

SEEING
BEYOND
THE
NORM

Dawn Adams reports.



**SHEERS ARE APPEALING TO A BROADER MARKET BASE
AS CHANGING CONSUMER PERCEPTIONS PROVIDE A
CATALYST FOR GROWTH.**

CONSUMERS ARE LOOKING BEYOND THE OFTEN TOUTED BENEFITS OF SHEERS TO EMBRACE THEM FOR A HOST OF NEW AESTHETIC REASONS. THE STRENGTH OF SHEERS, OFTEN SELECTED TO SECURE PRIVACY AND TO LIMIT ANY NEGATIVE IMPACT FROM STRONG UV LIGHT IS UNDISPUTED IN THE WINDOW FURNISHINGS SECTOR. BUT THIS CATEGORY IS GOING BEYOND PRACTICAL BENEFITS TO PROVIDE WAYS TO CREATE MORE VERSATILE AND CONVERSATION STARTING INTERIOR DESIGNS.

THERE IS NO doubt suppliers have been moving in this direction for some years by expanding their ranges to offer consumers more options that reflect a design element. An evolutionary change is underway as stiffened sheers make an entrance and white and ivory lose ground as favourite colours. But worthwhile noting is that the significant change in today's market is increasingly about how consumers and decorators are choosing to use sheers.

For example, a sheer with a lining offers multiple effects that can alter the appearance of interiors for day or night or just for fun. Sheers are now even being used with blinds to create another result. These combinations add a certain dynamism to the category with new opportunities to be imaginative in terms of design increasingly being promoted to consumers as they redecorate their homes and search for new ways to reflect their unique style.

BROADER MARKET APPEAL

WILSON FABRICS notes that sheers are increasingly being used in front of fabrics to make a design statement rather than just behind a blackout curtain. Jennifer Donnelly, the company's marketing manager, points to an example in the firm's range; sheers are being selected for use in front of its triple weave Luxury Satin fabric to achieve an elegant 'hotel' quality look. "Sheers have traditionally only been used behind a blackout curtain to provide privacy while the curtains are open, however, we are now seeing them being used in many different ways," she says.

Also in demand are sheers positioned in front of a blind to achieve a softer effect while still benefiting from the blackout properties of the blind and the privacy and light filtering aspects from the sheers. "It has taken a while to transform the consumer's perception of sheers from being just plain voile, 'scrim' or lace, to what we know it as today," she says.

Donnelly observes the vast range of sheer fabrics are appealing to a much broader market than this category previously attracted. She attributes the increase in demand, particularly over the past year, to the rise in number of ranges available as well as their different applications, with growth evident in the domestic and commercial markets. And she notes they are also being used as stylish room dividers or features along a wall to soften a space and create a sense of luxury and style.

'Ormondo', released earlier this year, under the Wilson Studio umbrella, is a sophisticated linen textured sheer made from a combination of linen, viscose and polyester. Available in six colours, 'Ormondo' has been designed to add a touch of natural elegance into a room and coordinates well with Carmine Floral and Geo which are due for release later this year.

A new 'Kids Print Collection' consists of nine coordinating designs in three sheers and six uncoated fabrics with a weighted hem in designs for boys and girls. Available in a wide width of 280cm and railroaded to allow a 280cm drop and no joins in the curtains, these prints are also Oeko-Tex certified.

WHITE AND IVORY LOSE MARKET SHARE

DEMAND FOR WIDER widths and for sheers to be coordinated with a coloured lining is accelerating, according to Basford Brands managing director Wayne Leslie.

An example is Filigree's sheer, 'Supreme', that is being released in 12 new colours that coordinate with its Night Shade triple weave lining. Also new is Southport, described as a beautiful European sheer in a textured linen look, while Kingston, available in 13 solid colours, has a paint brush stroke effect running through the fabric.

"There is a move towards a natural look and matt colours rather than shine or lustre," Leslie says.

A recent addition to the Maurice Kain collection is Harmony, available in seven colours with a decorative 'cobweb' effect. Also being released is Revival in a linen look in a wider 300 cm width. "The linen look continues as a trend while stripes are strong," Leslie says.

A metallic stripe features in the Ballard collection in a contemporary interpretation while a modern embroidered motif makes the Galaxy range stand out.

"The days of having plain white and ivory have diminished greatly," he says. They used to make up 60 per cent of the market but now, they make up around 20 per cent. In contrast, there is lots of visual stimulation seen in stripe with metallic yarns and strong contrast colours like a soft mild blue with metallic platinum. Twelve months ago, I might have thought this was fashion trend but now, it's becoming the norm."

Yet another trend gaining ground is for suppliers to offer stiffened sheer fabrics so that blinds can coordinate with curtains. The Revolution soft curtain fabric, for example, coordinates with a stiffened sheer blind fabric called Parnell from Filigree. "You can have the identical fabric in a soft draped curtain as in a roller blind," he says.



MAURICE KAIN

The Maurice Kain collection is also extending the width of fabrics being offered in response to increasing demand in the market. "There is a movement for longer than three metres with the new S track," he says. "In some cases, we're going up to 3.10 metres and looking at taking that even further," he says.

MULTIPLE USES

CONSUMERS ARE beginning to grasp that sheers can be used in multiple ways, according to Charles Parsons. For example, three different looks can be achieved when a coloured lining and a sheer are used on a double track. A transparent sheer appearance is secured when the sheer hangs on its own, a solid drape effect is gained when the sheer is drawn with the lining behind while the lining on its own presents a plain solid drape with the sheers pushed back to the sides.

Charles Parsons has released several semi sheers over the past six months with two particular looks emerging as significant trends. The natural textured look semi sheer is gaining interest with the firm's selection including Flaxton, Uluru and Sierra which is due for release shortly. Pascal & Pazzo are new sheers achieving a luxury look.

But the strongest trend in the market is a linen look constructed from polyester, according to the company. These sheers provide a solution for consumers who appreciate natural fibres and the softness and comfort this look provides while the polyester construction also ensures a more sun resistant fibre.

Also noted by the company is that consumers are beginning to choose sheers over blinds for their window treatments. Making sheers attractive to the market is that they provide a lining to create insulation, do not move about and create noise in windy conditions and allow consumers to inject more of their personality into their interior scheme. And appealing is that a greater control over the final look can be achieved with the addition of curtain header styles and the considered placement of curtain tracks.



WILSON