

Passion and Practicality

Why I Love Windows



Gordon Clements with his daughter Kelly and wife Dianne.

Most people don't typically think of Vermont when they think of trends, but Gordon Clements, owner of Gordon's Window Decor, based in Vermont, with additional offices in upstate New York and Virginia, believes his clientele is on the leading edge of consumer behavior.

"Given all that has hit the consumer lately—the loss of pension savings, the downturn in the home market, spiraling energy costs—I think Vermont is already the market the rest of the U.S. will become," Clements said. "Vermonters are pragmatic, careful, demanding and have long favored buying local. We are fact- and value-driven and, given that our winters can interminable, have always been energy-conscious.

"We offer a product that is designed, built and installed by Vermonters, and that fact resonates with our market. We align ourselves with other companies who have the same values; we are active in the community; we underwrite our public radio and television stations; and in everything we do, we make sure our marketing efforts mirror our mission statement and corporate culture."

Finding the Right Path

Clements' business wasn't always so focused. "Many years ago we sold as many soft window treatments as we did blinds, so much so that I got into fabric distribution primarily to get better pricing for our draperies.

"But living in an electrically heated home in Vermont I quickly recognized the huge hole windows create in the building envelope. Insulating window treatments became an interest and eventually a passion. When I launched Gordon's in January 1985, our primary insulating treatments were Warm Window and Window Quilt. When more effective new products came on to the market, such as Duette, then Symphony, we added those to our offerings. As we became smarter on how to build a profitable business centered on insulating the window, we created our own brand, EcoSmart Insulating Shades in 2006.

Today Gordon's Window Decor is strictly a custom window treatment business, and about 70 percent of those sales are its own EcoSmart brand of cellular shades and roller shades. "Over the years we tried selling fabric and wallpaper," Clements said. "We made our own wood blinds and verticals, but soon enough recognized what our strengths were, and what niches the market would allow us to operate in profitably. We have a small workroom primarily for top treatments, but insulating window treatments are our core business."

Communicating the Energy Message

Having been involved in the window treatment business long enough to note that this is the third energy-crises market he has faced, Clements understands that "saving energy" isn't always top-of-mind with consumers. But that's okay with him, because, as he has become more convinced of the importance of insulating treatments, the market is evolving in a way that favors his commitment to value-based sales.

"Dollar for dollar, nothing does as much for a building, residential or commercial, than custom window treatments," Clements said. "Quickly and inexpensively, window treatments can satisfy all four of a consumer's hierarchy of needs— aesthetics, comfort, convenience, and sustainability/operating cost. And they do so at the window—generally the focal point of the room—following the decorating tenet of adding strength to strength."

Having to convince skeptical Vermonters meant that Clements aligned himself long ago with other organizations that share a similar message and mission. These relationships are proved valuable many times over—in the form of shared information, testing results and referrals.

"We have worked professionally recognized energy-focused organizations such as Energy Balance, Building Green and Efficiency Vermont, that are leading research into advanced energy-saving initiatives. And the Preservation Trust of Vermont, which is pioneering an effort to



At the Carnegie Library in Solvay, N.Y., the Gordon's team built and installed 21 custom EcoSmart insulating cellular shades.

save windows, and promote energy efficient buildings, using insulating window shades. They are committed to restoring older windows, which can have an expected life of 100 years, versus a replacement window of 25 years. And, when combined with one of our insulating shades, which the Preservation Trust recommends, these can actually exceed the R-value of newer windows. The result is less-expensive renovations, less material in the landfills, lower operating costs and improved comfort and aesthetics."

The other strength Clements' business gains through these relationships is access to independent studies, tests and data he would not be able to produce on his own. "The Vermont consumer is most interested in concrete data and facts. We have a study showing mini blinds actually increase their energy bill by 10 percent over an untreated window while our insulating shades can cut it in half. We can also share a report with them that demonstrates the U.S. could save 10 times the amount of the BP oil spill in the Gulf if all windows had quality insulating shades with side tracks. We know that our clients find that information valuable and important, and that it influences their buying decisions."

Matching the Market to the Message

Although consumers may vary in their commitment to energy savings one market with which Clements's message has had consistent success has been large educational institutions. "We make a product that is durable, practical and extremely beneficial to the schools," Clements explained.

One of the company's biggest projects was a 10-year contract with a major university, in which all the draperies in the dorms were replaced with EcoSmart insulating shades, a total order of more than 15,000 units. This, in turn, led to other such projects, such as a 1,200-unit cellular shade

installation in July 2010 for a Washington, D.C., university. Clements uses not just the contacts from these university projects, but the information he gathers, such as:

- Repair work orders for window treatment problems dropped from more than 1,000 per year with the draperies installed to less than 100 once EcoSmart shades were installed.

Clements explained: "When you consider that the administration costs tied to a single work order range from \$75-\$150, that alone represents a huge annual savings, without even factoring in the energy savings.

"When dealing with schools, we now try, whenever possible, to make window treatment purchases part of their planned maintenance program. This is inevitably a less expensive and longer-lasting approach to maintenance spending than dealing with emergency repairs."

- There are obvious significant energy savings, which Gordon's estimates for each project using a U.S. government developed software for modeling energy transfer from windows.
- Students' satisfaction markedly improves, due to the fact they are more comfortable and better able to control the light and heat in their rooms.
- Compared to other sustainability investments, like a new boiler, these types of conversion projects—from draperies or mini-blinds to EcoSmart shades—are highly visible. Students notice it, visitors notice it, parents notice it.
- Because the students actually play a large role in reducing energy costs by operating their shades correctly, they



THIS PAGE: Three views of the Davis student center on the University of Vermont campus in Burlington. Featuring blackout shades behind sheer shades on a massive 30-foot wide window, the Gordon's team had to use cantilever lifts to reach to uppermost portions in what was a very tight-fitting installation. Two motors were installed to manage the shades.

recognize the school is actively committed to being more “green” and handle the window treatments with more care, which in turn means they are generally more careful overall with their room. The result is overall lowered repair and maintenance costs.

The Importance of a Solid Foundation

When Clements first started his business it was, like many, a one-person operation. But as his company grew and the niche he carved out for it became more defined, he has worked as hard on the internals of the company, as he did the message to the consumer.

“We’re a family-based business, and I’m beyond thrilled that my daughter Kelly is committed to moving Gordon’s forward. My wife Dianne also works in the business and to balance that we have to be respectful, open and communicative, not just with each other, but with everyone who works here. So the individuals we hire have to genuinely want to be part of a caring, passionate business.

“I’m pleased to say that 90 percent of our factory staff has been building shades with me for more than ten years,” Clements added. He believes it is this sense of community within the company that helps produce an excellent product. He cites as example the 1,200-EcoSmart shade project that was completed—from fabrication to installation—in just three weeks this past July. “It was our first project with them and it went off without a hitch, not a single defect in any of the shades, nor a problem with the installation.”

Clements is proud of what he’s accomplished—for himself, his family, his employees and his customers—but he’s perhaps even prouder that his product and his message are truly resonating with an ever-growing audience. “Our network of EcoSmart dealers stretches from Alaska to Ire-



land,” he said. “People recognize that I’m not selling snake oil, but a product that attractively and affordably adds comfort while cutting energy waste.”

He’s also rightfully proud of being a family-owned manufacturing business poised for growth, of delivering a quality product that helps the United States reduce its dependence on fossil fuels, and of having the opportunity to deliver a legacy to his daughter and grandchildren. For Clements it can all be tied back to his first home in Vermont and the custom window treatments he installed there more than 30 years ago.

“My wife and I bought this very high-end dining room set and installed Duettes (a new product at the time) with custom draperies on the windows. We used these custom treatments to solve a proportion issue with the window, tie together the decorating scheme, and make the space visually and actually warmer. In the 15 years we lived there, no one ever commented on the dining room set, but they all loved the windows!” **V**



Gordon Clements' Window Treatment Philosophy in Three Key Points

Our clients spend a lot more time in their homes and plan to stay longer. They want to make wise, long-term investments in their home, with the goal of making their home more aesthetically pleasing, comfortable, convenient and energy efficient. As the homeowner takes more of a stewardship position with their most important asset, our advisory role becomes much more important. The end results of this are:

1. Customers want practical window treatments with a return on their investment. They understand that half of their hard-earned energy bill is wasted out windows. New products, like EcoSmart Insulating Shades, that are affordable yet can create a four-sided seal, more than double the insulating power of windows resulting in an ROI of as much as 20 percent per year. This has made EcoSmart our largest-selling product by far. So much so that we have become the largest cellular shade retail manufacturer in the United States. Many of our customers want it for every window as a basic building envelope component offering comfort and energy saving.
2. For aesthetics there is a demand for natural fabrics to decorate over the insulating shades with side panels and/or top treatments that harmonize and create flow through the home. The psychology of color and its ability to create energy and mood has become very important for our decorating staff when advising clients.
3. Convenience is achieved using motorized treatments—something we can do with virtually every product now. Shades or draperies can be activated by remotes, timers, sun sensors or even your iPhone. We are not far away from the ability to activate your shades according to the energy demand—so important when we go to smart-grid, demand-driven pricing.



OPPOSITE PAGE: The showroom and fabrication center in Burlington, Vt., The showroom emphasizes the energy-saving message of Gordon's in every display,

CLOSER LOOK



Gordon's Window Decor
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