

“The Most Expensive Window Treatment is the One You Have to Keep Replacing”

Studies have shown that once you place a treatment in your windows, it most likely will stay there for a minimum of five to seven years, or even longer in most cases. If you don't believe it, ride through an older neighborhood and see how many mini blinds you see. Because of this tendency, it's best to view buying quality window treatments as an investment, amortized over the time you anticipate living in your home.

If you are moving into a new home, it may be tempting to “settle” for an inferior treatment because of the amount of expenses incurred with moving. From selling these in the past, Advanced Window Fashions has found that a majority of these treatments are generally designed to last for two to three years (less if you get them from the “Big Box” stores off the shelf). Nothing is worse than having to replace window treatments in order to sell your home, because then you don't even get to enjoy them!

Some custom economy blind companies will use a “bait and switch” approach, convincing you that the product they are selling is comparable to Hunter Douglas brand products. Use caution if you hear the words “it's just as good as,” “there's really no difference” or “it's a Hunter Douglas Company.” Although these products have a position in the marketplace, they are not equal.

Getting these companies to stand behind their products is very difficult, if you can even find the dealer that sold them or if the company that made them is still in business. Hunter Douglas is a two billion dollar, debt-free company. Because Advanced Window Fashions has the strongest alliance with them that any dealer can have, there has never been an issue with product repair or replacement.

Since most people only buy custom window treatments a handful of times throughout their lifetime, this booklet is intended to be an educational guide to the benefits of quality treatments, as well as an informational guide on the pitfalls and myths to watch for. It's based on education Advanced Window Fashions' staff has received, as well as over 25 years combined experience in the window treatment industry. We hope you find it useful and informative!

1. How To Get Your Window Treatments To Pay For Themselves

The best way to recoup your investment in quality window treatments is through energy savings. It's a simple scientific fact: heat moves towards cold. In winter months, it's drawn to the cold glass of windows to escape a home. In the summer, the opposite is true.

A single layer of uncovered window glass has an R-value of about 1, while a typical, double-glazed window (two panes of glass or a storm window) has an R-value of around 2. By selecting an energy-efficient window treatment, you can increase the R-value one to four points.

With a very high insulating R-value of 4.8 (on double-glazed windows), Duette honeycomb shades with three layers of honeycomb pleats more than double the energy efficiency of a double-glazed window and nearly quadruple the efficiency of a single pane of glass. The new Duette Architella shades feature a cell within a cell for increased energy efficiency. Looking good and saving energy at the same time is a winning combination!

2. What is the Difference Between Custom and Ready Made Treatments?

Ready made treatments are those which are made in mass quantities and come in only specific sizes, colors and features. They are then cut down to the size you need, or you have to make them work in your window. With soft and hard treatments, look for these quality signs.

Draperies and Sheers - When considering ready made products, look at the closeness in stitching, the quality of the thread used for sewing and the fullness factor (usually 1-1/2 to 2 time fullness). Feel the quality of the material and lining, it should be durable. Fullness for custom draperies and sheers is 2-1/2 to 3 times the face (ordered) width, making the treatment look full and luxurious.

Blinds – the number of ladders (tapes or cords that hold the blind slats) should be no more than 2 for a 36” wood blind, or 3 for a faux wood blind. More ladders are a sign of thinner slat material, which needs more support. Look in the head rail at the components. Most metal components have been replaced with high quality plastics, which won’t rust. You can spot the quality product.

Shutters - Look for the thickness of the panels, how the panel components are joined together (dovetail joints are the best) and the quality of the finish (it should be smooth, like the finish on a grand piano). Powder-coated or stainless steel hinges work better in our area than brass or other metallic finishes due to the salt in the air.

Be sure to ask your Advanced Window Fashions decorator for more characteristics to look for in a quality treatment.

3. How Long Will It Take To Get Your Treatments From Your First Meeting To Installation?

This is one of the most common questions asked. For the most part, it will depend on how quickly you make and are comfortable with your selections. This time can be significantly reduced *if you have all decision makers present at your appointment*, or come by the showroom to make your selections first.

A good rule of thumb is to allow 2-3 weeks from appointment to ordering. After the order is placed, the approximate lead times for products are:

Blinds, Shades & Shadings - 2-3 weeks

Shutters - 3 weeks (If told 6 weeks are more, the product is from China.)

Specialty Shapes and Custom Colors - 6-8 weeks

Draperies and other Soft Treatments - 3-8 weeks

Of course, these times are based on material availability and fabricator backlog. Advanced Window Fashions keeps you updated on any delays and has some of the quickest delivery times in the industry!

4. What About Indoor Air Quality?

Increasing indoor air quality has been one of the biggest pushes in the industry over the last few years. Most inexpensive window treatment products emit gases inside your home, decreasing the air quality. This is all part of the “green movement” to create safe products for increased health benefits.

The independent standard to certify products is known as Greenguard. Terms like “environmentally safe,” “environmentally friendly” and “improved indoor air quality” are marketing terms, which mean nothing. Unless a product has a Greenguard certificate, which you should request, it is not considered certified.

All Hunter Douglas products have been Greenguard certified, with the exception of a few solar window shades. Advanced Window Fashions will gladly provide the certificates upon request. The Greenguard logo is below.



5. Know Your Warranty

What do you do when you've had your treatment for a year or so, and the controls or the cord breaks? Worse yet, that bargain blind or shutter starts warping, cracking or peeling? If you bought your treatment from a big box store or via the internet (which is the most dangerous), they will give you the telephone number of the fabricator and tell you they only sell the products and don't handle warranty issues. What a time to find that out, huh? Warranties can be confusing. In the window treatment industry, there are basically three types:

1. No Warranty - usually found with "off-the-shelf" products. Since these items are considered disposable, they will usually be covered by the stores return policy (30 days). If they have been cut down to size, the return gets more difficult. Custom draperies and fabric shades have no warranty.

2. Limited Lifetime Warranty - is exactly what it implies, the product has a limited lifetime, usually 1 to 3 years. After that timeframe cords, controls and fabric separation (delamination) are not covered. This type of warranty is usually offered by limited lifetime companies.

3. Lifetime Limited Warranty - This warranty comes with all Hunter Douglas products. You will have a limited warranty for the lifetime of the product when it has been installed properly and has not been misused or abused. Hunter Douglas considers the product lifetime to be 10 years, although Advanced Window Fashions has never seen them not honor a true warranty issue. The Hunter Douglas warranty is also easy to read and clearly states what is covered and what is not. Hunter Douglas even guarantees cords for seven years and motors for five!

No known warranty covers shipping, removal or installation costs.

6. Who Will Install And Service Your Products After The Sale?

Not all companies and very few independent designers have their own salaried installer. These installers are sub-contracted and are paid a per piece rate by the job. Since there are only so many hours in the day, and only so many days in the week, these installers are focused more on larger, more cash advantageous jobs than on replacing your missing part, repairing your damaged shade or handling the removal and re-installation of warranty issues and repairs.

The sub-contracted installers have very little incentive to attend factory trainings. They lose time and money when they are not working and the training is not free. Hunter Douglas' products are the most innovative and the most complex in the industry. To protect yourself, ask for proof of training and Hunter Douglas certification, as well as liability insurance.

Also, watch for free installation. Do you really think these guys show up for nothing? Even if they were to do so, how experienced and thorough could they possibly be?

7. How To Tell What Treatments Are Really Right For Your Needs

The first thing to determine is your budget. To purchase quality base treatments for a new home, expect to spend about 2-1/2 to 4-1/2 % of your home's value.

Next, look at the directions your windows face. Windows with eastern exposure get morning sun, windows with western exposure get afternoon sun and windows with southern exposure get the sun all day. For these windows and with our climate, try to maximize the use of energy efficient products. For northern exposure windows, which seldom see the sun, this need is not as great. Be aware that the sun's position changes with the seasons. Plan accordingly for year round protection and comfort.

Finally, consider the aesthetics and functionality. Beautifying your home's interior and having operational controls to suit your lifestyle will lead to years of enjoyment, not to mention how much you will enjoy the compliments from your friends and family.

One last note, **beware of dealers who advertise the guaranteed lowest price on Hunter Douglas products.** Design configuration and dealer integrity is a very important part of the process. Ask for their certifications, not just how many years of experience they have. Without proper certified factory training, they could have been doing it wrong all those years!

Remember to think of window treatments as an investment, not an expense. The bitterness of poor quality and design is remembered long after the sweetness of low price is forgotten.

8. Can Window Treatments Be Financed?

Yes, they can. Many new home owners have found this to be helpful, especially with all of the costs incurred with purchasing and furnishing a new home. There are also those who enjoy using someone else's money interest-free. Advanced Window Fashions offers programs with up to six months of no interest and equal payments through a Hunter Douglas program developed with GE Financing. This financing is available for all products carried, not just Hunter Douglas products.

Although it's not as popular as it once was, some mortgage companies may still allow custom window treatments to be financed into the mortgage, amortizing the cost over the life of the loan. The interest is deductible and it only adds a minimal amount to your monthly payment.

These are great ways to not have to settle for what you can afford after closing on a new home. Advanced Window Fashions' clients have said that the six month buffer has allowed their savings to recover and that they were glad they got what they really wanted instead of settling for less.

9. All Hunter Douglas Dealers Are Not Created Equal

There are dealers who sell Hunter Douglas, and then there are true Hunter Douglas dealers. It's the equivalent of "yes, we can get that" versus "this is what we do." Hunter Douglas products are the most innovative and complicated products in the industry. Keeping up-to-date with the changes requires constant training and expenses most dealers choose not to incur. Hunter Douglas has recently started imposing training and investment requirements because of quality problems with some dealers. Know your dealer's level. Here's how the Hunter Douglas hierarchy works:

Standard Dealer – The standard dealer level is no longer available. This dealer has just opened an account in which no training was required.

Priority Dealer- This dealer now has to make a minimum \$1,000 investment in sample books to open an account. Two of the required books cost \$300-400 each. No training is required, but online training is available.

Showcase Priority Dealer - An investment of \$5,000 is required, which is used to buy the exclusive Alustra Collection product line displays. A three-day certification training is suggested within the first year.

Gallery Dealer - This premier Hunter Douglas Alliance program is for top-tier independent storefront window fashion retailers. It provides the highest level of commitment and offers intensive programs to help dealers enhance the customer experience. Certification training and on-going extensive training is mandatory. Gallery dealers have all current sample books and full size samples.

Centurion Club - This prestigious Hunter Douglas Alliance program is for an elite group of Hunter Douglas Gallery® Dealers and storefront Showcase Priority Dealers™ that exclusively represent the Hunter Douglas product line. **Advanced Window Fashions is a Centurion Gallery dealer.**

#10. What Happens If You Don't Like What You Have Ordered?

This is a very important question to ask before you order. The goal at Advanced Window Fashions is to create lifetime customers. With Hunter Douglas products, Advanced Window Fashions is currently the only area dealer to offer the Right Choice Promise, which states:

“Once the installation of your new window coverings is complete, we invite you to experience and enjoy them in your home for 21 days. At the end of this 21-day period, in the unlikely event that you are not thoroughly satisfied with the way they visually enhance your home, contact your Hunter Douglas Gallery® dealer during the next 21 days. They will replace your window coverings with a Hunter Douglas product of equal or lesser value of your choice. It's that simple!”

For other products, Advanced Window Fashions replaces them at a substantial discount and offers free installation.