Curtains up for Britain's window shutters and blinds market

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Once all it took was the twitch of a net curtain, but now Britain's nosey neighbours are more likely to be peering round a blind or spying through a shutter. Latest research from MINTEL finds sales of blinds grew by a massive 62% between 2001 and 2006, to reach Â£445 million, with the sector benefiting from the growing trend for simple and casual decor in the home.

But it is shutters that are the star performer in the window furnishings market. Although they account for just 5% of the blinds market, sales of shutters grew by a blinding 44% between 2004 and 2006 alone, to reach Â£23 million. By contrast, sales of curtains have remained almost static at around Â£640 million, with value sales increasing by just 2% over the same two year period.

"Our parental homes all had them - swathes of over the top floral curtains, with pelmets, tie backs and the odd matching scatter cushion. But today fashion has moved towards the much more pared down look of blinds or shutters. Blinds are driving the overall window furnishings and accessories market, posing stronger competition to curtains. But the last five years have seen the rapid renaissance of shutters, a traditional window furnishing that is finding a new popularity in today's homes," comments Vivianne Ihekweazu, senior market analyst at MINTEL.

The growth in the blinds market also sheds light on consumer trends in the housing market. The rising popularity of blinds is not just indicative of fashion but also of the fact that people are increasingly maximising the usable space in existing properties. Blinds clearly take up a lot less space than voluminous curtains, which is a real benefit where space is tight. Loft conversions in houses are also rising in popularity and usually include skylights which require blinds. Indeed, it is estimated that the number of windows installed in roofs is increasing by 8-10% per year. Similarly, as more people choose popular glass extensions and conservatories, blinds are again going to be the most appropriate option.

In terms of market value in the blinds sector, venetian blinds account for almost a quarter (24%) of sales at Â£105 million, closely followed by soft blinds (including Roman, Austrian and festoon) valued at Â£100 million. The remainder of the market is made up of vertical (Â£98million) accounting for a 22% share, roller at Â£75 million with a 17% share and pleated valued at Â£44 million at 10%.

Coming up green

People are becoming increasingly aware of the environmental impact of their actions, and awareness and concern will continue to grow with more media coverage. Double glazing helps to reduce heat loss, but there is scope for more. Window furnishing products already exist to help conserve energy further, but the suppliers need to do more to boost awareness and understanding of these options. This would help sales of specific types of products such as thermal and light reflective blinds and interlined curtains.Â

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