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TECHNOPHOBIA WINDOW TREATMENTS

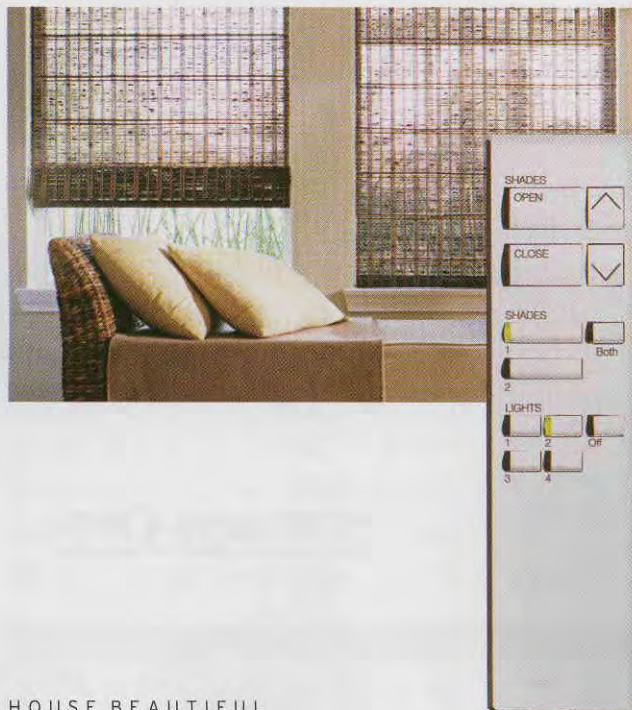
Motorized shades and blinds are so smart now, you can even operate them long distance. Terry Trucco gets the story from Mitchell Schulman of Manhattan Shade & Glass

I have been besotted with motorized window treatments for a dozen years, but I haven't kept up with the advances. Are they becoming more sophisticated?

Absolutely. Most types of window treatments can be motorized, including drapes, sheers, roller shades, Roman shades, skylight shades, and Venetian blinds. Battery-operated window treatments are the least expensive and can be installed without ripping up the walls. But if you want something more technologically sophisticated, you have to run a wire.

What can the latest electronic versions do?

The options are limitless, especially when they're integrated into a control system with a brain. You can control them from a touch panel that also controls the alarm system, lights, thermostat, audio/visual system, and so forth. You can program the shades to rise and fall at precise times of day so the furniture doesn't fade. For a client with a weekend home, we installed a master-master switch—a single button to press in the garage so when the family leaves, every single shade in the house goes down. And when they arrive, every shade goes up. Another client wanted a control button in each room of his house plus two infrared remote controls for the bedroom so that he and his wife can use them from their bed.



Anything else?

You can get motion and light sensors, too, so the awning retracts when the wind reaches 25 miles an hour and the shades go up when it's cloudy. And if you're concerned about them going up and down each time there's a passing cloud, we can program them so they need 10 minutes of consistent light before they move. There's a web interface available, so you can control them long distance, from your computer.

Can lights and window treatments be coordinated?

Window treatments can be programmed to work in conjunction with lights dimming or brightening, creating "scenes" for an entire day—morning, dusk, dinner time, bedtime, whatever. I had a client facing the Hudson River who had a scene button for sunset. The shades come partially down so he can see out but the sun isn't in his face. You can get a hand-held transmitter that will override the scene and dim the lights or move the shade any way you want.

How noisy are electronic window treatments?

The Lutron Sivoia QED electronic drive motor is so quiet that what you hear when your shade comes down is the sound of the cloth unrolling off the tube, not the motor. The other advantage, which is huge, is that it uses a low voltage electrical system. It's much less complicated to wire than the line voltage system used by traditional non-quiet drive motors. And Lutron offers a range of fabrics, including mesh sunscreens and a new line of PVC-free fabrics. Or you can have a shade company like mine make something in the fabric you want.

Sounds great. Are there any disadvantages?

The disadvantage of Lutron is that, while it's sexy stuff, it's available only in Roman shades, roller shades, and drapery track systems. You can't use it on wood Venetian blinds or a skylight shade. But line voltage systems, which operate any kind of window treatment, are going to get quieter. There's a new one available already, in fact.

Do I have to rip out my walls to install quiet windows?

If you have curtains, in most instances we can put them inside the window jamb or valance, then run surface-mount electrical wiring down the wall into the outlet behind the curtain panel. You need to use a remote control system to operate them. ●

FAR LEFT: Lutron Sivoia QED (Quiet Electronic Drive) motorized Roman shades, here in woven bamboo. LEFT: With this hand-held infrared remote, you can control one shade or a group of shades, and lighting.