

If you're lucky enough to have a bay window, make the most out of this traditional architectural element



Bay Watch



LEFT: “This bay window, located between a kitchen and family room, was a natural place for a breakfast table,” says architect Paul Bates of Thomas Paul Bates Architecture. **ABOVE:** A seating area framed by grand curtains provides great reading and lounging space in this master bedroom by designer Jane Hodges.

WHETHER THEY'RE GRAND AND THEATRICAL or charming and cozy, bay windows are an effective means of augmenting the level of light and expanding the sense of space in a room—and, if one is really fortunate, framing a wonderful vista. Handled properly, they can be both stylish and practical. “The trick is figuring out how to make a bay window look good and function well,” says decorator Leta Austin Foster.

Really, there isn't a room in the house that can't benefit from bay windows. “They add dimension, especially in a long, narrow space,” says designer Janie Molster. If your bay has significant depth, like the ones that are often found in Victorian

and Edwardian houses, it can function as a separate little room. “In a formal dining room,” says designer Barry Dixon, “a bay with a small table beside it can be an intimate alcove for two, but when there is a larger group, it can be used for serving or flowers.”

The bedroom can also be well-served by a bay window, says Dixon, who has positioned beds within bays, facing in or out depending on the view. “If the view isn't much, I'll put the headboard against the windows, so there is enough natural light to read by. Otherwise, it's wonderful to lie in bed and see out in three directions.” A bedroom bay is also a logical place for a dressing table or a

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Although the bay window in this Delaware house captures outdoor light, the view is unremarkable, so designer Barry Dixon backed the bed into the bay to create a pleasant place to read with ample natural light.

chaise with a small table and lamp. Dixon often uses a circular curtain rod so that curtains can be drawn, “conjuring the notion of a separate room,” he says.

Window treatments are perhaps the most daunting aspect of bay windows. When choosing them, says Foster, “think about what level of privacy you’ll need.” A bay window in a bathroom is a romantic idea until you realize that you have to stand in the tub to pull down the shades. “If privacy is an issue, be sure that you can reach the windows easily, or consider mechanized shades,” she says.

Corners can also pose problems when it comes to window treatments. Most decorators agree with designer Charles Faudree: “It’s best to follow

the lines of the bay, using mitered rods, though they may be costly.” A straight rod hung across a bay can be problematic unless the ceiling is high, says designer James Beebe Hawes of Caldwell-Beebe: “It can wind up looking like a puppet theater.” Think through the details, cautions designer Fern Santini: “If you stack heavy curtains in every corner, you might block the light. A lightweight fabric double-lined with sheer panels stacks beautifully in every corner and doesn’t obscure light.”

Lighting a bay window can be tricky as well. While some windows can illuminate a room beautifully during the day, they can become black holes at night. Santini favors sconces or swing-arm lamps on dimmers for

soft task lighting. “You can also borrow light from the outdoors,” says Hawes. “Exterior lighting in trees and around the yard prevents windows from turning impenetrable black.”

The most important thing, Hawes says, is to “make your bay window feel like part of the room, not just an add-on, and really use it.”
For details, see Sourcebook, page 204.

things to consider

- **Less is more.** “Don’t overfurnish,” cautions designer Fern Santini. “If the furniture is crowded or intrudes into the adjacent space, your bay will look skimpy.”
- **Protect your furnishings.** Make sure your windows are UV-treated,” says designer James Beebe Hawes, “especially if you have a piano in the window.”
- **Accentuate the positive.** “Accessorize a shallow bay window with a skinny table that can hold potted plants, an interesting piece of terra-cotta, or a unique garden object,” suggests designer Barry Dixon. “The extra depth complements any object, and the window will look pretty from the outside.”
- **Downplay the negative.** If your bay window isn’t wonderful, don’t draw attention to it with swags and jabots,” says Hawes. “Opt for simple window treatments, such as matchstick blinds.”
- **Think practical.** Whether your bay window has built-in seating or a comfortable armchair, says Dixon, the perfect reading nook requires a good lamp and a small table that can hold a cup of coffee or a book. “Otherwise, it’s not useful,” he says.
- **Showcase a favorite.** “A dramatic piece of furniture, such as a settee with high arms, might be difficult to integrate into a seating arrangement but can look right at home in a bay window,” says designer Janie Molster.



Bates and his business partner Jeremy Corkern designed this tall, squared-off bay window with a stylized frame for a bathroom. White terry cloth curtains can be drawn for privacy while allowing light to filter through.

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