, quoting speed and team productivity.

And the impact isn't just operational. "We replaced that [late-night paperwork] with a single button push due to

accuracy and partnerships,” said Soltis, referencing a client who finally made it home for dinner after years of working late.

Smarter Workflows, Seamless Operations

Modern platforms extend beyond quoting to support the full life cycle of a job. Scheduling, order tracking, measuring and workroom coordination are increasingly handled within a single interface—cutting out unnecessary touchpoints and costly miscommunications.

“Most people do not realize they are spending \$85 plus per month per \$100K in business on paper, triplicate forms, file folders, bankers boxes and toner,” said McGrath. “That is all eliminated with a comprehensive and readily available platform.”

Solatech’s cloud-based system includes laser measurement integration, custom workroom modules, vendor portal access and shipping label output designed for use by both retail dealers and fabricators.

Going Mobile & Hands-Free

With more sales reps, installers and designers working on the go, mobile functionality is critical. Most platforms are now fully cloud-based or offer offline capabilities for job sites with poor connectivity.

“We developed our entire tool set to work as a stand-alone, offline app,” McGrath explained. “Steel buildings in a large city with no service and you’re still you are good to go.”

Some systems are going further by incorporating artificial intelligence to reduce friction. “We’re integrating the latest in AI technology to allow users to simply speak to Quoterite to interact with our system,” said Aaron LeCornu, CEO of Quoterite. “This is particularly invaluable in the field, when you don’t have time to be clicking through an application interface.”

Onboarding, Training & Team Growth

As the workforce shifts and experienced pros retire, software is becoming a key asset for training and onboarding. “This has brought training time down from 10 weeks to 10 days,” said McGrath, whose platform includes AI-driven education tools for both salespeople and production staff.

Solatech offers dedicated onboarding support, real-time chat with U.S.-based trainers and product updates tailored to the brands each client carries. Quoterite also provides one-on-one training and a community network to help ease the learning curve.

That’s especially important for franchise groups and growing teams who need consistent processes. “One of the biggest growing pains businesses face is the introduction of process,” said LeCornu. “Software provides tools to keep everyone on the same page and delivering the same level of quality service.”

Making the Switch

Still relying on handwritten quotes, browser tabs and folders of printed order forms? Industry leaders agree: Transitioning to software is no longer a nice-to-have, it’s a strategic necessity. “The return on investment is simply inarguable,” said LeCornu. “You’ll be quoting faster with a higher conversion rate and better margins.”

Soltis added a final word of advice: “Be clear on what you want to achieve when you start looking at software, because there is no one-size-that-fits-all solution for a business.” Ultimately, the best software is the one that helps you serve your customers better today and tomorrow. ■

Where Software Can Help Most



Thinking about making the switch? Here are just a few areas where software can make your life easier:

Quoting

Generate accurate, on-the-spot quotes with vendor pricing built in.

Scheduling

Sync calendars, assign appointments and track job progress in real time.

Order Management

Track jobs from sale to install with fewer errors and no duplicate entry.

Measuring & Configurations

Integrate laser measurements and ensure accuracy for specialty shapes.

Training & Onboarding

Reduce ramp-up time for new team members with guided workflows and support.

Customer Service

Store client history, automate communication and deliver faster follow-up.

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HIGHLIGHTS

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✓ Customizable



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Trust Is the New Close

What if you never had to “close” again?

BY KATHY CRAGG PACE



You already know that old-school, pushy sales tactics don't work. Frankly, you're not interested in them anyway. You care about your client. You believe in the transformation your work can create. And, deep down, you know your job isn't just to sell—it's to lead.

But here's the problem you experience every day: When clients hesitate, drag their feet, price-shop or say, “Let me think about it,” what do you do? You don't want to be manipulative. You don't want to chase. You don't want to start sounding like everyone else.

So, you're stuck in the gap.

The gap between wanting to guide your client forward ... and not knowing how to do it with confidence and clarity. Between doing incredible work ... and not getting enough yeses to sustain your business. Between trusting your value ... and being able to inspire your client to trust it too.

If that sounds familiar, take a deep breath. It's not just you, and it's not your fault. This is a market shift. Buyers are different now. They're slower to decide. They're more skeptical. They do hours of research before ever calling you. And, in this environment, it's not your price that's holding you back.

It's not your pitch.

It's not even your process.

It's trust.

More specifically, it's the absence of a client experience that builds trust quickly enough to convert high-value leads into loyal buyers. Here's what's really happening: What looks like a “price shopper” or a “tire kicker” is often a great client in disguise—someone who's just unsure, unready and uncertain about the process.

And, yes, those leads are fewer than they used to be. They're more expensive, harder to earn and come with more pressure to convert. Every lead is precious now—which means how you lead matters more than ever.

So, if persuasion doesn't work, price drops don't help and “overcoming objections” feels off, what *does* work? Let me offer four truths about sales that just might change everything.

Contrarian Truth #1: It's not about convincing. It's about creating the conditions for yes. Most of the time, hesitation isn't rooted in logic; it's rooted in uncertainty. Clients don't need more facts. They need to feel safe. They don't need to be “closed.” They need to feel like they're making the right decision for themselves, on their terms.

And that doesn't happen through persuasion (aka force). It happens through trust. Your job isn't to convince. It's to create an experience, one that lowers resistance, increases clarity and helps the client imagine themselves on the other side of the decision, feeling proud and relieved they said yes. That's what makes a sale feel effortless. Not because it required no effort but because it never felt like pressure.

Contrarian Truth #2: Confidence doesn't come from a better pitch. It comes from a better process. Sales managers often say, "You just need to be more confident in the home." But here's the secret: Confidence isn't something you summon; it's something you build *by doing things differently*.

When you have a plan. When you know exactly how you're going to open the conversation, introduce money, explore needs and present your recommendation. When you know how to handle silence without panicking and questions without defensiveness, you naturally show up more confident.

Confidence doesn't mean having all the answers. It means having a process that allows space for trust, exploration and momentum without winging it. Confidence is the byproduct of clarity.

Contrarian Truth #3: You're not the hero. Your client is. Be their trusted guide. You know your stuff. You've got the credentials, the portfolio, the solutions. But as you've discovered, expertise alone doesn't convert. Clients don't want to be lectured or led by someone who seems untouchable. They want a partner, someone who can walk *with* them, not just talk at them.

You don't have to "impress" your way to a sale. You need to connect. You don't need to be the know-it-all in the room. You need to be the one who listens well, sees clearly and helps them move forward.

In modern sales, the most effective position you can take is that of the trusted guide, the one who makes the journey feel doable, exciting and safe.

Contrarian Truth #4: It's not your price. It's your trust factor. I know clients are taking longer to decide. I know they're comparing more. I know you feel the pressure to be competitive. But when a client says, "I need to think about it" or "I'm getting other bids," it's rarely just about the number. What they're really saying is: "I'm not fully sure I can trust that this will work out the way I hope."

This is why "better closing techniques" aren't the answer. Connection techniques are. It's not about being smoother. It's about being clearer, more human, more trustworthy. Because when trust is high, price sensitivity goes down. When trust is high, hesitation shortens. When trust is high, you don't need to chase.

TRUST transforms your sales results.

You don't need to close. You need to lead. You didn't get into this business just to sell products. You became a window treatment designer or launched your design sales business because you wanted to transform spaces—and the lives lived in them.

But too often, the sales process feels like the part you just have to "get through."

Here's what I want you to imagine instead:

- Picture walking into every consultation with calm, grounded confidence not because you rehearsed a script but because you *trust your process*.
- Imagine clients leaning in—not pulling back—because they feel seen, heard and guided.
- See your calendar full of projects you're proud of not because you pitched harder but because you connected deeper.
- Think about what it would be like to feel in control of your sales, your income and your business ... without ever compromising your integrity or energy.

That's what happens when you lead with TRUST!

When you shift from trying to "close" to simply guiding your client through a thoughtfully crafted experience—one that feels as good to deliver as it does to receive—you stop selling and start leading.

And more often than not, they'll say yes. ■



Kathy Cragg Pace is a beacon of growth, empowering window treatment and design sales professionals to thrive by replacing outdated "closing" tactics with authentic connections and irresistible buying experiences. With decades in the industry—leading her own award-winning design franchise to nationwide sales teams and directly influencing \$450 million in sales—Kathy helps businesses reimagine their sales approach and address client hesitations with ease and confidence. Through her courses, tools and coaching, Kathy guarantees results and shares free resources at » KathyPace.com

Quiet Season

When business slows, growth doesn't have to. How to turn summer's slowdown into your strategic advantage.

BY ELSE JOHNSON



This morning, a power outage brought my home office to a halt. With the computer down, I gained an unexpected span of open time. At first, I was frustrated, but I soon realized this pause offered something invaluable: time to think. Instead of battling technology, I spent the morning reviewing my business goals, organizing project files and simply breathing. The disruption became a gift—an invitation to reset.

Summer often brings a slowdown in the window covering and interior design industry, reflecting our seasonal ebb and flow. With many clients vacationing and projects slowing down, it can feel like a lull. But what if you, instead of dreading the slowdown, viewed it as an opportunity for clarity, creativity and renewal?

Midyear Makeover: Rethink and Recalibrate

Summer is the midpoint of the year and a perfect time to review your plans. Imagine a dealer in mid-July, receiving fewer calls and a lighter workload. Instead of scrambling to fill her calendar, she spreads fabric swatches and sales reports across her showroom table and asks: What sold well in spring? What didn't? Which marketing channels brought the most qualified leads?

This intentional pause allows you to discover patterns you might otherwise miss, like declining interest in certain styles or growing demand for sustainable materials. Rather than

reacting amid your peak season's chaos, this is your chance to proactively adjust services, rethink pricing strategies or launch offerings that align with shifting market demands.

Strategic pauses aren't luxuries. They're your secret superpower. The summer slowdown invites you to pause and reassess, ensuring your business isn't just busy but moving in the right direction.

Sharpen Your Skills: Invest for Growth

Summer's gentler pace creates perfect conditions for skill development. Maybe you've put off learning new design software, upleveling your leadership skills or exploring innovative products. Perhaps there's a certification you've been considering.

This isn't just about staying current; it's about positioning yourself ahead of the curve. The installer who spent August mastering motorization can confidently offer smart home automation in October. The designer who explored biophilic design can effortlessly talk about bringing nature indoors when clients return from their outdoor-focused vacations.

Personal and professional development during slower periods transforms quiet months into investments that pay dividends when business accelerates.

Nurture Connections: Plant Seeds for Future Growth

Summer offers the ideal opportunity for nurturing your relationships, which we often neglect during the daily rush. Pull out your client database and send thoughtful check-ins to past customers. A simple handwritten note asking how they're enjoying their treatments can reignite connections and open doors for new projects or referrals.

Consider hosting a casual client appreciation event, perhaps a vacation-themed gathering in your showroom or partnering with a local home center for a design-focused evening. These relaxed touchpoints often generate more authentic connections than formal sales presentations.

Don't overlook your professional network either. Reach out to interior designers, architects and contractors you haven't connected with recently. Informal summer conversations tend to be more relationship-focused and lay the groundwork for future collaborations.

“Resting isn't a weakness or laziness. It's an investment in sustainability. Not just environmental, but career sustainability.”

Creative Sabbatical: Refuel Your Vision

Summer is ripe for creative renewal. Instead of diving into spreadsheets during a rare free afternoon, visit a botanical garden or an art museum. The light filtering through leaves or the curated flow of color and space often sparks new ideas and refreshes your creativity.

These moments of inspired sabbatical are vital in a field where innovation and visual storytelling matter. Even casually browsing international design magazines, exploring fashion trends and people-watching at a cafe can reinvigorate your imagination. When the workload lightens, the world becomes your mood board.

Tech companies call it “hack time,” a time for employees to step away from their routine and explore passion projects. For you, this could mean experimenting with new fabric combinations, sketching fresh drapery concepts or picking up a new hobby just for fun. These offbeat paths often lead to breakthroughs that set you apart when the busy season returns.

Pull Down the Shades: Protect Your Energy

The warmer months are the perfect time for rest—yes, actual rest. In an industry defined by tight deadlines, visual

perfection and constant coordination, burnout lurks around every corner. We've all been the business owner pushing through exhaustion, chasing one more lead or completing one more install.

Think of this season as your chance to “pull down the shades”—both literally and metaphorically. Introduce summer Fridays, take that family vacation you've been postponing or simply unplug for a little bit each day.

Resting isn't a weakness or laziness. It's an investment in sustainability. Not just environmental, but career sustainability. Clients come and go, trends shift, but honoring downtime protects your passion and prevents burnout.

Trust the Natural Rhythm

Remember, every business experiences ebbs and flows. Summer's slower pace isn't a problem to solve but a natural cycle to trust. Just as window treatments regulate light and temperature throughout the day, seasonal business patterns serve their purpose. This lull is simply the calm before the fall consultations and the holiday rush.

Smart business owners use this rhythm to their advantage, trusting that September brings back-to-school energy, October sparks home projects and November launches the holiday entertaining season.

Moving Forward with Intention

As business owners in the window covering and design industry, we're often so focused on doing that we forget the power of pausing to reflect. Summer offers that pause. Whether you're revisiting your goals, developing new skills, spending quality time with friends and family, refueling creativity or reclaiming well-being, the summer season can recalibrate more than your calendar—it can realign your entire approach.

Let the quiet guide you. Use it to reset, grow and reconnect with what drew you to this industry in the first place. The holiday rush will return soon enough.

The question is: Will you be ready with fresh ideas, sharp skills and renewed energy? ■



Else Johnson is a mindset strategist and creator of the Wise Mind Leadership Blueprint™, trusted by high-achieving entrepreneurs to dismantle self-sabotage and lead with intention. Backed by certifications in NLP, CBT and Positive Intelligence—and decades of experience in finance, entrepreneurship and the design industry—Else helps clients build emotional resilience, redefine their leadership identity and unlock measurable growth in creativity, profitability and strategic influence. » MoreThanJustFine.com

DRAWING BACK THE CURTAIN

The psychology behind effective email marketing

BY DOUG BARGER AND SHAUN TURNER



As a window treatment professional, you're tasked with delivering solutions for both clients and collaborators. Your email marketing strategy is one tool that helps bridge these meaningful connections. Too often, email campaigns fall flat because they overlook the human element. The secret? Psychology. By understanding how stories ignite empathy, urgency sparks action and personalization builds trust, you can transform boring emails by crafting content that resonates, educates and inspires your audience to act.

Let's draw back the curtain on how your business can use psychology to make your emails an authentic source of growth.

Know Your Audience

Audiences want to be recognized and not feel like they're "just another number," even when they receive marketing emails from brands they love. Some ways to make your audience feel as though you recognize each individual are to segment and personalize your emails.

Segmentation is a way to divide a large audience into smaller groups so you can give them more relevant information. Some of the most common ways to segment your audience are by demographics, interests, behavior and where they are in the buyer journey. For example, a homeowner and a business owner each deserve a different email.

Personalization is a way to use your contacts' data and tailor an email to them. Many email platforms allow you to insert the contact's first name into the email's subject line and body, creating a connection and authenticity between your contact and your business. This can help your audience feel like you are talking directly to them.

Overall, segmentation and personalization build trust.

Craft Compelling Narratives

Stories activate multiple regions of the brain and are processed more like experiences than information. Storytelling helps foster that personal connection between the reader and your business. Craft a narrative that mirrors your audience's aspirations. Start by identifying common pain points for each segment of your audience. Some examples include the need for energy efficiency, the desire for a personal and functional space or overcoming privacy challenges. Use client testimonials to anchor your stories in authenticity.

NEXT STEPS:

- Audit past projects for standout transformations.
- Dedicate one email/month to a customer success story.

Activate Design Psychology

When you're creating an email, consider its overall design. Here are aspects of the design you should think about while creating an email:

- **Text:** If your call-to-action (CTA) appears in the first third of the email, it's likely to get more clicks than one that sits at the bottom of the email.
- **Images:** Images are suitable for informational emails about products but might not be great for promotions or incentives encouraging your audience to take action.
- **Colors:** Each email should have your brand colors and contribute to the overall design while being relevant to the topic of the email.
- **Contrast:** If your buttons stand out, a recipient is more likely to click, which improves your email key performance indicators and brings your offer to your customers more efficiently.
- **Layout:** The most essential part of your email should be the most noticeable, meaning other elements lead the eye toward it.

Understand the Importance of Action Verbs

Passive language dilutes clarity and urgency by obscuring who is responsible for the action. Action verbs like "Transform," "Discover," "Save" or "Join" each tap into psychological triggers: urgency, clarity and user empowerment.

Avoid using vague or passive language that lacks specificity. For example, "Click Here" doesn't convince many readers to act. Instead, choose short phrases that align with your community's pain points, like "Beat the Heat with Solar Shades."

NEXT STEPS:

- A/B test subject lines to see which verbs drive better open rates.
- Use urgency sparingly. Timed offers and creating FOMO are effective tools that lose effectiveness over time.

Offer Incentives with Reciprocity

Create an offer, an incentive or a benefit that gets your customers interacting with your business. After all, people want to know what's in it for them if they click on your email. Create limited-time discounts or offers on products or services, offer early access to new products or bring informative content that only your subscribers get access to.

The most important thing to remember about incentives is that the more tangible and immediate the benefit is, the more people want it.

Create Your Ideal Marketing Ratio

When receiving emails, customers want to receive content that adds value or offers an incentive for them. A 70/30 or 80/20 info-to-marketing ratio keeps emails from feeling too "salesy."

We recommend that your emails inspire and educate first. Create content that shares design trends, offers DIY maintenance tips or provides guides that explain common queries. Then, position products as natural solutions. For example, a blog on "Maximizing Your Living Room's Natural Light" seamlessly integrates solar shades or sheers.

NEXT STEPS:

- Audit your emails, categorizing content as "educational" or "promotional."
- End with an active CTA: "Customize your window treatment solution."

Test and Refine Your Email Campaigns

Testing and refinement will perfect your successful email campaigns. Consider A/B testing your emails to find the most effective components in your campaign. Was a personalized subject line more successful than one that wasn't? Did sending at noon rather than the late evening bring more clicks? Lean into your most effective emails and test options until you find methods that lead to the most success in open rate, unsubscribes and click-through rate.

Test, monitor, change and, most importantly, listen to your audience to ensure your emails are successful across each of your segments.

Create Your Most Effective Email Strategy Yet

The psychology behind your emails isn't just a bonus, it's a foundational element that can elevate your marketing from forgettable to compelling. Audit your current campaigns through the seven psychological principles discussed here, and refine your strategy to resonate on a deeper, more human level.

By weaving these concepts into your workflow, you're not just sending emails—you're building trust, connection and value with every click. ■



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FEATURED FINDS



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SheerWeave® Style 7300/7350: Sophisticated Versatility

SheerWeave Style 7300/7350 is a stylish solution for interior spaces, offering both light-filtering and blackout options to suit any ambience. Style 7350 gently diffuses sunlight, while Style 7300 provides complete privacy and total light blockage. Woven with boucle yarn that creates a crepe-influenced soft crimp and twist, these fabrics feature a refined pebbled appearance with a subtle rippling effect that creates a sophisticated surface texture while adding depth and dimension. Coming soon in nine classic colors in two openness factors.

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Coulisse

Motionblinds.com/eve



NEW
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Bond

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Shade Smarter, Light Brighter: The Artemis RGBIC Shade Arrives in 2025

The Artemis RGBIC Lights Zip Track Shade, launching in 2025, features a sun tracker for optimal shade and lighting. Its integrated RGBIC system offers customizable illumination, enhancing outdoor spaces with vibrant colors. Combining innovation and aesthetics, Artemis redefines modern outdoor comfort with smart, dynamic shading and lighting control.

Spettman

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Catalina Outdoor Hardware by Helser Brothers

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Helser Brothers

HelserBrothers.com



Push PRO delivers seamless shade control, working with the newest Quiet Li-Ion Wirefree motors, including the 0.7Nm, 1.1Nm and 2Nm models. It features 10 customizable offline timers, intuitive on-screen setup, a sleek 2.4" LCD with optional dark mode and Smart Wake for instant access. With personalized shade and room names, Installer Mode for easy setup, fast USB-C charging and up to six months of battery life, Push PRO elevates automation for residential and commercial spaces.

Rollease

RolleaseAcmeda.com



SOLD!

Give Them the Control, Get the Sale

BY OLIVER SCHREIBER



Motorized shades are an amazing tool. With the press of a button or the utterance of a few words to Alexa or Siri, shades open simultaneously and the living room and breakfast nook immediately start filling with invigorating morning light, beginning a new day. And they are not just an amazing tool for opening shades—they are also an exceptional sales tool. What client of yours does not want the ease of use that motorized shades can offer?

What can motorization do for you and your company? First, it can separate you from all the other companies who are still afraid of selling motorization. Motorization requires knowledge and must be studied and learned. Good sales reps and sales teams will take the time to learn the latest and greatest technology has to offer, which gives them an advantage. It will also give you the opportunity for higher average sales, increasing profitability.

Motorized shades have truly made selling window treatments easier and more fun. The motorization aspect turns a “need” of window treatments into a “want” of motorization—and turns a tool into a toy. We all love gadgets, and the modernization of window treatments is no different. Placing a remote control into the hands of a grown man or woman can turn them into a child again. They get to “play” with the shades. And the more opportunities they have to “play” with them, the more they want them. So, how do we go about getting our clients on board with motorized products?

Make sure you are discussing motorization at every appointment. Do not wait for your clients to ask about them. Many will not, out of fear of sounding dumb, fear of the price or sometimes just because they did not even know they existed! Bring it up to them. Make it a part of your initial survey, asking them, “Have you ever considered automating your window treatments, creating the ability to open as many shades as you like at once? Or closing all the shades in the entire house at the end of a long day using just the words, ‘Alexa, close my shades?’” Listen to their responses. Some may think motorization is expensive. This gives us an opportunity to price condition and let them know that motorized shades are not as expensive as they may have thought. Say something like, “It used to be that folks would only motorize shades that were too high to reach by hand. Now, you may be pleasantly surprised to find out that motorizing shades is very affordable. Like flat-screen TVs, the cost of automated shades has decreased significantly and now a good portion of our clients motorize their entire homes.”

Bringing up motorized products may also help to separate you from your competition. Many design consultants are afraid of higher prices, so they avoid discussing motorization altogether unless brought up by the client. This puts you in the driver’s seat and helps to identify you as the expert.

Bring in a motorized hand sample. We all carry hand samples of our products—like wood blinds, woven, cellular, roman and roller shades. These allow our clients to get a larger representation of each product and show them the operating systems. Why not carry at least one motorized hand sample? Maybe even a top-down/bottom-up cell shade? Hand your client the remote, hold the shade in the nearest window and let your client go to town ... they will love it! And that becomes a great spot to do a little more price conditioning: “Mrs. Smith, all our clients love motorization. No one who gets motorized products ever says, ‘I wish I hadn’t spent the extra money!’”

Talk about motorization early and often. Separate yourself from your competition by being the expert in automation. Allow your customers to see what “ownership” of motorized shades feels like by using motorized hand samples and giving them the remote. Do these things and you will see your client satisfaction go up, your profitability increase and you will likely see another check mark go in the Sold! column. ■



Oliver Schreiber began his sales career over 30 years ago and is CEO of Beltway Blinds in Washington, D.C., Maryland, and Virginia. He leads a team that generated more than \$11 million in sales last year. He has been a speaker at IWCE, has received awards for being the largest-volume dealer with Alta Window Fashions and sits on the National Advisory Committee for a window covering group, Exciting Windows! BeltwayBlinds.com



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