



Door Curtains & Portières

Expert advice on traditional placement and installation of drapery at doorways. **By Lynn Elliott**

EXTERIOR GLAZED DOORS

Old-house entry doors often feature glazing (a glass window or windows) as well as sidelights, compromising privacy and light control. "If the door is opened a lot, it's best to place a rod at the top and bottom of the glazed area or the door," says Dianne Ayres. Securing the curtain to the door will stop it from interfering with the door's function. Curtains for doors with glazing—whether exterior front doors and French doors—are typically hung on a top and bottom pair of sash rods. Sash rods are $\frac{3}{8}$ " curtain rods that may be round or flat. The rod is secured to the casing of the door by different types of brackets: swivel-end brackets, socket projection brackets, or inside-mount socket brackets.



SASH RODS

Aesthetic yet functional, curtains or drapery at the door or in the doorway act as privacy screens while adding color, pattern, and texture. Doorway drapery reached its height of popularity with the Victorians, but continued to be used in houses during the Arts & Crafts and Colonial Revival periods. David E. Berman of Trustworth Studios, and Dianne Ayres of Arts & Crafts Period Textiles, offer guidance here on how to hang period curtains, and various types of hanging hardware.

For sidelight curtains, sash rods with inside-mount brackets may be hung within the casings, but spring-tension rods are also an option. Measure the inside width of the sidelight window to determine rod length. Tension rods are adjusted by twisting the rod clockwise or counterclockwise. Sash rods for most glazed doors will range between 24" and 48". Round, brass sash rods with socket projection brackets are a period-appropriate choice because, although the style of curtains changed over time, the type of hardware remained fairly consistent. Still, most types of sash rods are discreet enough to work fine for a traditional home. Another option is the swing-arm rod, often used on French doors because they can be swung away to let light through. Swing-arm rods pivot on a hinge that allows the rod and curtain to be moved 180 degrees away from the window. They can extend from 20" to 36".

SASH RODS To install a sash rod with socket projection brackets, measure the width of your door's glass for the length of the curtain rod needed. Subtract $\frac{7}{8}$ " from the overall length of the rod to allow room for the rod to slide into the socket. "For doors, sash rods are most typically mounted about 1" to 1 1/2" above and below the glass, and about an inch to each side," says Ayres. Position each bracket and mark screw holes. Drill pilot holes and then fasten each bracket. Slip the curtain onto one of the rods. At the top of the door, tip one end of the



SWING-ARM RODS

rod in a socket and then slide the other end into the opposite socket. Repeat with the bottom rod.

SWING-ARM RODS A swing-arm rod is adjustable via a set-screw that loosens or tightens it. Extend the curtain rod to the width and lock it in place by turning the set-screw clockwise. At the top of the French door's glass, hold the bracket in place against the door frame and mark the position of the mounting holes on the frame. Attach the bracket with only one screw. Hook the rod on the mounting bracket and check for level. Drill pilot holes and, with rod in position, secure it with the screws. Repeat for the bottom rod. Hang the curtain. On French doors, swing-arm rods should mirror each other.

INTERIOR PORTIÈRES

Portières—drapery hung in the doorway between two rooms—were used as a means to separate the spaces, reduce drafts, and dampen sound. “There are no hard-and-fast rules for hanging them,” says David Berman, but, typically, “portièrè rods go *within* the casings. Usually you can see the ghost of where the portièrès were hung [on the woodwork].” Rods were 1 ½” thick and set 4” to 5” down from the head of the doorway, mounted inside the casing on socket brackets. “Portières are hung on rings so that they can open and close easily,” says Ayres. Berman notes pleat hooks were hidden in the upper folds of the portièrè for attachment to rings.

Hanging portièrès via a curtain header was never as popular. For portièrès over pocket doors, however, an outside mount was used so that the curtain didn’t impede each door’s movement.

Berman gets creative when hanging portièrès because the beefy hardware is often hard to find—and expensive. He uses copper plumbing pipes, which can be patinated or colored. “Copper pipes are stronger and look great,” he says.



INSIDE MOUNT



OUTSIDE MOUNT

“If you can’t get proper sockets, buy plumbing-bracket hardware; it looks made for the job.” Just like the copper pipe, Berman paints or patinates the brackets to match.

INSIDE MOUNT For high Victorian doorways, the rod was placed a few inches below the top of the door frame. Measure 4” to 5” down from the top of the frame for the socket bracket. Measure the width of one side of the casing, and find the center. Position the bracket at this central point. Once you’ve attached brackets, slip the curtain on the rod, and slide one end into the bracket, then maneuver the opposite end.

OUTSIDE MOUNT For a drape installation that completely covers the door, choose a curtain rod with projection brackets. Measure the height and width of the doorway. Add 2” to 4” to the width for length of the rod. For bracket placement, depending on the height of your ceilings, add 2” to 6” to the height of the doorway, and 1” to 2” to both sides. You may need a center support bracket to prevent the rod from bowing. If needed, use drywall anchors. Some brackets have locking screws. Holdbacks are placed a third of the way up from the bottom of the curtain, and 2” outside of the door frame. For instance, if a curtain is 72” long, the holdback is placed at 24” from the bottom.

MORE ON THE Curtains

Fullness refers to extra fabric across curtain width—how voluminous it is. As with window curtains, the fullness of door curtains varies based on the type of treatment. The standard for curtains on glazed doors and sidelights is 1½ to 2 times the width of the glass. Flat curtains weren’t common for glazed doors, but if that’s your preference, Dianne Ayres recommends adding an extra inch to the width to assure complete coverage of the glass. For portièrès, “Victorian curtain panels had 2 to 3 times the fullness; Arts & Crafts had 1 ½ times,” says Ayres.

Doorway drapery is seen from both rooms. In Berman’s house, “one set is a pin-striped red velvet on one side, and a rose chenille-like velvet on the other. They are sewn together with heavy blanketing and are edged in double-sided tape folded over the seam and stitched.”

Curtains on glazed doors are visible from inside and outside. Although the interior view is paramount, consider how it will be viewed from the exterior, too. Lightweight sheers and lace are delicate enough for thin sash and swing-arm rods.



COVERING SIDELIGHTS II Although not as common, mounting curtains outside of the jamb of an exterior door is also an option. Hanging drapery above a door in the same manner as the windows helps maintain the symmetry of a room—the door blends with the curtained windows. In a situation where there are no fixed sidelights and fabric panels are close to the door, holdbacks are necessary to keep curtains from catching in the door as it opens and closes.

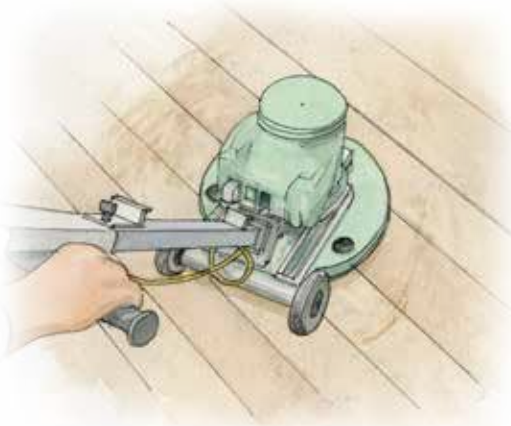


Fancy Painted Floors

Borders and checkerboard designs are DIY favorites; you might also try your hand at stenciling or faux effects. **By Patricia Poore**

Narrow the possibilities as you work out a design. Are you going for plain or with borders, faux stone, a checkerboard, or perhaps the look of a rug? The design for a kitchen will be different from one going under a dining-room table or a hallway. Which techniques do you prefer: striping, marbling, stenciling through a template, 3D *trompe l'oeil*, or even freehand painting? Work out the size of elements and repeats, eventually drawing the design to scale. Pick specific motifs first, and then select the color palette.

STEP-BY-STEP



STEP 1

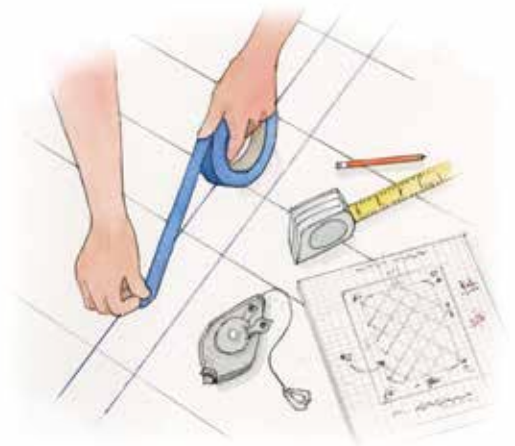
Prep the floor. For the wood floor shown in this sequence, that would mean stripping it of wax if necessary, doing repairs, filling large cracks, cleaning, and caulking.

Assuming the floor is sound, go on to power-sand the wood. Then sponge-wash the floor with a degreaser such as Spic and Span or TSP; dry with absorbent towels and let the floor air-dry thoroughly. Next, use a primer if you have concerns about adhesion, or to lay down a dark undercoat for a deep-tone finish color.

STEP 2

If the ground (base) coat is not wall to wall, use painter's blue tape and a measuring tool or chalkline to mark the area; your design may have more than one ground color. Use a roller for efficiency, then immediately brush out the wet paint for a traditional finish.

Over wood, your best bet is an interior alkyd, applied in two coats. Oil-based marine and deck paints are tough, but are glossy and high in VOCs; they will smell for weeks. Milk paint, either one casein-based or in a modern formulation, lends earthy color and a matte finish perfect for old houses, but it will need a top coat for protection.



STEP 3

Once the base coat is thoroughly dry, you'll mark out the rest of the design, including borders or striping, diamond patterns, a checkerboard, etc. Scaling from your drawing, measure and lay out the design, using a chalk line. Snap straight lines. Mark edges and stripes in painter's blue masking tape.

Because you can't paint adjacent to a section that's still wet, carefully plan your paint-decorating sessions in advance. Have an escape plan: don't paint yourself into a corner surrounded by wet paint.

STEP 4

Paint larger areas first, followed by striping and borders. Then do any stencil painting. Freehand work comes last. Freehand painting over a stenciled design will make the work appear to be entirely hand-painted—that's a 19th-century paint-decorators' trick.

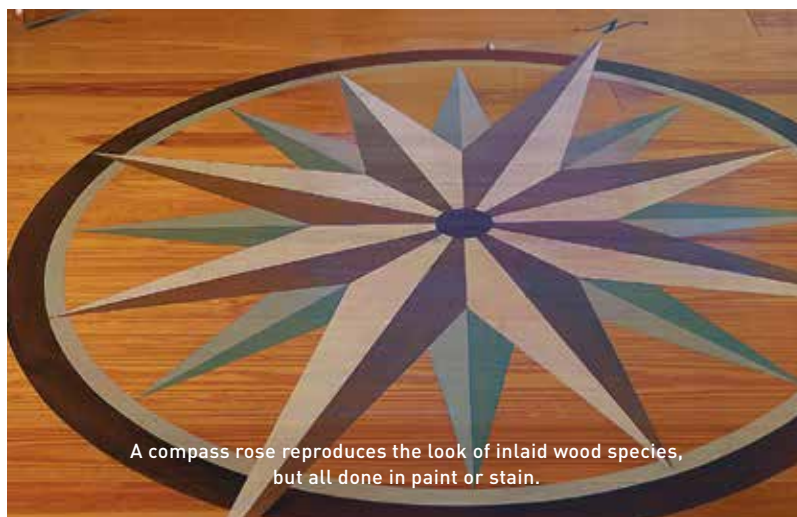


STEP 5

To protect the design from wear, you may want to apply a clear finish. Once the paint is thoroughly dry, apply two or three thin coats of a compatible polyurethane, according to label directions. Use a gloss finish for best adhesion; the last coat can be a matte-finish urethane, if your preference is a low sheen.



a long TRADITION



A compass rose reproduces the look of inlaid wood species, but all done in paint or stain.

Usually associated with early American and rural houses, paint-decorated floors date from about the mid-1700s and well into the 19th century. Not all fall into the folk-art category; urban painted floors, done with refined scale and color sense, reflected Federal style. Many geometric effects are sophisticated enough for a 20th-century Colonial Revival entry hall.

Painted floors were most common in New England, but originals have shown up in the Midwest and Texas. Plain painted floors were common in farmhouse kitchens. In fine Federal-era and Greek Revival homes, decorative-painting and faux-finishing techniques were used to suggest expensive floors of inlaid wood or marble tiles.

Checkerboard designs, spatter-painting, pinstriped borders, stencil decoration, compass

designs, geometric medallions, and *trompe l'oeil* “rugs” are historical conventions—painted directly on the floorboards, or alternatively on canvas floorcloths laid over the floor. Alternating between natural (or stained) wood and painted wood is a more recent innovation.

Imitating other materials—that is, faux painting—may have begun for reasons of practicality or budget, but then wood-graining and veined marbleizing evolved into an art form. Compass-rose designs in imitation of handcrafted wood inlays grew artistic and elaborate.

Inspiration for stenciled and freehand motifs could come from anywhere: decorator's pattern books, a fabric, even a natural botanical specimen.

THANKS TO Maine artist Susan Amons, to Fancy Painters Inc., and to Hurlbutt Designs, Kennebunk, Maine.



New Life for an Old Dresser

A garage-sale dresser, desk, cabinet, or chair can be made over with decoupage. **By Lynn Elliott**

If you've got a vintage (but not precious) piece of furniture, add color and pattern to suit with decoupage. From the French *decouper* meaning "to cut out," the idea goes back centuries, but was popularized in 17th-century Venice, where it was meant to mimic lacquerware from Asia. In England during the 19th century, gluing paper ornament (using botanical papers, embossed papers, and such ephemera as greeting cards and maps) was all the rage and soon spread to the United States.

This project requires no fussy cutting of individual ornaments, only gluing sheets to the drawer fronts.

STEP-BY-STEP



STEP 1

Choose a dresser with no curves, mouldings, or incising on the drawers—just flat fronts. Remove hardware. Sand off the old finish; use a sanding block or a power sander starting with 40- to 60-grit sandpaper. Switch to medium grit (80 to 120); for a natural finish, move on to 220-grit paper. If you use a power sander, don't apply too much pressure or you may damage the grain or create dished-out areas. Wipe the dresser down with a damp tack cloth and let dry completely.

STEP 2

Inspect the piece now that the paint is off. If you find minor nicks or gouges, use wood filler, squeezing it into deeper gouges first and following up to fill to the surface. If you intend to change the hardware (knobs or pulls), fill in the old screw holes, using a putty knife if your filler is not in a tube. Slightly overfill the hole because the filler shrinks as it dries. Smooth with a putty knife and let dry overnight. Then sand the hardened spot until it is level and smooth; wipe with a tack cloth.



STEP 3

Prime case and drawers with latex primer, letting it dry for four hours or according to label instructions. Use a tinted primer if the final color is dark or very different from the original.

Apply two thin coats of the finish color. You can brush it on, or roll and then brush out for a traditional finish. Let dry four hours between coats, and for three or four days before you decoupage.

STEP 4

Any type of paper—wallpaper scraps, paper napkins (reduced to one ply), posters, magazine pages, sheet music, etc.—and even fabric can be used for decoupage. You can cut out discrete images with scissors and a craft knife if desired. Here we show whole sheets of paper, trimmed to fit drawer fronts. If you're using fabric, leave 1/2" or less extra to be trimmed at the end. Position the paper on the surface and adjust as needed. (You can, of course, decoupage the entire piece, rather than just drawers, or side panels, etc.)



STEP 5

Using 300-grit paper, lightly sand surfaces to be decorated and wipe with a tack cloth. If you are using a collection of smaller pieces, work with one at a time: turn it over and spread PVA glue onto the back in an even coat. For large sheets of paper, the glue can be applied directly to the drawer itself with a foam brush, followed by the paper. Where paper overlaps, make sure to apply glue between the layers. For fabric, take care not to glue the excess border to the surface.

Once paper or fabric is applied to the dresser, smooth air bubbles and wrinkles with a damp sponge or a squeegee as you work. Work gently to keep paper from tearing or stretching. Let everything dry overnight.

STEP 6

Use a craft knife to carefully trim any excess fabric or paper at edges. Carefully sandpaper edges with a sanding block and 220-grit paper. To create a worn finish, use the sanding block over the entire decoupage area.

Now you must seal the work with varnish (or specialty decoupage glue). Get a durable, lacquer-like finish by using multiple thin layers of varnish. Use gloss varnish. If you want a matte finish, use matte varnish for the final coat only. Let each coat dry completely and sand lightly between coats, finishing with a tack rag.



TOOLS & MATERIALS

- Sandpaper: 40- or 60- to 300-grit
- Wood filler
- Tack cloths
- Latex primer
- Latex paint
- Decoupage paper
- Craft knife/scissors
- PVA glue
- Sponge or squeegee
- Varnish
- Pencil
- Drill



RIGHT Upgrade a vintage piece by changing out hardware. (Cobalt glass knob: freeman hardware. etsy.com)

STEP 7

Replace hardware or, if you are going for a makeover, position the new pulls or knobs. Measure out their placement and mark with a pencil. Drill new holes at the marks. Attach new hardware.

WHEN BUYING **vintage furniture**

Garage sales and flea markets offer great opportunities to nab a vintage dresser to refinish. Know when to buy a used dresser and when to pass:

- Inspect the piece to make sure it is structurally sound. Are the legs sturdy? Are joints loose or cracked? Are the drawers falling apart, or do they just stick? Sticking drawers are an easy fix, but pass on any dresser that requires extensive repairs.
- Don't be put off by cosmetic flaws like a nicked finish or missing hardware. Finishes can be redone; hardware can be replaced.

- Check for insect infestation. Signs of termites or beetles? Leave it behind.
- Check for mold or extensive water damage. A water ring can be buffed away, but furniture that has been through a flood requires professional help—worth it only if it's a valuable antique, which you wouldn't be painting and decoupage anyway.
- Measure! Know the measurements of your doorways—all of them. Besides height and width of the furniture piece, also check its depth. Will it get to where you want it and then fit the space? If not, move along.

TIP ● You can buy specialized **decoupage glue** that is both the adhesive and the varnish.