



## *Comparing Window Treatments is a Little Like Comparing Apples to Oranges*

Almost everyone loves to score a bargain. More than once I've been caught replying to a compliment with, "Thanks, I got it for \$10.00." My husband is the family grocery shopper and he loves to come home after a shopping session and announce that between a sale and doubled coupons the store paid him to buy a box of cereal.

So when ordering custom window treatments many customers like to price shop it around. The problem arises when they discover that the prices for custom window treatments vary wildly based on who you're ordering from.

Window treatments are now sold by everyone from Home Depot to your local designer or drapery workroom. But, if you are going to price shop for custom window coverings it is important to realize that it is not the same as comparing Giant Eagle's box of cereal to the one at Shop-N-Save.

Custom window treatments come in two categories, hard and soft. Hard treatments are things such as blinds, shutters, and roller shades. Soft treatments include draperies, valances, swags, and roman shades.

When ordering hard window treatments the prices are based on a number of factors including; the type of treatment, what it's made out of, the finish, the size of the window, whether or not you get a matching hard valance to go with it, if it's motorized or manual and which manufacturer is making the blind.

If you are going to get quotes on blinds from several sources make sure the prices you receive are based on the exact same blind. If you get a quote from the first person for white faux wood 2" wood blinds made by Graeber from one sales person and then ask for a quote for white faux wood 2" wood blinds from Hunter Douglas from another sales person, you aren't making a fair comparison. If you get a quote from one company for inside mount blinds (blinds mounted inside the window frame) don't try to compare a price from a second company for outside mount blinds. (Blinds mounted outside the window frame.)

Make sure you ask about installation and measuring costs. Some companies may have the installation and measuring rolled into the overall price. Others have it broken out. Big box stores often sell their blinds cheaper than independent window treatment sales persons, but after adding up installation and measuring charges the prices often come out to be the same. If you are building and remodeling a house it may pay to have all the windows covered at the same time because the sales person can sometimes get a discount from their supplier for large orders.

Even consultation fees can vary between sales persons. Some don't charge any fee to meet with you, but will charge later on to come out and do a measure. Others will charge, but if you buy from them they will take the fee off of the overall price. Finally some charge and don't refund the money back, but will take all their measurements at that appointment.

Doing price comparisons for soft window treatments such as drapes, valances and swags is a much more difficult process. There are several major components to the price of any soft window covering. The fabrics, the trim, the hardware to hold the treatment, either decorative or strictly functional; the lining and/or interlining; the installation and finally the labor to make the treatment. When you have this many factors in a job, it is nearly impossible to do a side by side comparison of decorator A and drapery workroom B.

Some window treatment designers charge a consultation fee similar to those listed above. Others will charge by the hour for entire design, but have very little mark up on the fabric and labor. Some designers are also workrooms who are doing the end fabrication. They are less likely to charge a consult fee, but may have higher labor charges because this is how they are making their money.

Even something as simple as buying the fabric from a different source and then having an independent workroom sew the treatment may not be a true bargain. Many companies charge a fee for COM (customer's

own material) to make up for their loss in fabric sales and the difficulty of working with fabric that may have flaws. Linings can vary wildly, designer A may like a heavy sateen while designer B prefers a lighter weight lining. Even hardware may be different in price because of the hundreds of different sources the designers can buy it from.

While price is always a consideration in choosing window treatments, here is a list of factors that should be most important when choosing your window treatment specialist.

The sales person should ask you a number of questions about your project, the room, the colors, the design and fabrics and your budget, before they ever step foot in your home.

You should be comfortable with their ideas and business practices. They should be professional and knowledgeable.

The sales person should have you sign a completed work order detailing all the aspects of the job including, design fabric and labor. They should also give you a written contract that both parties sign.

You should receive an estimate up front that addresses all the costs of the job including consultation fees, measuring and installation. Realize that any changes you make to the job once the work is in process will add significantly to your final price.

The sales person should freely show you samples of their completed work and be happy to give you references to check.

Finally make sure your specialist is listening to you and taking your needs into account and that you like the person you are working with.