

Window Coverings by Wayne Chaif

Wayne Chaif may be new to the drapery business, but he certainly isn't new to sewing. He has been sewing since 1969 and is a 1976 graduate of the Tailor and Cutter Academy in London, England. After thirty years in a corporate environment, Wayne began researching the idea of opening a drapery workroom and it seemed all the signs were pointing in the right direction for that to happen.

Sydney: How did you get started in the business?

Wayne: By 2005, after working in the corporate environment for thirty years, I had become disillusioned with it all. Because of downsizing it appeared that I would be laid off from my job. Instead of looking for another job I wanted to do something for myself. I took an inventory of myself. I had been sewing since 1969 and I had studied tailoring at the Tailor and Cutter Academy in London, England, where I learned to make bespoke clothing for royalty, all handmade. But I did not go into that trade at the time. Instead I returned to Canada and started working in an office.

In 2004, I saw some Roman shades that a friend of mine who was a designer had made. She said, "You know, Wayne, you could make a lot of money doing this because you know how to sew really well." And I said, "Yeah, I know, but I think there's some training you need."

I kept this in the back of my mind. One night I went on the internet to find information about making drapes as a business. I didn't know anything about the industry. Finally at 4:00 in the morning I went upstairs and woke up my wife and said, "We're going to Greenville, SC. There's a big

conference in two weeks down there." She said, "Yeah, okay." During my search I had landed on the Custom Home Furnishings Academy website and I sat up all night reading all the conference information. There were courses being offered by Terri Booser on how to start a workroom. I said, "I wonder what a workroom is. It must be the place they work to make the drapes. That sounds like a good course to take."

We decided that my wife would go to the conference with me and we would both take the courses and take a lot of notes. Two weeks later we were at the conference. I gathered up all the information that I thought I would need for someone who wanted to get into the custom home furnishing business and start a drapery workroom.

While at the conference, I went to the WCAA gala dinner at the Hilton and won one of the door prizes, a software package from Debbie Green's Minutes Matter. I said to myself, "The writing is on the wall.

I need to get into this industry because everything is falling into place."

In December 2005 I was given a severance package from my old company. I found out that the two CHF Academy programs were being held back to back in March 2006. I registered for all the courses in the beginners and advanced programs. I left Montreal in a snowstorm in February and drove down to the school. I took all the courses in the Career Professional program, had two days off and then did the Advanced Career Professional Program. I came home empowered with so much information. I knew it was exactly what I wanted and I had the confidence to start my business.



Wayne Chaif proudly displays his Window Treatment Career Professional and Advanced Window Treatment Career Professional Certificates that he earned at the Custom Home Furnishings Academy.

Sydney: When did you actually start the business?

Wayne: In April of 2006 I started buying all of my equipment. I invested in supplies, books, everything I could get my hands on. I researched the internet and found so much information, including the *Encyclopedia of Fabrications*, by Ethel Mahon, *Price your Work with Confidence*, by Kitty Stein. I read all of Kitty's old articles, subscribed to the CHF website, used Minutes Matter Studio and just bombarded myself with information. I also built my workroom table. In November 2006 I started actually working my business.

Sydney: Tell us a little about your workroom.

I live in Montreal, Canada, and the workroom is in Ottawa, Canada. The problem with Montreal is that it's a French province. All my business would have to be conducted in French, including invoicing and all other legal documents. I'm basically an English person living in Quebec, so it was difficult for me to start a business in a province that is mostly French. So I decided to open my business in my sister's basement in Ottawa, Ontario, which is all English. I am serving both cities, Montreal and Ottawa.

I try to get to Ottawa on Monday before noon and I leave before 5:00 pm on Friday nights.

Sydney: What workroom equipment do you have?

Wayne: I built a table 12' x 5', based on the Cheryl Strickland video, with components from Rowley and the



A box pleated valance designed for a restaurant in northern Ontario.

preprinted canvas from Adaptive Textiles. I also made the swag measuring tool that is used at the Academy.

I have a third hand stand and on the end of the table I have Rowley's clamps to hold a bolt of material and roll it across the table. I have a US blind stitch hemmer, a Consew straight stitch, a domestic machine and a commercial serger. I plan for my next purchase to be an industrial sewing machine. I have a boiler iron and Rowenta and a small stock of linings and interlinings from Angels. I also have two clothes racks.

Sydney: Are you a wholesale or retail workroom?

Wayne: I started out just selling retail. But my sister's friend is a designer and she asked me to do some work for her. Then another designer in Montreal called me. Now I'm working for three designers and also doing my retail work. I just recently met with another designer who has three clients and she wants me to quote some work.

Sydney: How are you growing your business?

Wayne: My business has grown solely from word of mouth. I have not done any advertising or marketing and I have been constantly busy since November.

Sydney: What types of projects are you doing?

Wayne: The first big project I did was swags that went into a three hundred inch bay window. There were six windows that made up the bay and the customer wanted twelve swags that were silk and lined and interlined, with decorative panels and jabots.



Another valance for the restaurant in Ontario. This one is 96" wide and it goes with a matching 384" valance. Decorative panels from the same toile were made for each valance.



Right now I'm working on a commercial job for a restaurant and spa in northern Ontario. I've done Hobbled shades using Terri Booser's method, the one with a straight back, and I've done a lot of swags.

When I get a large and challenging job I use Margie Nance's advice and bring it back to the basics. Instead of getting overwhelmed I try to dissect the project, put all my knowledge together, and pull out my books from school.

Sydney: What are your future plans for your business?

Wayne: I want to continue to know how to make everything but then I'd rather manage the workroom and have a couple of employees working for me to do the actual sewing while I grow the business and do the marketing and sales and administration of it.

Sydney: What advice would you give someone just starting a business?

Wayne: Don't be afraid to spend a bit of money because it's all an investment, even down to buying electric scissors. I bought stuff from Rowley. I bought the work order forms. I bought the measuring forms for windows. I bought a lot of stuff. Also, don't be afraid to spend money on educating yourself. I would like to take more courses at the Academy.

When I was thinking about signing up for the Academy, I said, "Be honest with me, Margie, because it's Canadian dollars and it will cost a lot of money. Is it worth it to take the advanced course?" She said, "Wayne, most people take the regular window coverings course and don't want to be bothered with the advanced because they feel like they've learned it all and they have enough to get going. I'm telling you, take these two programs. You will jump ahead four years from somebody who is starting out in the business."



Wayne's first big project. Swags for a 300" bay window.

I really feel that Margie was right because I'm looking at work orders or faxes that come through for quotations now and I'm thinking, "If I hadn't gone down to the school for the month and taken these courses I'd be so intimidated by all this." But I'm not now.

Just going down to the Academy empowered me with the knowledge and the confidence to get started. I really feel like I started out on the right foot and the whole thing was luck that night sitting down to my computer and asking, "How does one start a drapery business?"

The teachers at the Academy are really good. I especially give kudos to Donna, Susan, Terri and Margie, because those classes got going at 9:00 in the morning and sometimes didn't end until 7:30 pm. It was really intense. We had a set project to finish that day and we stayed until it was finished. I came home with a car load of samples.

So my best advice for someone starting out is to do your homework, buy some great books and videos and really consider investing in attending classes at the Custom Home Furnishings Academy.