



BLACKOUT VS ROOM DARKENING

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Sorry to disappoint you, but there is no such thing as a blackout shade. Room darkening, yes—blackout, no. We sell blackout fabrics, but the construction of the shade results in light gaps that may or may not be acceptable to your client.

This is both a challenge and an opportunity. Room darkening shades are the number two driver of demand for shades, after privacy. The challenge is getting customers to understand the limitations of room darkening products and getting them to be realistic about their level of expectation and personal need. Everyone has a different sensitivity to light. My bedroom is completely blacked out with room darkening shades and room darkening drapery panels. Believe it or not, my wife still needs to wear an eye mask because of the light from the cable box! Personally, I can sleep with the lights on.

We sell blackout SOLUTIONS and ask our clients to think about hotel rooms. Hotels are tasked with providing their guests with a dark room for sleeping at any hour of day or night. We remind customers that hotels typically have three layers of room darkening window treatments – shades, draperies and top treatments. This is the only solution that can achieve true blackout.

The most popular room darkening products are roller shades and cellular shades. Louvered products – blinds, shutters and window shadings are lousy room darkening products because light will always leak through the overlaps in the louvers.

Because of the way shades are constructed, there will always be a light gap between the edge of the shade

and the frame of the window. The fabric width is always smaller than the headrail. When you tell the customer this in advance, their response is always 'no problem'. After the job is installed is when they will call screaming that their husband/wife can't sleep.

We inform all our customers that the best solution to the light gap problem is room darkening drapery panels. Not only do they eliminate light gap, but they add a design element, insulation and sound absorption to the room. Draperies literally soften the room.

Top treatments are also important. Light is like water – it will find a way into the smallest crack or opening. Even though we have now covered the window and the light gap, it is not uncommon for small amounts of light to find their way through the headrail mechanisms of certain shades. A valance or cornice can block that small amount of light leakage.

Side channels are excellent solutions for light gaps on the sides of shades. Roller shade side channels have been in the market for years and now Hunter Douglas has developed a side channel solution for cellular shades. These products eliminate most light. But again, there can be some light leakage through the headrail or even the bottom rail if the window is not square.

Be sure to consult your customer in advance to discuss their light sensitivity. Bring in the expertise of a window treatment professional to support your advice. Let your customer know that a layered approach is always the most effective solution. If you do, I guarantee you and your clients a good night's sleep.

Above: Hunter Douglas LightLock system provides side channels to achieve maximum room darkening effect.