

Soft Furnishing

Unit 12

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Learning Outcomes:

On successful completion of this unit the candidate will be able to:

- ✓ Understand the use of Upholstery as protecting and covering furniture,
- ✓ Understand the overall effect of upholstery which contributes to the style and atmosphere of the room.

Fabric signifies comfort in a home. The starting point for creating beautiful soft furnishing is choosing the right fabric, whether it is wool, cotton, velvet or silk. Colours, patterns and textures set the scene for any successful room scheme. Just like colour it also sends out the strongest messages about the style and atmosphere of an interior.

Choosing Fabrics

The choice of fabric today is not that simple a task any more. Materials such as embroidered denim, mohair and cashmere have moved out of the fashion world and into the home. Printed textiles, from romantic florals to whimsical designs, classic toile de jouy to elegant damasks, are now available in an amazing array of cloths including light weight linen, silk and velvet. When choosing fabric it is important to think both in terms of visual and physical comfort. The choice of fabric is directly related to the following factors;

- Style
- Mood
- Budget

Fabrics must always suit the function of a room. Materials used in an area that suffers a lot of wear and tear, such as a family room need to be more durable than those in a guest bedroom. Comfort is of the utmost importance when choosing upholstery fabrics. Hard-wearing materials such as chenille, wool, and linen union with some nylon for added strength are ideal as they are both soft and durable. Loose covers are practical and invaluable if a change of look is required for the room. They can be used, not just for major pieces like sofas and armchairs, but for dining chairs and upholstered headboards as well. Use fabrics that can be easily washed or dry cleaned, such as cotton.

Suitability also comes into the choice of window treatments. If a room is to be used frequently during winter evenings heavy curtains would be required. In a more summery space choose light weight cotton or voile. Consider also the colour fastness of curtain fabrics. Even in a cool climate the curtains which are constantly subjected to sunlight will soon fade. In recent times there has been a desire for using unusual fabrics as inexpensive curtains, such as block printed designs from Africa and Indian sari fabrics.

Style and Mood

Fabrics play an important role in defining the style and mood of a room. Every fabric has four main elements - colour, texture, scale and pattern. Each of these contributes to a room's character. Colour is the most powerful element; texture has an enormous influence on atmosphere: rich velvets and silks bring a feeling of opulence and grandeur to a room. Block printed fabrics from Asia and simple cotton checks create a feeling of simplicity and relaxation. Patterns can also affect the mood, as does scale: a large scale design brings an air of confidence to a room, whereas small scale patterns are often perfect for a room where a calm atmosphere is required.

Budget

In some cases, though, it is hard for an interior designer to get to know about the customer's exact budget. Be realistic about what you can purchase wisely. For example, you might decide to choose luxurious fabrics for the furniture and a smart but inexpensive window treatment. For major pieces such as sofas choose upholstery that is timeless. You can always add cushions or loose covers to introduce fashionable colours. Another way to meet the budget is to use two different fabrics for the same item. Traditionally, chairs are often upholstered with an expensive cloth at the front and a less expensive cotton cloth at the back.

Combining Fabrics

Combining fabric is important because it brings interest and delight to an interior scheme. There are endless possible fabric combinations and the same basic contrasts can be achieved in subtly different ways. Consider the contrast of hot and soft textures. The texture and colour of furnishing fabrics holds great importance. While choosing a fabric check out how practical they are to wash and clean. When developing a room scheme, consider that cotton and linen fibres can be happily mixed with each other. Linen union is a linen/cotton mix which is practical and more economical than pure linen. It is ideal for making loose covers. Polyester/ cotton mixtures are easy-care fabrics that are ideal for bed and table linens.

Window Treatments

Window treatment should always be devised as part of the overall room scheme. This means looking at the colours, style, patterns, and period of the room and its décor, choosing fabric and a treatment which work well in that setting. However attractive you may think a fabric is in the shop, if it does not relate to the rest of the room it is intended for, then the result will be disappointing.

Curtains and Blinds

Windows are said to be the eyes of a house - they give light and vitality to a room. In order to get the most out of windows in a home, it is important to have the right balance between

allowing as much light to flood in as possible, dressing them in a way that complements the style of the window as well as the whole room, and gaining any necessary privacy. Curtains and blinds provide comfort and privacy, and can have a major impact on the mood of a room. There are many factors to bear in mind when choosing window treatments, not just colour, texture and pattern, but also the weight and opacity of the materials, and the type of headings and fixings.

Before considering the different options for window treatments, it is very important to consider their purpose first. The view from outside is also very important to consider when choosing window treatments. If the environment outside is full of strong colours - like the blue of the sea or the terracotta of a brick wall - allow these shades to influence the material you choose for curtains and blinds. Windows are, after all, the link between the outdoors and indoors. This can work both ways. If the window looks out onto a busy street, you can make it look attractive from outside by using coloured or patterned lining for the curtains. Choose a linking fabric that unifies all the rooms facing the street.

Light and Temperature

Window treatments are chosen after determining how much natural light comes into a room and how it falls. Blinds, café curtains, voiles and louvered shutters allow light to filter in. Stretching coloured or patterned voile between two poles to form a panel is a lovely way of achieving both aims. If you want to minimize strong sunlight in a room roller blinds are an effective solution. In a temperate climate consider changing the window treatment to suit the season, with for example, a full and heavy curtain to shut out the winter cold, but a lighter, more transparent solution in summer.

Window Proportion

Window treatments can also be masters of disguise. To make a narrow window appear wider, fix a curtain pole to extend beyond the window, and then hang curtains so they cover the wall. Hanging curtain to cover window and very little of the adjacent wall will make a window appear narrower. Curtains and blinds can help to disguise a badly proportioned room. To make the room taller hang the curtain from the ceiling to the floor, rather than from the top of the window. To lower a ceiling visually, use pelmets, which will draw the eye to a lower level.

Linking Rooms

Consider each window in relation to others in the house, and how colour, texture, pattern and scale flow from one space to the next. For example, a living room with neutral curtains and patterned upholstery can be linked to the adjoining room with the same pattern at the windows. A window can be made a focal point, when dressed beautifully (such as a view from the front door through the hall to a window room beyond); a beautiful window treatment will draw people into the house.

Fabrics for Windows

Almost any fabric can be used at a window, though some are more appropriate than others depending upon the room and the climate. But cottons and silks are conventionally suitable for the bedrooms. Flannels, wools and weaves can also be used there, whereas heavy textures such as velvet, brocade, wools and tweed are considered suitable for living rooms. Most fabrics look and hang better and last longer if they are lined and interlined. If a floating look of unlined curtains is required for a delicate room scheme, you can either combine with contrasting blinds or can use textures like watered silk, silk taffeta, softly printed voile light linen. Light weight curtains should be three times the width of the window, with deep hems, to help the fabric hang better.

Window Treatment Styles

Think about the use of the room when deciding on a window treatment. Bathrooms, for example, need practical materials such as wooden shutters or pinoleum blinds. In kitchens choose fabrics that are easy to clean. Curtain headings should also be appropriate to the location. For example, ribbon ties with pretty voiles are more for show than use; these should therefore be avoided in the children's room, where they are likely to be subjected to heavy pulls.

There is plenty of scope for creating individual window treatments. Readymade curtains can be customized with buttons, borders, ribbons, trims or appliqué. Unusual fabric combinations also work well: coarse linen edged with jewel-coloured velvet, for example, or wool bordered with satin. Adding a patterned trim to a simple pair of curtains gives them a more stylish look. Tie-backs need not be made of fabric always; twine, ribbon, velvet, jute and leather all make unusual alternatives.

Curtain and Top Treatments

Properly made curtains make all the difference to a room scheme. The top treatment, whether an elaborating swag with tails, a pelmet, a valance or simply an attractive heading on the curtains suspended from a pole, is as basic to the overall effect as is the fabric.

Poles and Tracks

All curtains are hung from the poles (with rings), rods (with or without rings) or track of one kind or another. Poles, whether made of polished wood, wood covered with fabric, brass, wrought iron or steel, stand on their own merits. They do not need to be hidden by swags, valances and pelmets. Poles are supplied with decorative ends such as knobs or finals. Tracks are always purely functional and are meant to be hidden with either swags, pelmets or valances. They are generally made of white plastic or metal, with a choice of brackets, depending upon how far away from the window you need the curtains to hang.

**Tracks****poles**

Creating Illusions with Curtains

If the window is very small and has a poor view it can be made larger and more elegant, with no sacrifice of light, by using several layers of cream or white voile, muslin or lace. For this you can hang one layer straight over the window, by suspending from the upper part of the window frame and descending to the floor to hide the shape of the window. Then two separate curtains can be added, gathered onto an overlapping rod suspended over the top of the window frame and caught back with tie-backs at each side. The fabric can be edged with a bubble fringe or ribbon frame for added interest. For more privacy you can use a roller blind under the first curtain.

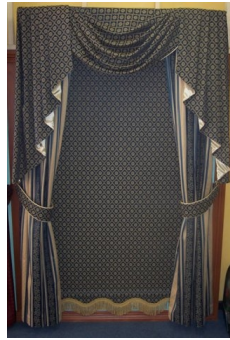
Another way of creating a long graceful window is to build a window seat. Next fix a wood frame around the top and sides of the window and down to the floor. Put a foam cushion on the seat and use scatter cushions to hide the wall between the window sill and seat. If there are two or three such windows in the room, you can make this arrangement look like an integral part of the room.

Linings and Interlinings

Lining protects the main fabric from sun, dust and pollution, enclosing hems and raw edges. A good lining makes curtains look good from the outside too. If early morning light is a problem in the bedroom the curtains can be lined with a special blackout lining. The curtains can also be lined with milium, a thermal fabric which not only blocks sunlight but also helps insulation.

Swags and Tails

These are used for more formal treatments: although they look as if they are made from one beautifully draped length of fabric, they usually consist of a number of different pieces joined skilfully together. They are frequently trimmed with fringing cord, piping or fabric borders. Proportions are very important in this type of treatment. The swag needs to be between one fifth to one sixth of the overall height of the window, while the tail should fall at least half way down the window. Swags and tails do not always have to be partnered with curtains; swags can also be used effectively on blinds and on shutters, or on their own.



Pelmets

These are decorative cover ups for the tops of curtains to hide unsightly tracks or fittings. Generally pelmets are made from plain wood, which is either painted or covered in a suitable fabric.



Valances

Softer than pelmets, valances are made of unstiffened fabric. They can be decorated with piping, a frill, or with a contrast band. Valances can be hung with a special valance track aligned to the main curtain track. Alternatively, these can be attached to a board, which is either above the curtain track or has the curtain track attached to the underside.



Tie-Backs

Curtains can be caught back in a number of different ways, and at various heights. The usual height for positioning the hooks for a tie back is two thirds of the way down the window,

but they can be placed higher or lower depending upon what seems in proportion to the window. One of the most commonly used shapes of tie-back is a long, narrow oblong, stiffened with buckram or interfacing. Other stiffened shapes such as crescents are also possible. Other styles include tie-backs with bows or metal tie-backs.



Italian Stringing

Another method frequently used for holding back the curtains is called Italian stringing or reefing. Italian stringing looks effective and lets in more light than tie-backs which are placed lower down.

Curtain Trims

Most curtains look more finished and elegant when some sort of trim is used, even if it is a self trim. Contrast linings are a wonderful way of finishing off curtains, particularly those that are tie-back or Italian strung.

Blinds

If you want to show off the window, you can install the blind inside the recess. Most blinds are good alternatives to curtains for small windows with radiators or window seats underneath. These can also be used in conjunction with permanently tied-back curtains. Apart from covering up the window practically, a blind adds an interesting sense of proportion to a room. Using blinds is a good idea if you want an uncluttered look, as most blinds are folded up to leave the window clear. Windows, where there is no space on either side to draw the curtain back into, such as dormer windows or windows that fully occupy alcoves, are also a perfect candidate for blinds. There are many ways of customizing blinds. They can, for example, be appliquéd with other fabrics, bordered with ropes, or stencilled.

A longer term solution is to use a pair of cream curtains. There are many fabrics to choose from, including linen, damask, velvet and silk. To finish a curtain apply 3 centimetre binding of contrasting or coloured fabric down the leading edge; this could be co-ordinated with another highlight colour in the room. The smartest and simplest curtain treatment is to use poles with pinch pleat headed curtains.

Fabric Blinds

There are five main types of fabric blinds: Austrian, festoon, pull-ups, roller and Roman.

Austrian Blind

An Austrian blind has a series of rings, usually as part of the Austrian blind tape, attached to the back of the blind in vertical lines. Each line of the rings is threaded with a cord and is attached to the lower ring. The top is attached to the Austrian blind track or a wooden batten. Austrian blinds are usually made with light, airy fabrics.



Festoon Blinds

Festoon blinds are often confused with Austrian blinds. However, an Austrian blind falls flat like a curtain, while a festoon blind needs twice the length of fabric for the finished drop.



Pull up Blinds

They look somewhat like Austrian blinds and also work on much the same principle, but they are made to lower right to the ground.

Roller Blinds

These can be painted, stencilled and made with almost any fabric that can be stiffened or laminated. These can be plain or highly decorative depending upon the design of fabric or the trim at the bottom.



Reverse Roller Blinds

In this type of blind the rolled fabric is at the bottom. Light weight fabric is usually used, which can be folded easily.

Roman Blinds

A Roman blind is flat, with no fullness across the width. The fabric is backed by a series of thin battens sewn parallel to each other in casings or pockets: the battens are pulled up by cords to form crisp folds.



Other Types of Blinds

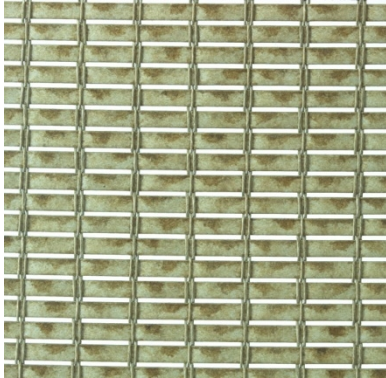
Bamboo Blinds

These are made from strips of bamboo and have an interesting appearance.



Louvre Blinds

These are slats or strips of metal, wood or stiffened fabric, which are designed to pivot open or shut. The type with thin horizontal slats is known as a mini blind, while those with wider horizontal louvres are called venetian blinds.



Matchstick or Linoleum Blinds

These types of blinds are made from strips of wood sewn slightly together with cotton. They are rolled up and held in place with cords. These are useful for filtering light.

Paper Blinds

Made of soft, thick pliable paper, these are flat blinds which roll up and down like rollers.

Alternative Window Treatments

Shutters

Whether these are louvred and folding or a solid wood variety, they are always neat and effective. The louvred wood shutters can be left as natural wood and the solid kind can be painted in different designs.

Problem Windows

Bay and Bow window

A bay or bow window with its continuous curve is often a problem if it has a window seat or radiator underneath. A simple solution could be to hang a blind against the glass. Permanently tied back curtains can be hung at the sides, if a crisper look is required the blinds can be left on their own. A contrasting or complementary fabric element can be used. This type of window can be made to look grand or simple depending on the top treatment. Swags and tails can also be hung.

French Doors

Many French doors open inwards, hence creating a problem, when curtains are closed. There are different ways you can overcome this problem: if there is space you can hang curtains from a pole that is wider than the frame so that they can be pulled to either side allowing the doors to be opened easily. If there is no room for this, you can hang the blinds on the glazed part of the doors themselves or create sash curtains as for sky lights.

Windows with Shutters

To treat this type of window, a pelmet or valance can be used. Alternatively, hang Italian strung curtains or curtains permanently held back with tie-backs, closing the shutters at night. Security shutters can be a problem, though: the best thing is to paint them.

Arched Windows

The traditional way to treat the Venetian, or Palladian, window (a rounded, arched window with narrow rectangular windows at each side) was to have a festoon shade in two parts of the centre, leaving the side windows undressed or simply shuttered. One option can be to fix a pole or track well over the top of the arch so that at least you see it during the day. Another option can be to fix the pole across the window below the semi-circular portion and curtain the window beneath, leaving the arch bare.

Picture Windows or Walls of Glass

Roman blinds, or vertical louvres, chain or other sorts of blinds are often the best solutions for a whole wall of glass.

Dormer Windows

Because there is no room to the sides of these windows to hang curtains, the best solution is to use roller or Roman blinds.

Circular Windows

It is best to leave them bare or you can replace the glass with painted or stained glass.

Side by Side Windows

These should be treated as one window. Hang curtains from a pole or track within a pelmet that goes across both windows, and draw the curtain to one side.

Corner Windows

When two windows are at right angles to each other in the corner. You can either use blinds or glass shelves which you can light from above or below with an up lighter or down lighter.

Differently Shaped Windows on the same Wall

If one of the windows is very small just leave it untreated, with a shelf across it or a sculptural object on the window sill. Otherwise curtain the whole wall, tying the curtains back at either side.

Upholstery

Upholstery fabrics are critical to the success of an interior. As well as covering and protecting furniture, they contribute to the style and atmosphere of a room and create a sense of harmony and balance by linking furniture with the wall, floor and window treatment. Good planning is vital in choosing upholstery. List all the upholstered pieces you want to include in the room and sketch them onto a floor plan. Consider how each item relates to the others and how it fits into the scheme. Fabrics should always be chosen to complement the shape and size of the furniture to be upholstered. A modern armchair with more graphic lines will suit a plain textured fabric. Using different colours, patterns and scales can make an item of furniture appear wider, narrower, lower or higher, depending on the effect you want to create. If the furniture has attractive legs, choose an upholstery finish that will complement this feature.

Upholstery Style

It is important that you have a clear idea of the fabric you want to use. First decide on the overall look you want to create, whether it is classic or tailored, relaxed and informal, cool and crisp or warm and soft. When considering the style also consider the importance of comfort and the key role played by the texture. Once you have chosen a style, think about the use and distribution of plain and patterned fabrics around the room. As a rule it is more practical to use neutral fabrics for major items such as sofas, and more colourful and luxurious textiles for smaller items to provide focal points. The main advantage of using plain fabrics for large pieces is that they make it easier to change the style and mood of the room. Colour and pattern can be introduced on sofas and chairs through cushions, throws and runners.

Small chairs, such as fireside chairs, offer lots of scope for experimenting with fabrics because they do not dominate a scheme. You could, for example, choose a check in two scales, and use one for the seat and one for the back. If you want to upholster everything in the room in two colours, these might be two neutrals, such as biscuit and cream, or two plains such as dark blue and taupe. You can then use smaller items, such as cushions, rugs and lamp shades to introduce vitality. One of the three colours should relate to the curtains or blinds.

Upholstery Trim

Choose upholstery trim to suit the style of the room and the furniture. The easiest way to feature a sofa or a chair is to use a contrasting colour or pattern for the edging rather than a matching one. This gives the same level of finish as binding a curtain edge.

Applying a gathered skirt to a chair can work well in a pretty bedroom, while a tailored skirt with pleats looks smart on a dining chair. The skirt can either match or co-ordinate with the main upholstery fabric on the chair. For example, a cream and taupe check fabric can be used for the main upholstery and a plain taupe for the skirt. If you are using button-backed furniture, choose a plain fabric or one with an all over pattern so that it does not matter where the upholstery design meets the buttons. The buttons can either be blended into the background by covering them with the same fabric or make them more prominent by using a contrasting pattern, such as checked buttons against a plain fabric or blue buttons against a cream one.

Dining Chairs

A set of matching chairs always looks smart but in order to give more vitality to the dining room contrasting colours or patterns can be used. There are two simple options: either the same fabric can be used in two different colours or same colour in two different patterns can be used. You can choose a blue stripe or check for the back or you can alternate the chairs around the table from stripes to checks. Matching buttons or ribbon-ties down the back of each chair add a further decorative detail: remember that a dining chair is one item of furniture that is often viewed from the back.

Drop in seats provide an easy means for introducing seasonal changes. Rich velvets are ideal for winter, while simple gingham are perfect for summer.



Cushions and Pillows

Furnishing accessories are as vital to a room as scarves, gloves, hats and belts are to complete a wardrobe. Whether you use a single striking colour or mix of colours to pull all the others together, each accessory is chosen to make a particular statement. Other soft furnishings such as rugs and curtains help to create a room's style, but cushions are an important accessory as they can be made as large colourful floor cushions for children or for extra seating, or they can be made smaller and grouped together on a plain sofa to make a

striking focal point. They are easy to make, can be easily moved around and are inexpensive, so they can be changed every season. They can be made in versatile cottons and linens or, to make a room special, in velvets or damasks.

Cushions can also be customized by adding, trimmings, piping, buttons or beads to complement the furniture or the room's decorative style. Pillows can also be made to suit the bedroom's style. Piped or pleated edged cushions are the popular choice for a classic room: made from patterned or plain fabric to match or accent the curtains or slip covers, they complete the scheme, giving it a seamless continuity.

A sophisticated country house look can be achieved by making cushions from scraps of antique textiles, damask, brocade and tapestry, edged and trimmed with cord, braid, fringing and tassels. If a more relaxed rustic look is required, use printed, striped or checked cotton, linen or even wool weaves for a country air. Choose a style and trimming to complement other furnishings in the room: floral print cushions look appropriate in a pretty country style room, decorated with dried flowers. Cushions can also be a valuable accessory in contemporary rooms. Plain coloured glazed chintz or robust weave edged contrasting piping looks stylish on modern upholstered furniture.

In quieter surroundings, large, flat bordered cushions made from textured natural fabrics in neutral shades, or uncomplicated colours like sage green, terracotta and navy, all look wonderful against uncluttered lines of American country furniture. In a bedroom where chintz is used for curtains and bed cover, make matching cushions from the same fabric but give them a softer look by outline quilting the design.

Types of Cushions

Cushions come in all shapes and sizes - rectangular, square, circular and even triangular. Small square cushions with frilled embroidery or lace covers look pretty in a bedroom, while large cushions break up the expanse of a roomy sofa. Bolsters are part cushion and part upholstery: firmer than conventional cushions, they give shape and support to a straight-sided sofa or divan and give a more formal effect than soft scattered cushions. Boxed cushions are often found on hard wooden seats where more resilient padding is needed; they regain their padded shape when no one is sitting on them.

Piped and Frilled Cushions

Piping the outer edge of the cushion makes it more interesting. Frills are added to a cushion for a softer touch. They work well with floral fabric and in bedroom furnishings.



Buttoned Lined Cushion

Buttons have long been the secret weapon of the fashion world. Elaborate beading and decorative buttoning are used on this type of cushion. These are highly decorative cushions, suitable for use in living rooms when coordinating the scheme.

Tied Corner Cushion

A very smart way of introducing bows and knots to cushions, this cushion has borders that tie at the corner. This looks best in medium weight cotton fabric, selected to suit the scheme. This cushion can be used on its own in the back of a side chair, as the centre piece on the sofa, or as a focal point on a bed.

Bolsters

Bolsters were formally used as decorative side cushions on early wood frame sofas, and they are the forerunners of today's scatter cushion. In the bedroom a firm bolster running down the width of the bed, with soft down cushions on top, is comfortable to sleep with and gives good support for reading in bed. But generally bolsters are just made to look decorative.



Boxed Cushions

These are suitable as chairs and sofa backs, as loose cushions in occasional chair seats, or they can be used as floor cushions, window seats and head rests.

Bordered Cushions

Cushions with additional borders or embellishments fit easily together and blend well on a garden bench, piled onto a squashy sofa, or displayed on a bed. Frilled edges, cords and piping, fringes and tassels are pretty decoration and encourage a romantic and period atmosphere. The contemporary style is padded and double borders.

Children's Cushions

Children mostly love to sit on the floor. Bright coloured diced floor cushions are usually used for this purpose.

Materials and Textures

Cushions can be carefully planned to give just the right balance of shape, position, colour, and texture to create a certain impact on their own, or two cushions might be designed to work together on a plain background.

Durable Fabrics

Always choose fabric which will wear and can clean well. Loose covers and seat cushions should be machine washable. Look for some unbleached linen, denim, gingham, woven rugs and kelims.

Colour Scheme

Neutral and white rooms may be 'traditional' or 'contemporary' in style -the colours and design of the accessories can either emphasize or distract from the period or modern look. A single cushion in shocking pink can have a huge impact on an all white room; a cushion with small white and pale lilac print makes less impact. Monochromatic room schemes can be made interesting by choosing different textures, darker and lighter tones for the cushions.

Bed Pillows

The shapes and sizes of pillows that can be used on a bed are endless. These are divided into two types: the pillow case, a functional cover for the pillow used for head support when sleeping and pillow 'shams' the covers for any extra pillows used for decoration or back support. House wife pillow style describes the cover with a flat back which allows the pillow to be inserted. The edges can be flat bordered, plain or frilled. These are made in the same way as scatter cushions, but without zips.

Pillow shams are usually open at one end with the decorative edge. These pillows are produced in different shapes. Large round pillows, or huge square pillows, frilled, fringed pillows, embroidered or heart shaped pillows all combine well with a bed's traditional shape. Textures can be mixed by combining different weights of fabric: suede with linen, for example or cotton with silk. Cushions are embellished in the same way as curtains or upholstery. Trims, feathers, ribbons or fringes will create a decorative look, while wood or pearl buttons offer a more subtle form of ornamentation.

Uses of Cushions

As well as choosing cushions for their visual qualities, consider their practical usefulness. A square shaped cushion measuring at least 55 x 55 centimetres will be generous enough to offer good back support, while cushions placed on chairs and window seats should be deep and wide enough to provide comfort. Floor cushions bring a relaxed and friendly atmosphere to the room.

Table Dressing

The marvellous thing about tablecloths is that they can transform any old table, even a simple one made from chipboard, into a beautiful object. A beautifully dressed table can enhance any meal. Tablecloths, runners, and accessories can help to transform a room from summer to winter, from day to evening, from an informal family lunch to a formal celebration diner. The main function of the table cloth is to protect a polished dining table at meal times and provide an attractive background against which to display china.

Table Linen

One of the first things to consider is the surface of the table: if it is beautifully polished or has a painted design, it is worth showing off, so do so without a tablecloth and use place mats. Another option that allows the table surface to be seen is to use place mats for dining and a runner at other times. These could be co-ordinated with table linen. If you would rather use a table cloth, decide whether it should provide a calm canvas for your tableware or form a more decorative look. You need not be confined to a conventional tablecloth. Alternatives include antique curtains, sari fabric, even a fine check wool blanket - remember that fabric intended for everyday use should be durable and easy to clean. Embellishments for table clothes include ribbon trims, velvet borders or runners that lie across the surface. Unless you want the cloth to be purely decorative, table linen fabric really needs to be washable and in a wide width to avoid joins.



Tableware

People often have a set of everyday china and a formal dinner service. Using different tableware for each course can add variety to the meal. Mixing pattern on china follows the same rule as mixing pattern anywhere in the room.

Accessories

Coloured glasses make an ordinary table look pretty. Decorative candle holders, a magnificent fruit bowl or a set of silver dessert spoons can create interest to the table look.

A magnificent bowl of flowers or fruit can be used as a centre piece. Attractive containers can also be introduced on the table.

Bedding

Bed Linen

As the bed is the most dominant part of a bedroom scheme it can be the perfect way to make sure that you get exactly the colours and fabrics you want. Bedding should be chosen to suit the look of the bedroom, be it romantic or smart, country or simple. Pattern, scale and colour are important here, so choose bedding with care. Colours can either harmonize or contrast with the scheme and patterns can be mixed, for example by using checked pillowcases with plain ones or florals with stripes. The tactile qualities of bedding are all important. Whether you opt for linen or cotton sheets, blankets or duvets, eiderdowns or throws, rectangular pillows or square ones, what matter is that you have to make the bedroom as comfortable as possible.

Choosing Fabric for Bed Linen

Pure linen is the most luxurious choice – it feels lovely and cool in summer as well as being strong and durable, but it is expensive, it is time consuming to iron and not widely available.

Pure cotton is the next choice for luxury and comfort, although unless it is easy care, it too needs pressing.

Egyptian cotton is superior to ordinary cotton, having longer and finer fibres than average.

Cotton flannelette has a warm, fluffy surface which makes it suitable for winter sheets.

Cotton polyester is non-shrink, hard wearing and takes less looking after than natural fibres. It is also less expensive.

Dressing the Bed

The look of the bed can be changed with the seasons, by using loose covers to cover the headboard. In winter you might use cosy wool or felt, then in summer switch to a pretty voile or striped cotton. Loose covers are also easier to keep clean than tight upholstery. Use different coloured ribbon ties to complement other colours in the room. A valance around a bed looks smart if it is co-ordinated with the headboard. If the headboard and valance are permanent features, rather than being changed seasonally, keep them plain. Ticking stripes and checks are a good choice if you want to use a pattern. Decorative cushions, such as patch work or appliqué, can give a bed a finished look. These too can be used to complement the colours and patterns found elsewhere in the room. Fringing, piping or braiding can be used to enhance the look further.

Bed Curtains

The bed head can be decorated with many devices, from a simple wall hanging to elaborate coronets and half testers. In ancient times bed curtains were used for privacy. The Victorians briefly re-introduced the four poster but decided that it was not a healthy choice to enclose the bed with curtains, so they chose the half tester instead. This was a canopy over the head end of the bed only.

The easiest way to add style and interest to a bed is to display a rug, patchwork quilt or fabric hanging behind the bed. Alternatively, you can fit a coronet on the wall above the bed head. This is a small semi-circular pelmet from which you hang drapes. These need to be lined preferably with contrasting fabric, and are supported on either side of the bed head with hold backs. Half testers are similar to a coronet but the pelmet is often a rectangular shape and is decorated.



Coronet



Half tester

Four Poster Beds

Whether antique or modern a four poster bed, being hung with curtain has a wonderful feeling of being cut off from the outside world. Use decorative patterns, sumptuous silks or, the most cost effective option, romantic voiles. Generous amounts of fabric are needed to give a feeling of luxury and comfort. If using a patterned textile consider the placement of pattern from every angle. As a four poster creates a significant height line in the room, it is important to consider the overall window treatment in relation to the bed, to ensure they harmonize.

Dressing a four poster is to some extent dictated by the bed style. For a modern design drape some muslin over the canopy. Or go for dress curtains at each corner, a canopy (a piece of fabric that ties to the top of the frame), tie back if you wish and a matching bed valance. A traditional four poster can have the complete look: full lined curtains with braid and fringed edges, tie backs, a canopy and pelmet, matching valance, contrasting light curtains and co-ordinating bedding.



Suggested Further Reading:

- ✓ *Soft Furnishings, (2006), By Chris Jefferys*
- ✓ *How to Start a Blinds (soft Furnishings) Business (Beginners Guide), (2003), By Gayle Spellman*