A perk of custom panels: They offer so many choices. These from The Decorating Store at Terminal Mill Ends feature goblet pleats in Carole Fabrics' Starr fabric in Seafoam. The rods are Kirsch; under the draperies are Hunter-Douglas Vignettes shades.
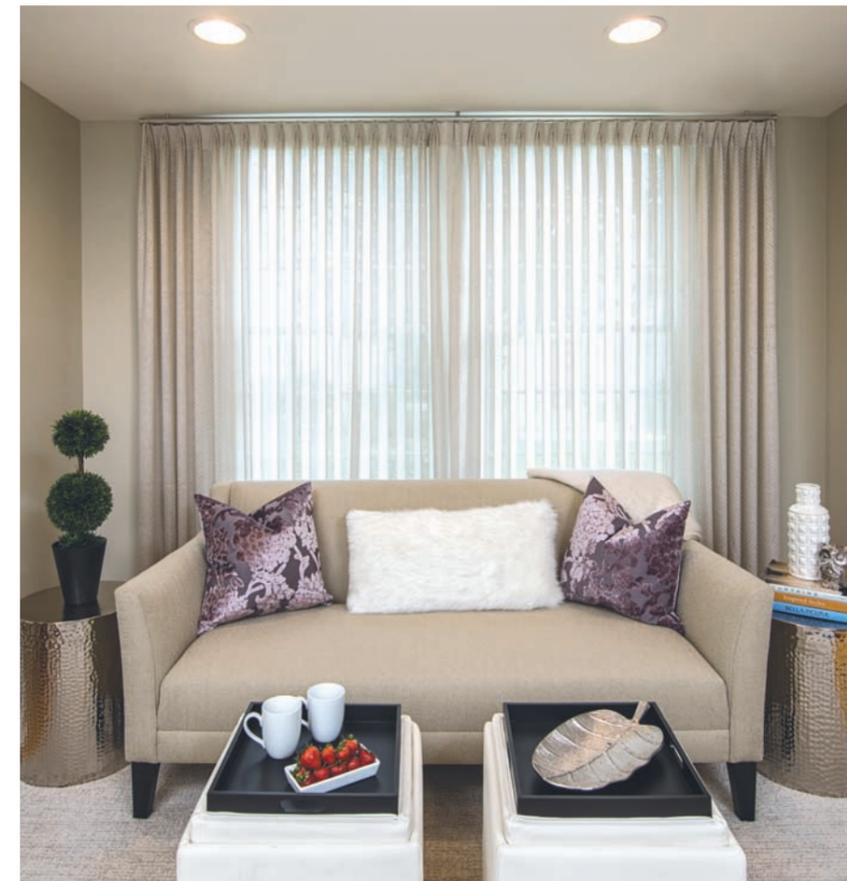
PHOTO BY MARISA PELLEGRINI

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Left and above: Textured sheers filter the light in this contemporary treatment with a semiexposed rod; LuAnn Nigara of Window Works is the designer.

Below left: Nigara says straight downward-hanging panels — such as these French-pleated ones she designed — are highly desirable in today's window treatments.

Below right: Tack-top pleats give a more fashionable feel than traditional pinch pleats, says Lois Croce, director of design for Metropolitan Window Fashions, creator of this treatment. Within the monochromatic living room, the linen-blend face fabric mates with a napped lining for enhanced drape-ability.

Plain Facts

Custom window treatments, even the simple ones that offer today's most-wanted looks, deliver major advantages over their ready-made counterparts

BY MARY VINNEDGE

YOUR ROOM, UPDATED WITH NEW PAINT, FURNITURE AND CARPET, STILL NEEDS A WINDOW TREATMENT.

You want something plain and low-profile — no poufy swags encroaching into the room, no cornices or valances crowding the space and collecting dust. You could buy off-the-rack drapery panels or Roman shades to control privacy and light. But you'd be happier with the delayed gratification and greater investment in

a custom treatment, say LuAnn Nigara of Window Works in Livingston, Lois Croce of Metropolitan Window Fashions in North Plainfield and Denise Y. Mills of The Decorating Store at Terminal Mill Ends in Union.

Why? Because you have so many more choices. And with more choices, you're more likely to get exactly what you want.

PHOTO BY MARISA PELLEGRINI

COURTESY OF METROPOLITAN WINDOW FASHIONS

Above left: Window treatment designer LuAnn Nigara says ripple-fold draperies deliver that "urban-modern feeling" that's tremendously popular in interior design. She designed these with a slight puddle at the bottom and chose fabric that would hang straight down. **Detail:** A special tape is crucial to the design of ripple-fold draperies.

Above right: Top-pleat panels in a graphic design (Fabricut's Passarella in the color Plume) dress up this family room. The Decorating Store at Terminal Mill Ends' installer cut the Kirsch rods to size and placed them to look as if they bend around the corner.

Tips from the Pros

With custom window treatments, the designer's experience is your trump card

Lois Croce of Metropolitan Window Fashions says a professional who's familiar with current fabrics can save you time by limiting the number you must evaluate. Say you want a lime-and-cream trellis pattern in a nubby matte fabric: An expert can quickly pull swatches from several manufacturers, narrowing the options from hundreds to a handful. To ensure the right color and scale, "bring in paint samples or the arm cover or cushion from a chair, or better yet, have a free in-home consultation."

Denise Mills of The Decorating Store at Terminal Mill Ends underscores the importance of scale. "The scale of a pattern is very important not only to the total appearance of the window but also to the balance of other patterns in the room."

A pro can head off expensive mistakes. Say you want a straight downward hang for drapery panels: That can be tricky to achieve, says LuAnn Nigara of Window Works, because many fabrics will billow out at the bottom. A fabric expert can evaluate the weave to ensure a just-right hang.

With custom, Nigara summarizes, quality is a huge part of the package. "It's better construction, and it's professional installation — it's everything."

Key among those choices: fabric. Your options — from pattern and color (which sometimes can be exactly matched to certain paint brands or Pantone colors, Mills says) to scale and weight, shiny or matte — are almost unlimited. "In a big-box store, if you are looking at a Roman shade, you'll get maybe two colors and three fabrics to pick from," Croce says.

Linings are crucial to window treatment success also. A basic white lining helps repel the sun, Mills says, and silk and faux-silk draperies need an inter-

lining for more body. "Thermal linings help insulate a window. Blackout linings are used for rooms that need privacy and those that need to be dark for sleeping," Mills says.

Nigara agrees. "I regularly use eight different linings [various sheer, blackout and semi-opaque types] to give customers the look they want. After assessing their needs, I know which one to use for each application. Lining is as important to the finished look as the face fabric."

IN STYLE

Custom also means you can select the styling for your panels. "You're probably going to get only pinch pleats or rod pockets" in ready-mades, Nigara says. Croce and Mills say that although traditional pinch or French pleats remain popular, many customers like the softer, updated look of tack-top drapes. Mills says "inverted box pleats are often used in contemporary/modern and transitional rooms for a cleaner, tailored look. Panels with grommets are not as popular

Top: The homeowner wanted a casual effect: a very loose rod pocket with no header for a contemporary look, says Lois Croce of Metropolitan Window Fashions. The faux linen (100 percent polyester) face fabric has a napped lining that helps it drape nicely.

Bottom: Red Bank clients wanted a timeless, tailored look for their master bedroom and preferred Roman shades to drapery panels, says Sarah Dooley, principal designer at Leedy Interiors in Tinton Falls and an associate member of the American Society of Interior Designers. The custom option that was chosen: TheShadeStore.com's Cascade Roman Shade, sewn in contrasting colors of wool sateen plus a blackout lining.

as they once were, but are [still] used in contemporary/modern applications." For "that urban-modern feeling," Nigara likes ripple-fold draperies. She adds that box pleats, a wider flattened pleat, are gaining popularity.

And while fewer embellishments are being used with today's treatments, Croce likes to put a button or two at the bottom of each pleat. "The look is still tailored but very custom. With box pleats, I might put a big button at the bottom, a 2-inch one."

Although today's trims are fashionably restrained, they're still crucial for individualizing the treatment and tying together color schemes. Grosgrain ribbon, flat braids and tapes (sometimes in a subtle pattern such as a Greek key design) can provide a pop of color contrast across the bottoms and sides of Roman shades as well as on the edges of drapery panels.

THE RIGHT FIT

Bespoke treatments also ensure a perfect fit in width and length. "Readymade is usually a single width of fabric — 54 inches. You lose some to hems," Croce says. "You'll use fabric at about a 2:1 fullness covering a window, so two panels cover a window about 48 inches wide. To go wider, you add panels but then you end up with gaps."

Off-the-rack panels are typically 84 inches long, forcing you to hang them on the window molding or at that level, Mills says. To make the window seem grander, you can hang treatments close to the ceiling, which is seldom lower than 96 inches. The higher the better, Nigara and Croce advise, so 84 inches doesn't measure up.

Finally, custom rods can provide the ultimate polish. "Even if I go 40 feet, you won't see a splice," Nigara says. "It looks like a single rod, and the sizes are three-eighths inch to $3^3/8$ inches in diameter." And Mills points out that "the color offerings are endless." ▣

Mary Vinnedge, who often sews her own window treatments, learned a lot from these three talented window-treatment designers.