

***Window Treatments
& Slipcovers***
FOR
DUMMIES®

by Mark Montano and Carly Sommerstein



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& Slipcovers***
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Window Treatments & Slipcovers For Dummies®

Published by
Wiley Publishing, Inc.
111 River St.
Hoboken, NJ 07030-5774
www.wiley.com

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Published simultaneously in Canada

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Library of Congress Control Number: 2005924594

ISBN-13: 978-0-7645-8448-0

ISBN-10: 0-7645-8448-0

Manufactured in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

10/RZ/RQ/QV/IN



About the Authors

Mark Montano is best known as the lead designer on *While You Were Out*, the hit designing show on TLC, which he joined in 2003. It's one of the most-recognized and best-loved home redesign shows on television.

Well before *While You Were Out*, Mark began designing clothing for his mother at the age of 14. After graduating from Colorado State University (where he earned a bachelor's degree in business), Mark moved to New York City, where he continued his education at the Fashion Institute of Technology, earning a master's degree in costume history. An internship at Oscar de la Renta gave him an appreciation for exquisite fabrics and the inspiration to begin his own clothing line.

He opened his flagship boutique in New York's East Village and established himself in the world of haute couture. As the youngest member ever to be inducted into the Council of Fashion Designers of America, Mark designed a signature collection of ready-to-wear and custom couture for more than ten years, which was shown to great acclaim on the runways of New York's Fashion Week.

Mark joined the staff of *Cosmo Girl!* magazine as a contributing editor in 1999, where he began a monthly room makeover column called "Cool Room." In early 2002, Mark continued inspiring teens with the publication of his first book, *Super Suite*, a collection of room makeovers for 15 teenage girls, which was selected for inclusion in the "Books for the Teen Age 2003 List," published by the New York Public Library.

He also writes a weekly column entitled "Make Your Mark," syndicated in more than 70 newspapers by Knight Ridder, in which he answers a wide range of readers' decorating questions. In August 2004, Mark began work as a feature columnist in the New York Post's home section, where his column "Mark Your Territory" tackles city-living design problems.

Mark's book, *Dollar Store Décor*, was published to great acclaim in 2005, and he's currently hard at work on a new TV show, TLC's *10 Years Younger*. He lives in New York City and Los Angeles.

Carly Sommerstein attended New York University, where she studied English and American literature. She has worked as a freelance book editor for more than 13 years. Her writing has appeared in the *NY Press*, the *Utne Reader*, *Jane*, www.playboy.com, and elsewhere. She also collaborated with Mark Montano on *Super Suite*. Carly lives in the New York City area with her husband and two-year-old son.

Dedication

This book is dedicated to our loved ones, and to everyone who has the desire to make things more beautiful.

Authors' Acknowledgments

So many people had a hand in creating this book, and we want to extend our deepest thanks and lasting gratitude to every one of them. Thank you, Diane Graves Steele, vice president and publisher, and Mikal Belicove, acquisitions editor, for coming up with the concept for the book and for giving us the chance to execute it. Thanks to Janet Rosen, our adorable and energetic agent, and Sheree Bykofsky of Sheree Bykofsky Associates, for their faith and on-going moral support. The great Jeremy Nelson did the interior photography, and the fine folks at Kreber in Columbus, Ohio, provided the color-insert photos; thanks and kudos to you both. Many thanks to the graphics department at Wiley, who created this book's line drawings.

The project editors and copyeditors of the publishing world are rarely given their fair due. These diligent, highly organized, and creative multitaskers contribute hugely to the final product. Thank you, Chrissy Guthrie and Sherri Pfouts, for your amazing brains and for your dedication and encouragement during the shaping of this book from start to finish. Copyeditors Chad Sievers and Neil Johnson corrected our spelling and syntax and made many smart comments and suggestions that helped a great deal. We also want to acknowledge the helpful contribution of our technical editors, Carol Spier and Sandra Rea, for going behind our work and pointing us in the right direction.

Mark thanks his parents for helping him to think out of the box, Jorge Montano for his organizational skills and good cheer, and his cowriter Carly Sommerstein.

Carly thanks her late grandmother Betty Liner, a talented seamstress and fabric lover who first exposed her to creativity with cloth. Thanks to her husband, J.R. Taylor, for his unconditional love and support. She also thanks her mother-in-law, baby genius Barbara Taylor, and Sherylann Matthias, her amazing nanny, who both helped to care for her son, Judah Ray Taylor, during the writing of this book; it truly does take a village. And thank you, Mark Montano, for your sense of humor and giant talent. It's a pleasure to work with you and an honor to be your friend.

Publisher's Acknowledgments

We're proud of this book; please send us your comments through our Dummies online registration form located at www.dummies.com/register/.

Some of the people who helped bring this book to market include the following:

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Special Art: Color section photos by
Mark Madden, Kreber; in-text photos
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Proofreaders: Leeann Harney, Jessica Kramer,
TECHBOOKS Production Services

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Introduction

We're delighted to welcome you to our take on window treatment and slipcover design. If you're bored with what's being offered to you in the stores and want to take a crack at doing it yourself, you came to the right place. We think making your own window treatments and slipcovers is the perfect way to express your individual style, to make a room truly special and entirely your own. This book provides you with our formula for a little style magic: We provide several fun ideas to jazz up your windows and furniture and explain step by step how to make them come to life. All you need is some money, time, and effort, and before you know it, you'll be creating beautiful window treatments and slipcovers for which you'd pay an interior decorator a king's ransom (not to mention bragging rights!).

As soon as you get the do-it-yourself bug, don't be surprised if you scoff out loud at all the store-bought home decorating products, their inflated prices, and their listless design quality.

About This Book

Window Treatments & Slipcovers For Dummies is a book for everyone — from those of you who don't own a sewing machine, and don't want to, to those who are learning the ins and outs of sewing, to those of you who have some good basic sewing knowledge that you want to flex a bit, to those of you who have been sewing for years and want to pick up a few new design ideas. We include useful background knowledge and practical information on choosing materials (such as fabrics, trims, and hardware), tips on planning your construction, as well dozens of step-by-step projects that you can create as is, or adapt to your design needs.

We wrote this book so you can make window treatments and slipcovers easily at home and in the style you love. We conceived and translated into writing many projects that don't require any sewing knowledge, for those who want to create without sewing, and many projects that only require rudimentary sewing knowledge. We wish we had the time and space to give you a sewing tutorial for each project, but that just wasn't possible. If you want to attempt an "advanced" sewing project that we offer, but feel that your sewing skills aren't quite up to snuff, we encourage you to pick up Jan Saunders Maresh's *Sewing For Dummies*, 2nd Edition, (Wiley) which shows you all the basic step-by-step sewing concepts and techniques, and some fun projects, as well.

Conventions Used in This Book

We want to take a minute to point out some conventions we used when writing this book:

- ✔ To get you started on the right foot, each project begins with a formula for figuring out how much fabric you need to cover your particular window or piece of furniture. We also always provide an example, so that you can see the math in action.
- ✔ In addition to addressing fabric needs upfront, we also provide a list of needed tools and materials before each project. We arrange these lists of supplies alphabetically, not in their order of importance. Making sure you have all your tools and supplies handy before you begin a project is essential.
- ✔ We simplify many standard sewing practices to make this book as accessible and easy as we possibly can. If you've been taught to sew in a way that contradicts our advice, certainly do what makes you the most comfortable. But consider trying it our way. We've thought it all through, and we believe our suggestions will work out great for you and your room. Mark has been sewing for decades and really knows his stuff!
- ✔ Anytime we introduce a new sewing, fabric, or decor term, we *italicize* it.
- ✔ We **bold** all keywords as well as the steps in a numbered list.
- ✔ Web sites and e-mail addresses appear in `monofont` to help them stand out.

What You're Not to Read

Of course, we'd love for you to read each and every word of this wonderful book — after all, we wrote it! However, if you're not interested in all the details and just want to get to the heart of each project, you can skip the sidebars, which are shaded gray. Sidebars contain good-to-know but nonessential info, so they're totally skippable if you want to do so.

Also, any paragraphs marked with the Nice to Have icon are skippable as well. These paragraphs point out tools and gear that are (you guessed it) nice to have but not necessary to complete the project successfully.

Foolish Assumptions

As we wrote this book, we made some assumptions about you and your needs:

- ✓ You want to be able to create great-looking rooms without having to first achieve seamstress status. (Although for some projects in this book, we do assume that you at least know your way around a sewing machine.)
- ✓ You want a wide range of style choices to fit many different rooms.
- ✓ You're looking for tips, shortcuts, tricks, and smart advice — from soup to nuts — to lower your frustration level down to zero (or at least pretty close to zero).
- ✓ You want to start making window treatment and/or slipcover projects to spiff up your rooms right away.

If any of these assumptions fit the bill for you, welcome to our world and to this book!

How This Book Is Organized

We organized this book into five parts so that you can quickly and easily find what you want.

Part I: Window Treatments & Slipcovers 101

In this part, we talk about planning your window and slipcover projects including how to determine your style, your color likes and dislikes, your fabric choices and where to shop for them, and information on hardware and “softwear” for your windows and furniture. We also give advice on what tools you need and how to create a useful workspace.

Part II: Window Treatments in a Snap

The chapters in this part deal exclusively with the easiest no-sew and low-sew window treatments — everything you need to know about measuring, cutting, and creating simple curtains, draperies, and shades. We cover the

wonderful world of window treatment accessorizing, so you can personalize your creations. We also offer some helpful timesaving shortcuts and quick fixes in case you find yourself in a jam.

Part III: Slipcovers Made Easy

This part shows you all about simple no-sew or low-sew slipcovers and how to calculate your fabric needs and measure properly so you can cover nearly any piece of furniture in your home. We offer some advice on adding accessories, such as trims and other add-ons, to your slipcovers and, as in Part II, a few shortcuts and plenty of advice on how to melt away mistakes.

Part IV: Challenging Projects to Try

Here we offer you four more chapters of window treatment and slipcover projects. Two are “intermediate” in nature; we assume you have some sewing skills that you’ll use to make treatments and slipcovers that are a step up from the really easy ones in Parts II and III. We also include two more-challenging chapters for “advanced” window treatments and slipcovers.

Part V: The Part of Tens

In this part, we give you some practical style advice including our humble opinions on design tips to help you create a truly special room, as well as interior design rules that should be broken (we ardently believe that thinking outside of the box is the first step toward discovering your creativity). We also offer you a few Web resources so you can find the materials you need at a great price.

Icons Used in This Book

Throughout this book, we use icons in the margin to guide you toward important points and concepts. Here’s how they break down:



Some tools are essential in creating the projects in this book, and others while not totally necessary are still nice to have. Check out the information that appears near this icon; you may find some great timesavers and frustration-savers.



This icon alerts you to useful information. This information can help guide you along the creative process as well.



The information next to this icon tells you how to do something in the quickest and best possible way.



Make sure you read the text next to this icon. We point it out to help you avoid various pitfalls and keep your sanity while you're making a project.

Where to Go from Here

Because each chapter in this book can stand on its own, you can really start anywhere you prefer. If you want to start with a window treatment, go to Part II or Part IV. If you'd rather tackle a slipcover, head to Part III or IV. And if you're the type of person who really likes to have his or her ducks in a row before beginning a project, peruse Part I to make sure you know about buying and using the right fabrics and hardware, assembling a sewing kit, and creating a functional workspace.

We do suggest that you read Chapters 2, 4, and 6 before you decide on a window treatment and Chapters 2 and 10 before you decide on a slipcover. Thinking about what kind of fabric you need and understanding some of the measuring challenges (and for window treatments, what kind of hardware to buy) go a long way toward helping you plan your project. After that, you can jump around from chapter to chapter to see which projects match your skill level as well as projects that meet your particular design needs.

6

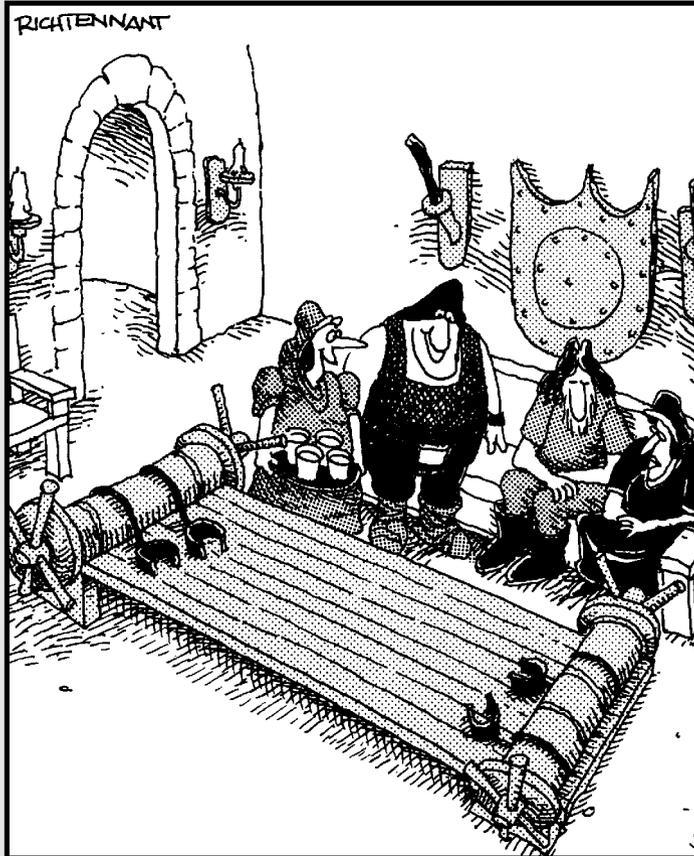
Window Treatments & Slipcovers For Dummies ---

Part I

Window Treatments & Slipcovers 101

The 5th Wave

By Rich Tennant



"I was thinking of making a pretty floral slipcover with ruffles for this, but I didn't want to send mixed signals."

In this part . . .

Planning your new window treatment or slipcover — or both — and getting all the materials and your workspace together may seem demanding, but we're going to make sure it's also fun. Furthermore, we promise that if you take everything one step at a time, you'll discover your hidden designer *and* see your project through from beginning to end.

In this part, we start off with some style and design choices to mull over, recommend where to go for inspiration so you can start fleshing out your projects, and provide a quick overview of construction techniques and advice on organizing a simple workspace. We tell you all you need to know about choosing, shopping for, and pre-treating fabric; deciding on accessories and trims; and picking (and even making) complementary hardware and mounting it correctly. We also recommend some helpful tools that you want to keep around to make your sewing life a lot easier — and fun.

Chapter 1

Covering the Basics Before You Start

In This Chapter

- ▶ Thinking about color, print, scale, and texture
 - ▶ Searching for inspiration everywhere
 - ▶ Choosing your construction
 - ▶ Creating a workspace and gathering your supplies
-

“But where do I start?” Many people, even design professionals, have uttered this phrase when faced with starting a designing endeavor. Creating something seemingly out of thin air can seem daunting, and you may even put off starting your project because you feel overwhelmed by everything. Don’t worry, we’re here to help.

This chapter offers some basic information and helpful tips to keep in mind when you’re beginning to think about slipcover and window treatment projects you want to make. From choosing fabric to seeking out style ideas, to thinking about trims and considering whether to sew or not to sew, to organizing your workspace and getting your sewing kit together, this chapter is a great place to start — from the beginning!

Thinking about Color

Do you like light-colored, sheer fabrics for an open breezy feel? Do you like bursts of saturated color? Are you attracted to the richness of velvet? Fabrics have unique qualities that can help you express your true style (see Chapter 2 for more).

One of the first things you think about when starting a new design project is your color choice. Whether you like or dislike colors and combinations of colors is subjective, but you can rely on a few principles to help you decide what color/colors work best for your project.

Using the color spectrum

The *color spectrum* comprises the colors of a rainbow. If you remember your high school science or art classes, you may recall old Roy G. Biv, which stands for red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet. The warm colors — red, orange, and yellow — register in many people’s eyes as advancing. They make an area look larger, tend to impart energy and vigor, and are at the left side of the color spectrum. The cool ones — green, blue, indigo, and violet — register in many people’s eyes as receding. They make an area look smaller, tend to impart calm and relaxation, and are on the right side of the spectrum.



Black and white are “color-free” colors that go well with warm or cool hues. Neutrals like beige, tan, cream, and wheat can also be combined beautifully with either warm or cool hues.

Deciding whether to go cool or warm

Most people choose either warm or cool tones, and stay within the one family of colors — for example, robin’s egg blue matched with indigo — which decorators call a *monochromatic* color scheme, depending on what kind of feeling they want to impart in the room. Warm tones impart a bright, happy, stimulating feeling, while cool tones give a calming, relaxing tone. Bedrooms are rooms where you relax and sleep, so many people favor cool colors, like blue, while a den and kitchen are livelier spaces that oftentimes benefit from a warmer palette. Dining rooms are often red, which is considered an appetite stimulant.

Mixing it up by choosing both

No rule says that you have to stay exclusively within the cool tones or the warm tones. In fact, we wholeheartedly advocate using both sides of the color spectrum — what we call the *cool/warm paradigm*. For example, a warm orange and a cool/neutral tan always look great together, as do a sunny yellow and a cool blue. Another winning combination is red (or pink) and gray, or blue and orange.



We encourage you to add color to your life in ways that please you. But moving all over the color spectrum with four or five colors that don’t relate to one another may make the room a bit too busy, creating a space where working or relaxing is difficult. Stick to two or three compatible colors and you’ll never go wrong.

Say your existing decor features a brick-red sofa, a white armchair, a light green rug, and off-white walls. You have one warm element (red), two neutral elements (white and off-white), and one cool element (green) in your room. You may decide that you want to move toward the cool family, playing up the carpet’s color by incorporating another cool tone in your window treatment,

say, a window treatment in a similar green, or a blue with green tones. Or you may want to move your decor toward a warmer palette by choosing a cinnamon brown slipcover fabric to cover the armchair. Saffron is another color that looks gorgeous added to warm tones.



Paint samples, the kind on paper that you get at the hardware or paint store, are very useful to keep specific colors, or families of colors, handy when you fabric shop. Take a few home and match them to the elements of your decor you want to keep in mind when you shop. Staple 'em right into a notebook where you can easily locate them. (Check out “Nearer to thee (your references, that is)” later in this chapter and Chapter 2 for more on creating a notebook.)

Are you feeling it?

When selecting a fabric for your project, you want to consider how the fabric feels. Some fabric has a shiny finish, some is silky, some is rough, and some is a bit scratchy (see Chapter 2 for more on choosing fabric). How does the fabric feel when you sit on it, lounge on it, and touch it with your bare feet? Do your family members, especially children, who tend to have more sensitive skin, like it? At the same time that you're evaluating the feel of the fabric, consider its “hand”; how does the fabric handle, drape, or crease? Is it stiff or flimsy?

Although the fabric's feel applies more to slipcovers than to window treatments, it's still important for both types of projects that you enjoy handling the fabric while you're making your project, because that's half the fun.

Picking prints

Prints, including stripes, polka dots, florals, geometric shapes, plaids, paisleys, sunbursts, and so on, are a terrific way to add pizzazz to a room. Choose a print whose background color echoes another color in your decor to give your project and room an extra punch.

When selecting a pattern, consider contrasting its scale with other patterns in the room. *Scale* refers to the size of the patterns and how they relate to other patterns in the room. Add a small check to a large floral print for a traditional look. Mix a medium stripe with a small geometric print for a great-looking modern design scheme.

We especially love bold prints with large motifs and recommend them if they fit your decor. Large prints can provide a nice focal point to your room, like a design exclamation point. However, they can be a challenge to sew because you have to match the repeated motif across fabric panels (see Chapter 6 for more on repeats).

What's that smell?

Most people don't think about the scent of fabrics, but if you're using a certain fabric to make a slipcover you'll be lounging or napping on, it may be an issue, especially for people with sharp noses. Although some fabrics have a distinctive odor, others are fairly neutral smelling. Some natural fibers have inherent scent qualities, like silk and wool, while others get their odor from the

types of dyes or finishes used. For the latter, laundering doesn't always get rid of a fabric's scent because the dye is impregnated in the fabric and the finishing processes also contribute to any aroma the fabric may have. So if you're worried that a particular fabric may be too strong smelling for your slipcover, get a sample, launder it, and check it. Sniff before you buy!



Particularly with slipcovers, you have to be sure the motif always runs the correct way across the entire sofa or chair. Our recommendation here and throughout this book is to use a small, all-over print fabric for creating slipcovers. It saves you time, money, and sewing frustration, and you'll be less prone to grow weary of your slipcover if you take this advice (see Chapters 2 and 6 for more on prints). You'll find that small, all-over prints also impart a cozy, calming feeling; something about that random repetition is very lulling to the eye.



Many books, including the one you're currently reading, urge you to exercise restraint when you mix patterns. Two or three patterns are plenty. A room bustling with four or five different patterns can impart an unrestful and chaotic feeling. You can add visual interest with other elements, such as texture, rather than inundating the space with too many patterns (see the next section).

Making use of texture

Introducing texture is a great way to add a low-key sense of style. Not everyone likes a bold or diverse color palette. If you want to work in neutral colors but don't want it to get boring, look for fabrics with texture. Woven fabrics — such as damasks and twills — are wonderful for window treatments and slipcovers.

Fabrics with *nap* (in this case, fabrics made with raised threads that impart a fuzzy texture, and which “change” color when brushed one way or the other) — such as velvet, velveteen, and corduroy — are also good choices. Quilted fabric, like matelasse, is a nice choice for slipcovers and adds a bit of cushion for good measure. Faux-suedes add texture and are durable as well as washable.



You can also consider introducing a small bit of texture to the body of a conservative-looking creation: Add a pillow or skirt to a slipcover or a tieback or edging to a window treatment. A little can go a long way.

Uncovering Sources of Project-Planning Inspiration

Whenever you're planning a new project, you have a ton of items to keep straight. On top of all these elements, you also need to find design ideas. Where do you get the spark of inspiration? This section can provide some insight.

Catalogs and magazines

If you're like us, you get about a million home-design retail catalogs in the mail each month. Don't throw them away. They're a great place to find inspiration. Most of these companies also sell a nice array of drapery rods, poles, brackets, finials, and *holdbacks* (tiebacks made from hard materials). Take a look at the different styles to see which ones appeal to you. Some may give you a few ideas of your own, either to make (see Chapter 8), or to pick up cheap secondhand at resale stores, flea markets, or garage sales (see Chapter 4).

If you subscribe to *Architectural Digest* or a similar magazine, or if you receive any of the do-it-yourself design magazines — the market now has more than ever before — you're sure to find tons of ideas. If you can't swing a costly subscription, check out the library (your mom would surely approve of this idea).

The good ol' public library

Books on interior design, architecture, the history of fabric, and fine art books are all great idea sources, if you're fortunate enough to have your own library (Mark has an awe-inspiring one!). If you don't have one, remember that another ideal place to search for design ideas is waiting for you right in your hometown — the public library.

In this digital age, many people often forget how peaceful and edifying libraries can be. You can really concentrate and evaluate when you're surrounded by nothing but quiet. Make the time to "study" there, as you used to do as a kid, if only for an hour, to find your inspiration (and at the right price!).

Museums and historic homes

To get a feel for classical designs of the past, museums and historic homes provide a wonderful opportunity for study and contemplation. On-site curators verify the historical accuracy and caretakers tend to the design elements of these places, allowing for a pleasant, informative visit. Meet these professionals if you can and ask questions. Be sure to inquire as to whether photographs are prohibited before taking them.



To locate a historic home that is open to visitors, check out this helpful Web site: www.nationalregisterofhistoricplaces.com.

Open houses and house tours (also known as barging in on the neighbors)

When an important (or not so important) home is up for sale, the real estate office handling the sale arranges a no-invitation visitation time so prospective buyers can see the goods. These open houses are given to create local “buzz,” and they usually last for a full weekend. They’re another wonderful (and super fun) opportunity to get design info.

In a similar vein, some cities offer (for a nominal fee that usually goes to charity) tours of historic neighborhood homes, some of which have been lovingly restored to their original splendor. It’s an opportunity for the homeowners to show off their restoration work, and for you to meet like-minded folks who love house history, and to contribute to a worthwhile cause. Some towns feature designer showcases of newly constructed homes or holiday-themed tours to raise money for a community project; these tours may also be a good resource.

If you have some drawing talent, make a sketch of the design detail you want to re-create at home. Yes, you can whip out your minicamera or cell phone to take pictures, but please be discreet — you’re still in somebody’s home!

TV and the Internet

TV design shows are rampant. Just turn on your TV (of course, we recommend the one Mark’s on, *While You Were Out* on TLC) and see if they’re doing anything you want to try. Write down the name and date of the episode, and later do an Internet search for that show’s Web site, where you’re sure to find information and additional links that can provide inspiration.

The Internet is also a great design resource. Just log on to the Web, type in the specific design topic — for example, “kitchen valance” — into a search engine, and happy hunting.

Fabric stores

Visiting a great fabric store with an amazing array of fabric is a wonderful way to start the process. Sure, we can explain to you what organza or damask or toile looks and feels like, but until you see it and touch it yourself, you can't decide if it's right for you and your needs. Believe us, the sales help won't look at you funny if you spend an hour at a fabric store and buy nothing. Getting educated about what you like and don't like about fabric is an important step in creating the projects in this book.

Some Assembly Required: Necessary Construction Skills

You have quite a few construction options for making window treatments and slipcovers. Whether you sew or not is up to you, as we offer a few sewing alternatives, such as using hot glue and iron-on bonding tape. You also need to measure with a measuring tape and drape fabric to get the look you're seeking.

Measuring makes it right

Measuring correctly is essential to making your creation the best it can be. Accurately determining your window's width and length and your furniture's width, length, and depth is the first step in determining your fabric needs.

Before you begin any project, take a look at our two measuring chapters, Chapters 6 and 10, for tips on figuring out how much fabric you need for your style of windows or furniture. You can also find some info there on cutting your fabric, making patterns, and calculating your seam allowances.

Folding, draping, tying, and more

Many of our simplest projects call for finessing and arranging fabric by way of folding, draping, tucking, and tying. In our easy window treatment chapter, Chapter 7, we talk about using folded throws, draped fabric to create swags that loop around a decorative rod, and adding clips to create fast and beautiful treatments. In our simple slipcover chapter, Chapter 11, we focus on tucking, pinning, tying, and draping fabric or even flat bed sheets for a great covering effect.

Although they may sound easy, these skills actually take a bit of practice to get the look you want, so don't feel discouraged if it takes you a few tries (or more).

After you achieve the look you love, you can add a bit of panache with knock-out accessories. (Check out Chapters 8 and 12 for adding accessories to your window treatments and slipcovers.)

Sewing (or gluing or bonding)

This book divides projects into three categories: easy no-sew or low-sew window treatments and slipcovers; intermediate-level projects that require some sewing knowledge but also offer a few sewing alternatives; and more complex projects where sewing with a machine is a must and some specific sewing knowledge is required.



Generally, the easier the project, the less reliant on a sewing machine you need to be. In some cases, you can substitute sewing with a hot glue gun, safety pins, or even Stitch Witchery or another brand of iron-on bonding tape. Check out the individual project chapters for specifics.

Here's a quick rundown on your sewing choices.

Sewing with a sewing machine

Sewing with a machine is the quickest and easiest way to construct a window treatment or slipcover. You'll be folding fabric to sew hems with our fold-and-fold method (see Chapter 14), sewing straight lines across fabric to create rod sleeves, joining two or even three panels of fabric together to get adequate width for your windows and furniture, and sewing fabric pieces together with simple seams.

A sewing machine is also helpful for sewing on accessories. Any sewing machine that can sew a straight stitch and a zigzag stitch works fine, and the ability to reverse to back tack is helpful, but not essential. If your sewing machine has a zipper foot attachment, you can use it for adding zippers to slipcover cushions (see Chapter 17).

Sewing by hand

A needle and thread come in handy when you only have to make a few stitches here and there, for low-sew window treatments, and for attaching buttons, bows, appliqués, and other accessories, especially delicate trims that your sewing machine could damage (see Chapters 8 and 12 for more on accessories and the best ways to apply them). Just remember: Have a few sizes of needles around for different fabric weights; the heavier the fabric, the thicker the needle.

Using a glue gun, bonding tape, and more

You also have a few other options besides a sewing machine or sewing by hand when working these projects. You can use

- ✔ A **glue gun** (a tool that melts a stick of glue and ejects it in a thin stream) bonds fabric to fabric for a long-lasting hold and is a great alternative to sewing, especially if you confine its use to an area that you can't see after the project is finished.
- ✔ **Iron-on bonding tape**, such as Stitch Witchery, which you use in conjunction with an iron and pressing cloth, can take the place of sewing hems at the bottom of your window treatment. You can also use it to attach accessories, like trims and appliqués. You place this tape between two layers of fabric and iron over the fabric. The iron's heat melts the tape and adheres the two pieces of fabric together.
- ✔ **Fray Check** is a sealant for fabric; it prevents nicks and edges from fraying.
- ✔ **Safety pins** are a terrific way to create no-sew window treatments (see some of the projects in Chapter 7), and they're also useful for securing slipcovers (see Chapter 12).

Check out Chapter 5 to discover more about these handy notions.

Creating a Workspace and Gathering Your Supplies

Organizing your workspace is an essential step in the creative process. Having everything you need at your fingertips allows you to work unimpeded and quickly, not to mention lowering the dreaded frustration level. Here's all you need to get it all together.

Your worktable

Did your mom or grandmother have a sewing room when you were growing up? Who wouldn't love a room of one's own, to dream, create, and indulge one's senses? If you don't have a room to set up a permanent workspace for your sewing projects, what can you do? Don't panic. You can use any large table, with just a bit of specification.



You need a large, flat surface on which to spread out, measure, pin, and cut fabric, and you need a stable spot for your sewing machine. Because sewing machines tend to shake, use a sturdy table, such as a strong kitchen or dining room table. If you're limited by space as to how large a table you have, set up an adjacent card table so you have room to spread out your fabric and so your fabric has a place to rest when coming out of the sewing machine, especially when you're sewing large fabric panels.

You also want to cover a smooth-surfaced table with a table pad or secured tablecloth to keep your fabric from sliding around. If you plan to do quite a bit of sewing and don't mind the extra work, consider covering your worktable with half-inch thick cotton batting, to add some nonsliding padding. Roll the batting out across the table and secure it by taping it under each corner of the worktable, or use extra-large rubber bands at the table edges to keep the batting in place.



If you're really limited for space, you may be tempted to try to work on the floor. We suggest you skip the floor because it's *really* hard on your body. But if you have a strong constitution and the floor is your *only* option, make sure you kneel on a pillow, or buy a gardener's foam pad. You'll be able to work longer, and your knees will surely thank you for it! And always tape a large clean sheet to the floor so your fabric doesn't pick up any dust, dirt, or dog or cat hair. We don't recommend working on a bed; it's too soft, and there's just too good a chance you'll cut through your bedspread or duvet.



If you're committed to setting up a permanent sewing space, you may want to invest in some sewing room furniture. Check out sewing centers, tables, and cabinets made especially for sewing rooms at www.joann.com.

Let there be light

Adequate light is an essential ingredient for any creative endeavor. If you can't set your worktable up near a source of natural light, get a floor lamp or other large light source with a full-spectrum light bulb so everything — from the pattern repeat to the selvage edge to the matching thread color — is crystal clear. Doing so also serves you well if the only time you get to work on your creation is in the evening.

Bags, baskets, boxes, and more

We understand but don't adhere to the "out of sight, out of mind" school of thought when it comes to sewing areas. Keeping everything hidden away may make for a peaceful-looking room, but we also firmly believe that the better