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The Wonderful World of Wood Window Treatments

BY SOPHIA BENNETT

Trends may come and go, but one thing is certain: Wood window treatments are here to stay. This enduring class of window coverings offers beautiful aesthetics and terrific function. Wood treatments are widely available and versatile, able to help homeowners meet a range of goals.

Wood is a perfect fit with consumers' desire for more earthy-looking products. "The warm and natural feeling wooden window treatments add to a space cannot be created by any other material," says Jo Vois, managing director of Coultice, based in the Netherlands. "Wooden window treatments give every room a little radiance and the feeling of being close to nature. Besides, wooden venetian blinds also give you the ability to create any type of light and privacy. While they cover the window, wooden blinds still provide an open and inviting atmosphere."

Consumers excited about green home products may be drawn to things like those customers who are looking for products are a perfect option renewable resource," says Monica Noble in Corona, CA. (For more, see "Green Woods" on page 28)

Shades

Wooden window shades are trending upward right now, driven by the desire for natural looks and materials, says Heidi Hummel, director of merchandising for Blinds Galore in San Diego. "Historically, woven woods are most popular along the coastline for use in homes with a beach-focused interior. With the increased interest, I find that natural shades are purchased across the nation and in numerous age demographics," she adds.

Mike Jones, founder and CEO of Hartmann & Forbes in Tualatin, OR, says younger consumers are especially excited about the company's products. Millennials are more interested in the story of how the shades are made and more likely to seek out sustainable products.

When people envision woven wood shades, they typically picture the traditional bamboo or rattan look varieties. But there are many more options available today. "With the continued interest in the category, suppliers have expanded material and we are seeing more cloth-like finishes made of grass weaves and silk," says Hummel. "These closely resemble roman shades."

"Early in our company's history, we made the strategic decision to invest heavily in our knowledge of plant fibers and on working experts in natural fibers and weaving," says Jones. "We still do that, but we've expanded our weaving facility and have chosen to work in a number of regions where all of our competitors source. This gives us access to local fibers and we work directly with our farmers to create exclusive harvests that can meet the demands of our broad product mix." Beyond materials such as bamboo, rattan and silk, the trend continues to allow for more shades from hemp, banana, cork, hemp, palm, water hyacinth and a host of other materials.

While shades in these styles are popular, "In general, we see interest moving more toward simple, elegant and lightweight roman more classic looking, textured and darker shades," says Jones. "Of course, automation is a huge trend these days and we have developed an in-house team of automation specialists to accommodate the need for expert help. We also offer full automation project management at no charge for the design community."

Hummel recommends going a layer on woven wood treatments. "Most common issue with these shades come from aging. Due to the use of natural materials, they are more prone to graying, cracking or warping and bleaching from the sun. A liner will slow this process. But it will still happen over time. She also notes that over shade materials may require edge-binding to prevent wear and damage to the shade. "

Industry wood trends

Blinds

"Recent in-laid wood blind categories has stayed relatively constant over the past few years," says Brown. "We typically see people wanting wood blinds when they are upgrading from lower quality one blind, but occasionally we will have a client who wants them purely because they offer an earthy and organic look to the home."

According to Vois, one of the fastest-growing categories is motorized wood blinds, especially ones for large windows. "With our innovative automation concept MOTORBLIND, the wooden blinds can easily be turned into motorized blinds," he says. Smith & Noble added wood blinds to its Smart Shades motorized product offering last fall.

One of the exciting things about modern blinds is the huge range of paint and stain colors. "The color selection can make a product go from modern to traditional and fit into a specific trend," says Clouse. "For example, a flat dark gray finish with a sleek metallic and a two-tone decorative ladder tape on a wood blind can modernize it, while selecting a mahogany finish with a more decorative valance and decorative tape could be best suited in a more traditional setting."

Whatever color is used, the grain of the wood will give the blinds a beautiful final appearance. However, Clouse does caution that finishes may look different on varying types of blinds. "Depending on the wood, the finish will be absorbed differently and achieve the same species, some lots could vary on the color of the wood. This will affect the final finish, especially on slats or more transparent finishes." For consumers concerned about green products and indoor air quality, specify low-VOC finishes.

Although wood blinds are ideal for nearly every room, be careful about using genuine wood blinds in spaces that are humid—for example, bathrooms or over the kitchen sink. "Real wood blinds are a great option here because they will not warp," says Brown.

Exterior shutters have traditionally been painted a darker color to they stand out against brick or stone. "Lately, we have seen an uptick in lighter colored shutters," says Miller. "Clients are choosing more and more natural elements on their exterior, so keeping the shutters in their natural raw wood state is on the rise."

One of the biggest changes to interior shutters is that the louvers have gotten bigger over time. "The standard in the US, is 2 1/2 inches, where in the late '90s it would have been a 2-inch louver," says Davis. Single-panel shutters are also more popular than the double-panel variety. Rather than pulling out shutters when the control mechanism is in the center, consumers are increasingly down to those with a hidden control not attached to the rear of the louvers.

Ensuring shutters are the correct size and shape and are mounted correctly is paramount, says Miller. "Think of the windows as the eyes of the home and the shutters as the eyebrows to understand the space. If the shutters are incorrectly placed, sized or designed, they can ruin the appeal of the entire home."