

HOW TO Purchase Plantation Shutters

How-To Tips:

- Variation in shutter quality can be dramatic. Pay attention to what you're getting, and make sure you get what you pay for.
- Know the size of the space you're trying to fill. Smaller spaces can accommodate lower-end shutters much more easily than larger spaces.
- Synthetic shutters offer many benefits for small spaces, but can sag with time when built too big.
- Work with a retailer that stocks a wide variety of shutters. This will give you a good idea about what will work in your home and what won't.
- Insist on a warranty with your shutters. If the retailer doesn't offer one, shop somewhere else.

Are you moving into a new home and trying to decide just what kind of window covering will make the perfect statement? Or perhaps you just want to update the look on your current abode. Whether you need to start from scratch or simply add a finishing touch to an already well-decorated room, you should consider plantation shutters.

The origins of these classic window coverings date back to the 19th century, when they were actually used in the harsh environment of tropical plantations. Proving to be truly timeless decor, they began showing up in residential homes as early as the mid 1970s, and have steadily gained in popularity over the last two decades. These shutters are now one of the most sought after of window coverings and are found in every type of environment, from the most regal homes to more modest townhouses.

"The addition of plantation shutters to a room offers a dramatic enhancement without a major construction project," said Jeff Falcon, president of Bay Home and Window, a Bay Area regional wholesale shutter provider. "They lend themselves equally to both contemporary and traditional motifs. Opened, they create a spacious, free quality, while closed they offer warmth, privacy and protection."

One quality unique to plantation shutters over other types of window coverings is their ability to architecturally open up a room while actually adding brightness through ambient light reflection off the surface of the louvers. This feature alone can change the feel of a room. Plantation shutters can be used for almost any opening and can be installed on a track system for patio doors.

What to look for

One of the few drawbacks to entering the shutter market is that shutters come in several distinct levels of construction quality, and understanding these differences can present a challenge. Variation in quality can be found in every part of the shutter panel, including material selection, joints, tension systems, hardware and finish. It's important to educate yourself in the different lines and construction types available in order to compare their strengths and weaknesses.

"You'll find that in the realm of wood shutters, lower-priced construction levels are quite serviceable in small to average size windows, as long as they receive little or no sunlight," said Falcon. "Alternately, higher line construction may be called for in larger or more exposed openings."

Shutters made of synthetic materials such as vinyl can be perfect for smaller openings or windows in damp environments, but often have sagging problems in spaces that require wider panel widths.

Bang for the buck

Although the right quality shutter will last for decades, the most common mistake made by buyers is to purchase shutters of a lower quality than what is indicated by their window environment. Errors of this kind can be costly.

Even a low-end shutter can look nice when new; however, most problems stem from using the wrong construction. A mistake here will often not reveal itself until several months have passed. Making a selection even more difficult, the average consumer must often rely on the advice of a retailer carrying only one or two lines of shutters.

"One of the best ways to reduce the risk of purchasing the wrong

construction quality is to shop with a company that carries several types, preferably one that specializes specifically in shutters," said Falcon. "Ask questions and compare."

When it comes down to making a decision between using the right shutter quality or perhaps putting in that new landscaping, think twice about stretching your dollar at the sacrifice of your shutter construction. If a decision must be made, it may be wiser to consider doing fewer windows and staying with the best shutter for the job.

Also, be sure that there is a comprehensive written warranty and read it carefully. Make sure that there is a written transferability clause if you intend to sell your home in the future. Most higher-quality manufacturers will allow at least one transfer, which can be a plus to a new buyer. Remember that a warranty is only good as long as the company that issued it is there to stand behind it, so a quick call to your local Better Business Bureau is always a good idea.

How much to spend

Once you've determined which quality of shutter will best suit your environment, the only remaining factor is cost. The price you pay for shutters will range substantially depending on the quality you choose. They typically will cost less than a lined drapery set but two to three times more than ordinary blinds. Some companies have a straight price that is computed on a "per square foot" basis and others use a "price grid" method. Pricing per square foot can work in your favor if you have small windows, but a price grid is more advantageous for those with average to large openings. Whichever method is used, the old adage that you get what you pay for is apropos in the world of plantation shutters.