Cornices, Valances and Lambrequins

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Cornices, valances and lambrequins

Whether you choose draperies or insulated Roman shades for your window, you can gain added energy-efficiency by adding a cornice, valance, or lambrequin.

All of these treatments are designed to reduce heat loss due to convection by enclosing the top of the window treatment and the window frame. The lambrequin also encloses the sides of the window.

The type of treatment you choose will depend on the mood you wish to set in the room and how much you want to spend on materials. To get an idea what each of these treatments would do for your window, cut patterns out of cardboard before you invest your time and money on the actual project.

**Cornices**

Cornices are frames, usually made of wood or a stiffly woven and coated fabric called buckram or permette (Fig 1 and 2). The directions are for wooden cornice construction.

**Supplies**

- ¼-inch plywood
- decorator or plain fabric
- fusible mesh
- lining fabric
- angle irons
- nails, glue

**Directions for construction:**

1. Measure inside window width and length. Determine length for cornice in proportion to window. A cornice is usually 1/9 to 1/6 the length of the window.
2. Cut a pattern from heavy paper and tape to the window to check the design you have chosen.
3. Cut the fabric and lining, using this pattern. Also cut plywood to form top, sides, and front of cornice.
4. Assemble plywood base, using small nails and glue.

Fig 1. Plain cornice.

5. Fuse fabric to lining with a fusible mesh (to prevent wood from showing through the cornice fabric).
6. Cut bias strip that is 1-inch (2.5 cm) wide to go around entire cornice (for decorative cornice, as in Fig 2).
7. Sew right side of strip to right side of cornice using ¼-inch (6 mm) seam (Fig 2).
8. Clip curves and turn strips to back, mittering corners. Adhere to plywood cornice with glue.
9. For a finishing touch, cover the entire back with fabric, using the glue.
10. Use angle irons to mount cornice to wall just outside the window frame.

**Valances**

Valances not only add a finishing touch at a window but they also conceal the hardware and mechanical workings of the window as well. Valances are made of soft or slightly stiffened fabric and are suspended over the window in a wooden frame. Valances are really a cornice with a softer look.

**Supplies**

- plywood for frame
- decorative or plain fabric
- angle irons for hanging
- drapery hooks (pleated valance)
- heavy-duty staples (pleated valance)
- lining fabric (bubble valance)
- cord for piping (bubble valance)

**Directions for construction:**

**pleated valance**

1. A pleated valance is treated the same way as a very short drapery.
2. The valance can be attached to a mounting board using drapery hooks which fasten into staples on the edge of the board.
3. A pleat should be positioned on the corners of the valance. Pinch or box pleats or shirring may be used for the valance.
4. The valance may be perfectly straight, with or without trim.

Fig 3. Pleated valance.

**bubble valance**

1. The bubble valance should be made of a medium to lightweight fabric that is firm and crisp; polished cotton works well. This treatment requires a cornice board which should be constructed and attached before the valance is made. The width of the cornice board should be in proportion to the window.
2. Measure the length of the cornice board including both returns. The outer fabric should be cut 2½ times the length of...
the cornice board (including returns) and the width of the cornice board plus 2½ inches (5.7 cm) for seams and bubble (Fig 4). (The return is the distance the window treatment and/or hardware sticks out from the wall.)

3. The lining fabric should be cut the length of the cornice board (including returns plus 1 inch (2.5 cm) for hem on sides and depth of the cornice board plus 3 inches (7.6 cm) (Fig 5).

4. Make enough piping to go around the upper and lower edge of board and each end of return. The piping should be made with ½ inch (1.2 cm) of seam remaining to attach to valance.

5. Using a heavy thread or light cord, zigzag over the cord at the upper and lower edge of outer fabric. Divide fabric into fourths. Divide cornice into fourths and gather the fabric to fit the cornice. Attach piping to upper edge of valance, leaving a length of piping at each end to correspond to width of cornice board.

6. Attach piping to lower edge of valance. Press under ½-inch (1.2 cm) seam on each end and top edge of valance lining. Attach lining to valance at lower edge. Piping will be between lining and outer fabric with ½-inch (1.2 cm) seam.

7. Bring folded edge of lining to cording so that seam is covered. Stitch in place. Ends are to be finished by gathering outer valance to fit lining fabric. Stitch excess piping to lining at ends. Attach outer fabric that is gathered to ends.

8. Miter upper edge of valance to correspond to corners of cornice; stitch in place. Valance may be attached with staples along top and down sides close to piping (Fig 6).

4. Clip curves and corner. Turn to back; tack or staple to frame, pulling cover smooth (Fig 8).

5. Trimming neatly conceals any spots where the covering has puckered. Flat trim should be glued into place.

6. To hang lambrequin on wall, screw two angle irons to top of frame, position on wall, and screw into place.

Lambrequins

Lambrequin is a word that is rather new in the decorating vocabulary. A lambrequin is a structure that frames a window. Usually covered and trimmed, it can add importance to insignificant windows, unify windows of odd shapes and sizes, or frame a view. Ideally, a shaped lambrequin is made of plywood; however, it can be made from heavy cardboard.

**Supplies**
- plywood
- decorative or plain fabric
- staples and staple gun
- glue
- foam for padding (optional)
- angle iron for hanging

**Directions for construction: lambrequin**

1. Cut plywood into desired shapes (Fig 7 is a plain one).
2. Glue and nail plywood together to form frame, sand.
3. Cut fabric so that it will extend 2 inches larger than frame. If you are using foam padding, you should also cut it 2 inches larger than frame.

Swags and jabots

Swags and jabots are among the most decorative window treatments. They can blend with any scheme, from the formal French to the casual contemporary. Swags can be used singly, doubly, alone or with jabots. They can be lined with a contrasting print or solid fabric as well as a neutral lining material. Jabots can be almost any length, from one-third to full-floor length. The sill-length jabot is best with sill high paneling or chair railing.

**Directions for construction: swag**

1. The depth of the swag should be in proportion with the height of the window. The center of the swag is usually 12-15 inches (30.5-38 cm) for an average window. Use muslin to experiment and try different widths. The muslin will be used to make a pattern. The top of the swag is cut on the crosswise grain of the fabric. Begin with a muslin piece about 3-6 inches (7.5-15.2 cm) wider than the board and 36 inches (91.4 cm) long; with basting stitch, mark center of fabric.
2. Use push pins to pin muslin to the top of the board, matching
center of board to center of muslin.

3. Begin pleats working from the top. Put 4-6 inches (10.2-15.2 cm) in each pleat. Measure down 4-6 inches from top of board and fold. Bring fold line to top of board and pin. For second pleat, measure down another 4-6 inches and fold. Bring fold line to within 1-1 1/2 inches (2.5-3.8 cm) of first fold line and pin in place. Continue making pleats until the center of the swag is in proportion with the window (Fig 9).

4. Keep pleats at both ends on crosswise grain of the fabric, and keep the center marking in line. Trim sides with end of board.

5. Swag will have a zigzag pattern to indicate placement of pleats (Fig 10).

6. Use the muslin as a pattern for cutting drapery. Add an additional 1 1/2 inch (3.8 cm) for hem at the top and 1/2 inch (1.2 cm) for seam on the sides and lower edge. Cut lining the same as the swag but make it 1 inch (2.5 cm) shorter at the top. With right sides together, stitch lining and swag together, leaving the top open.

7. If the fabric does not ravel, trim the seam to 1/4 inch (6 mm). If the fabric ravelers, leave 1/2 inch (1.2 cm) seam. Press open seams and clip the seam. Turn to right side and press. Stitch lining to swag across top. Turn under 1/2 inch (1.2 cm) on top edge and stitch twill tape to top of swag 1/8 inch (3 mm) from fold line.

8. Pleat the swag and stitch the pleats in place. Attach the swag to the top and side of the board with staples.

**Directions for construction: jabot**

1. Make a muslin pattern for cascade before cutting the fabric.

2. For the average window the outside length should be about 30 inches (76.2 cm) long. There should be about 20-25 inches (50.8-63.5 cm) across the top plus enough for valance board return (Fig 11).

3. The facing of the jabot is usually of matching fabric, but can be of a contrasting or coordinating fabric for a more interesting effect. Cut the facing the same size and shape as face fabric.

4. Seam fabric and facing together along the top, sides, and diagonal.

5. Press seams open with tip of iron.

6. Turn and press flat.

7. On lower edge of return, fold 3/8 inch (9 mm) to inside and slip stitch.

8. Pleat according to markings on pattern

9. Zigzag across to hold pleats in place.

10. Cut a 2-inch strip (5.1 cm) of the fabric the length of the jabot across the pleated edge plus 3/4 inch (1.9 cm).

11. Turn strip to underside 3/8 inch (9 mm) at the ends and fold through the center.

12. Pin edges to top of jabot and stitch.

13. Press.

14. Fold strip over top of valance board and tack in place, or use snap tape to attach to the board (Fig 12).

Variations

As many variations on these basic directions exist for cornices, valances, lambrequins, swags, and jabots as your imagination can conceive.

1. Use different fabrics—an easy way to change appearances easily.

2. Wide framing or molding can be used for the face and sides of a cornice. This requires mitering the corners, but does give a more elegant appearance.

3. If framing or good quality wood is used for cornices and lambrequins, they can be
finished with a clear finish or painted instead of covering with fabric. Paint is easier to keep clean than fabric.

Fact sheets in this series
FS 776, Energy-efficient window treatments
FS 777, Energy-efficient draperies
FS 778, Cornices and lambrequins
FS 779, Insulated Roman shades
FS 780, Insulated shutters and panels


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