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What the Pros Know

Solutions for Dilemma Windows

By Deb Barrett

Window dressings for Avondale Homes kitchen eating area. (photo by Deb Barrett)

Today's challenging windows are not limited to what we commonly refer to as specialty windows—arches, transoms, bays. With little dialogue between window manufacturers, builders and window fashion professionals, we are often faced with other window dilemmas like assorted windows/doors in one room and oddly placed or sized windows. Here are some trade secrets from the pros that deal with all these kinds of dilemmas.

1. Arched Windows
Arched windows dominate housing architecture in several regions of the country, creating challenges for designers.

Solution: Savvy designers will design treatments that flatter the architecture and mimic the curve. Most top treatments for rectangular windows can be adjusted to arches. Swags and balloons are good choices.

2.Odd-Size Windows
It's all about proportion. All proportions are based on ratios called Fibonacci Scale and are intimately connected to Golden Mean. The Fibonacci Scale is a sequence of numbers in which any number is the sum of the two preceding numbers (0,1,1,2,3,5,8,13,21,34). Rectangles with sides related to Fibonacci Scale numbers—2 x 3;
3 x 5; 5 x 8—are called golden rectangles.

Solutions: When designing window fashions, the trick is to camouflage badly proportioned windows by turning them into golden rectangles. Here are some approaches to do that:
• Specify mounting heights and bracket-to-bracket measures that turn the window into a golden rectangle.
• Divide the window into thirds; locate a center of interest; create a silhouette that leads the eye around the window by giving it a path.

3. Corner Windows
Corner windows are making a comeback. They offer great ventilation and light in today's homes and big headaches for pros.

Solution: Unify the two windows and create a point of emphasis. Use one top treatment or a center drapery panel to hide the inevitable center gap between the window jams.

4. Odd-Shaped Windows
Octagon and round windows first appeared in the Georgian period in Europe, evolving from the Roman keystone arch, and later moving across the ocean in the Victorian era. Dormers are small windows in roof line alcoves, requiring tight tolerance. All these windows call for simple, light treatments. Film is a perfect solution.

5. Determining Width of Stacked Stationery Panels
Here are a couple of options the pros use to determine how wide stacked stationary drapery panels should be:
1. Specify stationary panels 1.5 times fuller than bracket to bracket. They will look like they can close.
2. Specify stationary panels 1/3 wider than desired finished width. This adds fullness to the width, not to each pleat. A panel you'd like at 20 inches stacked would be fabricated at 33 inches finished width. The trick is to add fullness discreetly.
Tip the visual weight scale to the top treatment. Drapery panels should never be wider than your valance depth. Top treatments look best when the scale of the valance is larger than the panels.

Trove, a New York design house specializing in visually arresting wallpapers, has moved into the window category with these stunning films featuring birds or butterflies in flight.

6. Portiers
Portiers can dramatically mark an entrance and correct proportions of the door or entrance. They can make a large area smaller, or if hung above a door in a room with a tall ceiling can disguise bad proportions.

7. Wide Windows
What works on a 50" window doesn't always translate on a wide window. Again it is a question of proportion—balance width with height.

Solutions: Valances and contrasting detail add interest. If the window is wider than it is high, balance with long panels. Break up the width into sections using swags, kingston, box pleats or bells, in odd numbers if at all possible. Fabric choice is essential. Large patterns intensify in large spaces. Small scales repeated into infinity don't work. Lace has too much detail. Solids need texture. Prints can bleed—so line and interline.

8. French Doors or Atrium Doors

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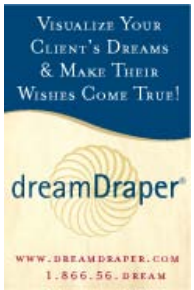

For an alternative to Romans or shades on French doors, consider Brise-Bries, a simple curtain usually in lace or sheer.

9. Fascia Board
Fascia board is a good solution for hiding white goods when a valance isn't in the budget. Fascia board is a fabric-covered board with a small face onto which white goods are mounted. It hides the rod when draperies are open. French or Goblet pleats work best.

Brise-Bries, a simple curtain usually in lace or sheer, hangs on French doors three quarters down from the top. These are an excellent alternative to Romans or shades for privacy on French or atrium doors. (photo courtesy of Gibbs-Smith, from Charles Faudree's French Country Interiors*)*

10. Side by Side Windows
A variety of window types can be placed in a series side by side. Suburban Georgian architecture emphasizes this look. Typical windows are placed 10 to 12 inches apart, which can leave about 3 inches when dressed. That is not enough to rest the eye.

Solution: Design these windows as one. There is too much redundancy when treated individually. Unify with a decorative rod and panels or a valance. Also, use wallpaper and matching fabric. The window and wall blend together—an old technique that creates the illusion the window and wall are one. **V**

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