

SOUTHERN COMFORT

Shutter Options And Innovations

TEXT Stephanie Cavanaugh, Washington, DC



ABOVE: Shenandoah Shutters combined Softedge™ Shutters on the windows and Shadowbox on the French doors to complement this sunroom and provide both privacy and sun protection. Home of Judy Reavis, Distinctive Design. Photography by Omar Salinas, HiTech Photo.

Jim Imbur, president of Richmond-based Shenandoah Shutters, got a kick out of a TV special that featured a pooch who suffered so from separation anxiety that he'd trashed all of the shutters in the house. Happily, the doggie shrink cured the beast and the delighted owner announced that new shutters were on order.

"I'm thinking of how to breed this dog," whispers Mr. Imbur.

He jests. Shenandoah Shutters has no need of canine saboteurs. The manufacturer is so successful that he opened a second showroom in Vienna, Virginia three years ago to handle the clamoring Washington, DC, crowd.

What accounts for the booming popularity of shutters, and particularly Plantation style shutters, the specialty of this house?

"People are tired of heavy draperies," he says.

"They want to let in as much sun as possible—but keep it from coming in directly—and control privacy."

Plantation shutters, with broad slats ranging from 2 1/2 to 3 1/2 inches, offer maximum flexibility and more than a touch of romance. "They go back to the 1700s and the Caribbean in the days before air conditioning; the southern United States in colonial times," he says. If that conjures an image of ceiling fans, potted palms and a mint julep on the veranda, "it was also a very pragmatic treatment." They blocked the direct heat of the sun while letting in cooling breezes.

Curiously, the shutters with 1 1/4 inch slats that we call traditional were a Victorian innovation. "The Victorians loved to clutter things up," he quips.

Over the past twelve years, the workshop has created historically appropriate shutters for a plantation house outside of Richmond that dates to the 1600s, covered the 15-foot windows in the banquet

hall of a mansion in McLean and the even more towering windows of several historic churches.

How do you reach those heavenly slats? "We offer a long wooden rod," he says. "Just like the old-fashioned school shade."

Shenandoah offers a vast range of color and wood choices. Nine shades of white and four wood stains are standard and the custom color choice is infinite—they even matched the lipstick red walls of a room on Washington's Embassy Row. Custom wood choices include oak, cherry, walnut and heart pine, "just about anything commercially available," says Mr. Imbur.

Specialization has led to innovative products like the patented Softedge, his most popular mounting system. "The traditional way of mounting shutters is to install a frame that covers most of the molding—very unsightly," he says. "The Softedge is an outside mount with a concealed hinge and a double rollover edge that blends them right into the molding. It's clean, simple, aesthetically pleasing and allows for tilting windows and the crank box on casements that wreaks havoc on so many shutter installations."

Shadowbox Shutters, another advance, are designed for French doors and sidelight windows. They lift right off for cleaning, but stay snugly in place

when they're hung. "It's the only product I know that won't rattle and clang when you open and close the door, which can drive you crazy," he says.

While they've done many commercial installations, the company's primary market is residential. "We're very much in tune with the homeowner," says Mr. Imbur. That is evident from Shenandoah's showrooms, which are furnished like houses with full sized shutters in the windows.

"We give people a chance to see the product as it would be in a home," he says. "We're very up front that this is a high-end product. They should understand what they're going to purchase."

Custom made shutters in this rarified league are a considerable investment—he ballpark \$550 to \$600 for a typical colonial style window. But, consider how quickly draperies fade and grow dated. Not only do shutters never go out of style, these beauties carry a 100-year warranty. "And it's transferable!" he laughs.

Is there any sheet of glass that he wouldn't cover with these handsome wide slats?

"Can't think of one off hand," he shrugs. "We've even done sky lights...and a dog gate for the pet of a retired colonel." He then adds, rather mysteriously, "Once we accommodated a cat...but we don't want to do that again."



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Softedge™ Shutters—so unique, they're patented.

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