

INTERIORS

Glass Act

Dressing a window, whether with elaborate curtains, a simple blind or a set of shutters, helps to set the tone of a room. Get it right and you will enhance the space. Stylist Mary Norden tells you how

SHUTTERS If you're after a contemporary look, it's worth thinking about getting shutters. They offer a great deal of flexibility – different slat sizes, colours and panel designs and, best of all, they allow you to have more control over how much light enters a room. Choose between full-height shutters that cover the whole window, cafe-style (right) ones that cover the lower half of the window for privacy while allowing plenty of light into the room, or traditional, solid ones designed to be folded back during the day and closed at night.

CURTAINS OR BLINDS? Key things to consider are light, budget and style. If getting enough light is a problem, opt for blinds because curtains can cut out some light. For bedrooms where you might want to block out all light, choose blackout blinds or thick, interlined curtains – or both. On a tight budget, blinds cost a fraction of the price of a pair of curtains, but if you are set on having the latter, then check out eBay and specialist second-hand curtain dealers (see stockists). If you are after a sleek interior look, roller blinds are the obvious choice, while unlined curtains are more informal. If the walls are papered and you are after drama, choose curtain fabric that coordinates.

SEASONAL CHANGES You might want to consider having curtains and blinds. Hang both blinds and curtains during the winter months to create a lovely, cocooning feel, then in the summer remove the curtains and use just the blinds to allow more light in.

GET CREATIVE For alternatives to fabric, you could use a blanket or throw as a curtain to create a cosy quick fix for windows – there's no hemming involved. Just add a strip of ruffle tape or a row of curtain rings stitched in place on the reverse. If the blanket is too long, either allow it to puddle on the floor, or simply fold over the excess blanket at the top to achieve the perfect length.

CHANGING DIMENSIONS If you want to give the illusion of height, choose vertically striped fabric. If you are hanging curtains at a narrow window, extend the width of the curtain pole well beyond both sides of the window, so that when you pull back the curtains you reveal the maximum amount of window. If there is no space for a wider pole, opt for a blind.

THE NEW NET CURTAINS Plain window film gives a lovely frosted look without the expense of buying new opaque-glass panels or the frilliness of traditional nets. Also worth checking out is the extensive range of pretty decorative glass effects and coloured transparent films available at brume.co.uk.



Cafe-style Manhattan shutters from The New England Shutter Company are custom made and can be painted in any colour. A good choice for kitchens as they won't pick up cooking smells or stains



Break the rules and go for curtains in different colours, such as these from Designers Guild



Team a statement blind with coordinating cushions, like these from Jane Churchill

DOUBLE-SIDED CURTAINS When curtains are drawn, they show their rear view to the world. Using an alternative fabric as a lining creates a glamorous two-sided curtain. You could be dashing and choose plain on one side and pattern on the other.

BREAKING THE RULES No one says you have to have a pair of curtains – just one will tick the style box as long as it covers the window generously when pulled across. Likewise, a pair of curtains doesn't mean they have to both be made in the same fabric. Choose coordinating colours or patterns but keep the fabric weights the same. **H**

ESSENTIAL STOCKISTS:

- The New England Shutter Company offers an inspiring selection of custom-made shutters; visit thenewenglandshuttercompany.com
- For wonderful embroidered fabrics and silks, visit janechurchill.com
- For ready-made curtains, blinds, curtain poles and tracks, check out John Lewis; visit johnlewis.com
- For bold colour and patterns, visit designersguild.com
- From heavy linens to delicate sheers at affordable prices, visit ianmankin.co.uk
- For second-hand curtains, someone to make bespoke curtains, unusually shaped curtain tracks or suppliers of window film, visit thehousedirectory.com