

art is  
work

HORNER  
& Company



# S H E R R I E H O R N E R

[A PROFILE IN MATERIAL CULTURE]

*The value of seeing one's work in a historical context is the value of scholarship—a comprehensive knowledge of architecture, art history and historical forms.*

Moving through the meticulously replicated period rooms of Winterthur on a recent visit, Sherrie Horner, long fascinated by material culture, was particularly entranced by an exhibition of 18th-century needlework. Viewing extraordinary quilts, samplers and silkwork pictures done by students at The Marsh School of Philadelphia, Ms Horner found herself reflexively deconstructing the designs, patterns and techniques used.

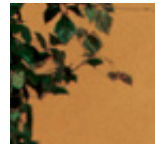
“But beyond that,” she remarks, “I wondered about the people who had created such beauty. How was that artistry and industry a part of daily life? I found myself thinking about—and transported by—the hands that made it, the consciousness involved, and the historical and cultural contexts.”

The decorative arts have many forms, many disciplines and living traditions. A master curtain maker, Ms Horner sees herself and her work in the context of generations of practice. And in the profound influence that practice has on the beauty, structure and rhythm of created spaces and people's lives.

## TRADITION IN MODERN CONTEXT

Historical forms are expressions of their period of origin, but elements of a living tradition transcend time and generate new concepts. “One must respond to context,” notes Ms Horner. “In working with older forms of architecture, we have a marvelous opportunity to create curtains that are luxurious and historically accurate. But with modern architectural forms, it becomes a question of translation, and that is a challenging process.”

Light and shades are illustrative. Shades temper, veil and screen natural light. Historical curtains controlled light, protecting interiors and textiles, but their greater purpose was to be decorative and sensual.





The modern concept of modulating light follows modern architecture and the need to cover a wall of glass or perhaps, a serpentine-shaped window—new forms on the continuum of the tradition. And it is impossible to design beautifully appropriate treatments for them or for any window if one is ignorant of history, Ms Horner explains.

“The value of seeing one’s work in a larger, historical context is the value of scholarship—a comprehensive knowledge of architecture, art history, and historical forms—because successful creation is actually successful translation.”

*One becomes a master curtain maker by intending to be one and constantly practicing with that intention.*

#### MASTER CURTAIN MAKER BY DESIGN

One becomes a master curtain maker by intending to be one and constantly practicing with that intention. The inclination and temperament may be in-born, but mastery is achieved with diligence, patience, and extraordinary attention to detail. The first fifteen years are merely an apprenticeship, spent immersed in a near infinite variety of forms and environments. Capacity, range, and tested professional judgment accrue contextually, and as a mosaic.

“With focus, concentration, and contextual understanding,” reflects Ms Horner, “one is able to hold disparate elements in mind: fabric, architecture, color, practicality, light, movement, or capacity for movement. And that might be for one or several windows in one room; when doing an entire house, its every element must be held in mind as one integrated and constant awareness.”

Asked how she developed that capacity, she quickly replied, “Practice. Every day.”

And how did she make her workroom a master workroom?

“Same again: Every day saying, ‘No we don’t do it that way, we do it this way.’ Or, ‘If that doesn’t work, let’s try a different stitch or technique.’ Every day. Teaching all the time.”





# *The Business of Curtain Making*

[AND THE ART OF THE BUSINESS OF CURTAIN MAKING]

BY SHERRIE HORNER

PRESIDENT AND DESIGN DIRECTOR, HORNER & COMPANY

*I*n England, in 1974, I toured the great houses. Historical curtains were something of a revelation; I was amazed by their beauty, and by the form itself. I didn't know how they were constructed or created. But, not only did I think I could learn it; I knew that if one were to do it at all, that would be the end point. Achieving it became my singular professional objective. And, I was renovating my own home, so had a perfect place to start. It was a great teacher, the first of many.

I opened my first shop in England. I had an apprentice, but still did the sewing. In my second shop, in Portugal, I hired seamstresses but always did the cutting. Now, in my San Francisco workroom, I've developed a very capable team. Daily, hourly, I preach and teach technique, process, and project management. It's been interesting to see the steady transfer of skills and responsibilities and in that exchange, to realize and appreciate how much I had learned.

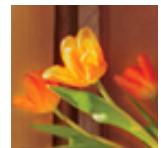
## *Range, capacity, consistency*

Horner & Company provides services for design, production, and installation. We have a multi-project capacity and the experience to handle every dimension of every job.

Did we get there overnight? Hardly. Building my workroom has been an organic and constant process. We've cultivated talents, skills, and instincts, and we've finessed inventory and workflow systems, integrating the two so that each promotes and supports the other. Meticulous standards consistently applied ensure that everything we produce, from concept to installation, is exquisitely informed and professionally delivered.

## *The commitment*

Our focus is not only on what we do, but also on the way that we do it—efforts that reach beyond the goal of increased efficiencies to have everyone involved in critical endeavors, working diligently and with as much awareness as they possess. In that process, clients get the absolute best from us and we become better artisans.





### *Moving into experience*

In professional exchanges with clients, a shift takes place—in them, and in me. The shift is an experience, a moment of melody or beauty, a moment of insight or meaning. It moves the heart, and the heart must be engaged to create something authentic.

We help create environments that transform and transport. The process of installation is theatre; we at Horner & Company are stagehands, here to create a particular illusion or drama, to change the ambiance. To perform a kind of magic.

### *Trust is earned*

We create things that make an enormous difference in people's spaces and daily lives. In this context and as agents of change, we have a unique responsibility. Horner & Company might be recommended for a project, or hired on the strength of its portfolio. But everything we do, and everything about the way we do it, must demonstrate our capability and credibility. Trust is earned, never assumed.

And a product is only as good as its process is rigorous. The forms we create are exacting; there is no room for chaos. Our systems of oversight and project management are logical, economical, and supported by precise communication.

### *Art is work*

What makes a curtain maker master of the form? A historically informed aesthetic vision. The technical expertise to see it realized. Patience for endless detail and an equanimity not easily shaken, because a dozen unknowns can pop up in a day: a problem with fabric that was just delivered, or having to do an installation in the midst of construction. Change is a constant.

A master curtain maker is involved in the design process, knows how the finished product should be hung, and understands what is appropriate for the room. Apprenticeship is long because there are so many forms to master, and so many contexts and environments in which to practice.

As one learns, one teaches others, nurturing talent and building collective capability. A workroom's depth and capacity evolve daily, with each individual mastery of new forms and skills.







### *Livelihood*

Horner & Company provides a decent livelihood for its employees. Honoring their work in this way creates an essence in the finished product, a subtle essence that informs the experience of the designed environment.

Horner & Company expands on the legacy of its tradition only because there is demand for its product. Without that, a workroom could not continue. Nor could it train a next generation of artisans. In fact, there would be no jobs or niches for any master artisans—cabinetmakers, wood carvers, painters, weavers, textile designers, or makers of passementerie. Generations of patience, skill, and craft would be lost.

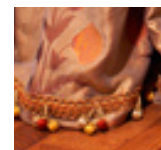
### *Listening*

My process begins with listening, really listening to the client. In conversation, I hear likes and dislikes, and what pleases or doesn't. It's my job to translate those ideas and preferences into material form, to create an authentic manifestation of the client's desire and experience of beauty.

### *Discovery*

Converting ideas into form is never formulaic. The process is one of discovery, it is fluid and invites alchemy. Conversations are relaxed and follow instinct, interest, and the individual, allowing vision and expression to emerge with ease. Solutions are entirely personal; a concept or treatment that works beautifully for one client won't for another.

When process ends in product, I want clients to feel the collaboration was intellectually stimulating and artistically gratifying. Their satisfaction, and my own, complete the experience.



### *Informed perspective*

A master curtain maker views architecture, design, and cultural tastes—past and present—in the larger context of history and material culture. A master curtain maker knows which books, furniture, art and artifacts have inhabited a particular world at a particular time, and which do in this time.

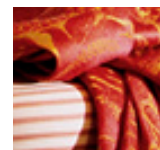
Without such an informed perspective and understanding, I couldn't create historically accurate or thoroughly modern forms that belong, and are completely at home, in the designated space. Finished in the right way and with correct proportions, they look perfectly at ease in context.

### *Indispensable partner*

A quartet of attributes makes a workroom an indispensable partner: aesthetic vision, technical expertise, capacity, and discretion. Without expertise, vision can't be realized. Without discretion, capacity is irrelevant.

It is not enough for a workroom to create an exceptional product. On site, sufficient sensitivity is required to successfully read and accommodate the client's wishes and sensibilities. Every client, every situation, and every response is unique. Installation is the final expression of expertise.

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# Services

*Consultation • Measurement  
Construction • Installation • Project Management*

## THE WELL-MADE CURTAIN IN BRIEF

The well-made curtain begins with a concept, but is the result of a series of thoughtful and practical decisions: which needle, thread, hand stitch, lining and interlining are most appropriate? Should it be sewn from the top down or bottom up? Seams are sewn with the correct tension, and patterns are perfectly matched. Only fabric widths and French pleats are machine stitched; everything else, including the hem, is hand finished. Added trim looks as if it's an integral part of the curtain, and hand stitching is invisible.

The well-made curtain allows a textile's character—the weave of the satin, the texture of the silk, its print, pattern and colors—to shine. Structure is sufficient to hold the desired shape, but that shape undulates; the pleated textile moves forward into the room, and away. With interlining and good lining added to the construction, the fabric is given presence and dimension. It is sculpture, sculpture in the medium of textiles and in very specific relationship to the architecture and furnishings.

## CONTEXTUAL SEWING

As you cut and manipulate fabric, decisions are made with the information of experience. True mastery is informed by *why*—seeing why something is made a certain way. Every item we make interfaces with another element: dustskirts fit on the bed, bed draperies fit on the bed frame, coverlets sit on the bed, curtains hang from the hardware and around a window. Everything is contextual. As a master curtain maker, I must hold every element of a house in mind. Likewise, Horner & Company seamstresses always sew contextually, conscious of the whole and how each part fits within it.

## ARTISAN PARTNERS

We work with select, skilled artisans whose collective wisdom and collaborative style extend our talents and reach. Approaching structural and technical problems with economy and ease, they often devise solutions we wouldn't have considered. They are indispensable partners.

## AGILE WORKROOM

In simultaneously managing multiple projects, a workroom must be fluid and agile, able to shift focus, assignments, and operations on short notice without losing its balance or momentum. At Horner & Company, being resourceful is an attitude and instinctive response.



# Process

## CONSULTATION: ARCHITECTURAL PLANS

At the first project meeting, Horner & Company and the designer review architectural plans for the client's house or renovation. A site tour follows, with detailed discussions regarding design options and constraints, selected furnishings and antiques, client preferences, and planned use for each room.

*It's my job to translate ideas and preferences into material form,  
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and experience of beauty.*



Here, practical problems and questions are considered in context of the overall plan: the relationship of room to room; privacy needs; west-facing windows or other light-related issues; style, luxury, and desired aesthetic; window concepts and possibilities; and available budget. Basic measurements are taken.

## CONSULTATION: TEXTILES

Next, Horner & Company and the designer review textile choices in the context of a room's design, furnishings, and intended use. Sherrie Horner will advise on fabric suitability for each window and treatment, and for custom items such as bedding, pillows and slipcovers. Options for hardware, trim and embellishments are recommended at this time.

## CALCULATION:

### A DETAILED ESTIMATE

When drapery function, fabric and hardware choices are made, Horner & Company meticulously calculates yardage, labor and costs. Estimates include detailed descriptions of every item ordered, such as



flanged or ruffled bedding, archival custom trim, interlining, lining, custom hardware with a particular finish, or wooden shutters and blinds. After reviewing the calculations, the designer requests changes, and/or approves the estimates.

#### ORDERING AND DEVELOPMENT

After receiving a 75% deposit, Horner & Company begins its ordering process. When delivered, fabrics are inspected, checked for yardage and flaws, tagged, and stored. If it is a very large job, project items such as lining, trim and hardware will be delivered over the course of several weeks, but sewing and project management can now begin.

Invariably, multiple site visits are required to obtain specific measurements. What was merely a hole in the drywall on the first site tour has become a window with added moldings on the second, and choice and use will always direct form. For example, if screens open inwardly, the curtain must accommodate that movement.

Furnishing placement and plans can be fluid, and so require a fluid response. Adding a new element, whether furniture, art or carpet, can alter a window treatment's technical requirements, form, and aesthetic.

#### INSTALLATION

When a house under construction is sufficiently clear, Horner & Company will install the hardware and measure for precise finished curtain lengths. When the house and the client are ready, Horner & Company will install and dress the curtains, providing instructions for care and use.

#### PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Skillful project management drives the process forward and compensates for unknown variables. Conditions are rarely ideal; deliveries and construction are often delayed, and project timelines will move in response. A flexible workroom is prepared and expects the unexpected. Focus keeps every element intact.









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