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PROJECT

ROMAN SHADES

A Roman shade of unlined pale-yellow linen creates mood without drawing attention to itself. The droop of the pleats—the result of ring tapes sewn only on the side hems—is as sensuous as the soft suffusion of light.

ROMAN IMPERIAL CULTURE HAS SURVIVED IN THE NAMES OF SUCH A MOTLEY COLLECTION of items and ideas—candles, sandals, togas, arches, baths, numerals, ruins, holidays, peace, and even noses—that it's probably the rare person who pauses to reflect on the etymology of the Roman shade. Yet those curious enough to try to track down the origin of the name will find themselves stumped, albeit in the very good company of experts at the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum and the New York School of Interior Design, as well as the writer of the entry on shades in *The Encyclopedia of Interior Design*. Whatever its pedigree, the Roman shade has proven to be the decorating salvation of any-

one who is temperamentally incapable of draping, swagging, or blinding a window. Easy to make, uncluttered in appearance, adaptable to formal or informal spaces, this is the shade whose structure alone conjures up the timeless proportions and classicism of the Eternal City itself.

What makes the Roman shade so suitable as a project to do at home is the beautiful logic governing its construction. Cords are threaded through rows of rings on the backside of the shade fabric, which is attached at the top to a wooden batten fitted snugly to the window frame. A dowel inserted in a pocket at the bottom gives the material body as the shade is adjusted. When the shade is down, it covers the window completely and with a minimum of material; when raised, it reveals an unencumbered view crowned only by the soft pleats its tightened cords and rings have created on the way up.

The Roman shade shares its underlying structure with a wide assortment of other window coverings, particularly the flouciener, more baroque Austrian and balloon shades that were popular in the early eighties. Still, despite its capacity for audacious display, the Roman shade is essentially understated, even when



PUTTING THE SHADES UP



When the shade is to be mounted inside the window frame (above left), you can simply screw the wooden batten into the frame. The sides of the frame will hide the shade's rings and cords from view. To mount a shade on the outside of a window (above right), use angle brackets to support the batten. The shade itself must be wide enough to curve around each end to hide the brackets and the wood. This allowance of material is known as the "return." It should be no more than the depth of the batten itself. Fold it smoothly, and staple in place at the top.

KEEPING THEM RAISED



Part of the beauty of Roman shades is their appearance when raised. Pulling the cords downward to raise a shade sets into motion the transformation of the fabric's smooth, simple lines into a series of soft pleats. One way to adjust the height is with a cord lock (above left), common to many other kinds of shades and readily available at craft and drapery-supply stores. After the cords are threaded through it, you can pull them to one side to lock the shade in place or move them to the other side to release it. Another simple and time-honored method to secure the cords is to attach a cleat (above right) to the inside of the window frame.

made from a rich fabric like silk or given decorative, droopy corners called drop tails, which form when the ring strips are set in from the edge.

Before making a shade, you should know what purpose you want it to serve. Carl Dellatore of New York City's D & F Workroom begins his consultations with questions clients don't always consider before they meet with him. "I ask if the shade is to address a sunlight issue, an ultraviolet problem, the neighbor next door, the need for a dark space for respite, or just the desire to soften the light," he says. Whatever a client's needs, Dellatore has learned that most people are interested in what he calls "the fresh, modern, simple, and functional" qualities of the shade. "A Roman shade is not about excess," he says.

Even so, there is variety within the simplicity. Unlined linen or cotton will diffuse the sun's harsh rays, for instance, while a lined fabric can block them altogether. Ring tapes placed far apart cause a shade to "belly," creating a loose, unconstructed appearance. Using fewer rings allows for bigger pleats and shows more of a fabric's pattern. A shade of crisp fabric with a steel dowel sets off architecture with its tailored lines. Placing lots of rings close together will result in a gathered, formal look Dellatore calls "scrunchy."

Once your shades are completed and in place, Dellatore recommends the final touch of "dressing" them. Pull the shades all the way up, making sure every pleat is smooth and organized, then leave them up for several days. "Fabric has a memory," says Dellatore. The properly dressed Roman shade, then, will "remember" its classical inspiration, keeping pleats neat and window clear, whether in Rome, Rio, or Roanoke.

simple roman-shade variations



SHEER



TOILE



STRIPED COTTON



PLEATED SILK TAFFETA

sheer fabric, like unlined white linen (top left), demonstrates how subtle a Roman shade can be. Sheerness softens the light and provides minimal privacy; nevertheless it has the structure and slight heft of a more substantial shade.

toile tells a story, which makes it a perfect candi-

date for the smooth surface a Roman shade presents. This vintage-fabric shade (top right) has been lined to give it a weightier, more formal look, and its movement up and down is slower because every other ring on the four ring tapes behind has been removed. The pleats occur every 10 inches, and a steel dowel holds the shade taut when lowered.

striped cotton (above left) lends itself to the kind of casual, unconstructed Roman shades that have become popular in recent years. With only two ring tapes, indented 5 inches from each side, this shade has a sag in the center as well as droopy edges, called drop tails, the result of a dowel cut 10 inches shorter than the shade's width. The rings were placed 5 inches apart and hand sewn so the stitches wouldn't show.

pleated silk taffeta (above right) is lined and interfaced to give this shade the luxurious appearance of weight. The rings are only 3 inches apart, for narrow "scrunchy," pleats.