

Looking at sun's rays in a new light

By BARBARA MAYER
The Associated Press

You already know that you should protect yourself from overexposure to the sun's damaging rays. And the same goes for what's in your home. So you may want to rethink your preferences for bright, sunny rooms.

Natural daylight is stronger and more damaging than artificial light. The sun's ultraviolet rays can fade and weaken art works, textiles and furniture finishes.

"Virtually any organic material can be damaged by excessive daylight — especially the ultraviolet component of natural light," said Steven Weintraub, a lighting consultant in New York. "We may worry more about older things because of their value or fragility, but actually new things will suffer the most obvious change in a short time. Even plain old newspaper changes color within a few days."

You don't have to dwell in darkness but rather take some precautions to control intense sunlight.

The first and easiest way to protect art works, textiles and furnishings is to place objects of concern away from uncontrolled natural light. That might mean hanging paintings on a side wall instead of directly opposite a sunny window. Before arranging a room, spend a few days mapping out the pattern of natural light to learn the intensity of exposure in each area.

Another simple measure is to draw the curtains, pull down shades or close blinds when nobody is using the room.

"The damage from light is cumulative, so if there are short periods of high exposure, it's not so great a problem as continuous exposure," said Weintraub.

Lighting specialists say that most people prefer an evenly lit room and become uncomfortable in a setting with patches of brilliant sunlight and darkness and harsh shadows.

"The ideal solution is to have north-facing windows which provide a diffuse or scattered light instead of the blinding single-point light that comes through south, east and west-facing windows in most seasons of the year," said Wendell Colson, vice president of research and development for Hunter Douglas, Inc.

Relocating a window is rarely an option, so the next best solution is a window treatment that changes sharp daylight into diffused daylight. The view, which is what most people really love about natural daylight, does not have to be completely obscured if translucent fabric is used.

Combining two or more treatments is usually the most successful solution. Layered treatments provide more options because you can peel back one or more layers. Some choices that work especially well include a double layer of translucent paper or a double layer of filmy fabric paired with side draperies that can be left open or pulled closed for greater light blocking and privacy.

The purpose of the double layer is to eliminate harsh shadows and create a soft diffused light that is bright but glare-free. Some window covering fabrics, such as cellular and honeycomb shades, also block most of the damaging ultraviolet rays.

Sometimes the view is too spectacular to cover at all. In that case you might install exterior window shading devices such as awnings to control the light or to have windows treated with a film that screens out ultraviolet rays.

Films are not suitable for all types of windows, so have a reputable professional installer evaluate the situation and do the installation.

People in the market for new windows can look into those which have ultraviolet screening.

"The extra expense may be worth it," said Weintraub.

Window tinting

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that film forms a shield across glass to which it is fitted, so that if the glass is broken most of the fragments will be held in place.

Manufacturers claim that windows play a vital role in a home's energy efficiency, as untreated windows tend to allow solar heat to enter in the summer months and home heat to escape in the cold months. In many instances, they explain, window film pays for itself in energy savings in a very short while. As Paul LaRocque commented, "Solar energy hits the glass, and window film makes it more difficult for that energy to be transmitted. Customers with lots of windows have had to turn down their thermostats after having film installed."

In new houses the energy loss can be even greater than in older homes as windows typically account for 15 to 30 percent of the total heating load, and may account for more than half the summertime cooling load, manufacturers say. Homeowners considering installing window film first need to determine the areas of wasted energy, whether excessive energy is being used in the summer months, or dissipated through windows in the cold, or a combination of both. Window film costs about \$6 to \$12 per square foot installed. Films are fitted to the inside of the glass. They may be cleaned with any standard product, including those with ammonia, manufacturers say.

Sheila Garrett is a local freelance writer.



Record-Eagle/John L. Russell

Sheets of the tinting material are cut to size, then pressed onto the window glass.



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The windows on the south side of the Neuharths' Leland home are now tinted.

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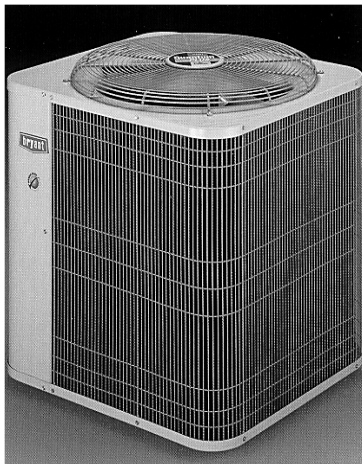
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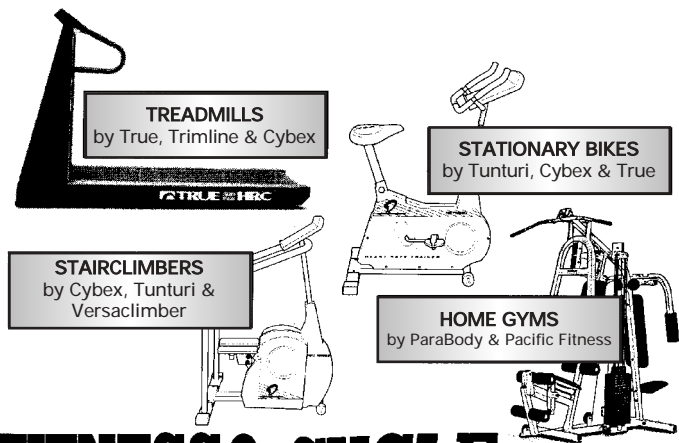
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