

Drawing a curtain over heat loss in the home

How keeping your house warm and well insulated can be a pleasure

The house that Richard Fitton built or, rather, rebuilt, at Salford University, is a standard Victorian terrace house representing 21 per cent of the housing stock in the UK. It had been due to be demolished, but energy research fellow Richard rescued what has become known as the Energy House and reassembled it in a sealed chamber in order to accurately control climate conditions.

Researchers can make it rain, snow, and even roar with wind in the chamber so they can measure whether it makes much difference to the room temperature if you close the curtains, for instance, on a cold evening. Or whether it's really worth the bother of installing cavity wall insulation. Or if it's true that snow on the roof really does provide insulation.

Recently, the house was used by Beama, the trade association for manufacturers of devices such as smart meters, to test the savings that can be made by using proper heating controls, and even they were surprised by the findings. With wind, heat loss increases by five to eight per cent, rain causes a 20 per cent loss and, both together, there's a massive 30 per cent heat loss.

The research went on to show that drawing the curtains on a blustery night not only makes us feel cosy, but can actually reduce that heat loss by 15 to 17 per cent. Drawing the blinds helps by some 13 to 14 per cent.

These findings are backed up by research conducted by English Heritage in tandem with Glasgow Caledonian University, which looked at the



Above, Liberty print upholstery. Right, Liz Cox

problem from the point of view of older and listed properties, where replacing sash windows is not only very expensive, but can also detract from the character of the building. They discovered that repairing damaged sash window frames and adding draught-proofing strips could reduce the heat loss by almost 90 per cent. However, heat can also be lost through the glass itself, and the research showed that heavy curtains, or close-fitting roller blinds, can also cut the amount lost by more than a third.

All of which is good news for companies such as Signature Interiors of Hurstbourne Tarrant, which provides handcrafted curtains using traditional skills and techniques, combined with state-of-the-art design and technology. The principal of the company, Liz Cox, whose skills were developed through training and involvement with the

Contact

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National Design Academy, City & Guilds, the Association of Master Upholsterers and Soft Furnishers, the Custom Home Furnishing Academy and KLC School of Design, says she's particularly excited by an innovative fabric coming out of the insulated clothing sector.

Signature provides top-quality curtains that are interlined with three, sometimes four (for blackout purposes), layers of fabric, adding that "all-important buffering between the windows and the interior", says Liz.

The fabric, Clo-1, uses specially selected fibres to create an insulation that seems to have an enhanced thermal performance and Signature is now trialling it with a view to hand-stitching it into their curtains as a lining. "We're trying it on the curtains for a few of our clients," says Liz "and we're looking to be able to offer it in future as one of our standard products to reduce heating costs."

But that's not all that's causing a frisson in the soft furnishings world, for, as Liz explains, Liberty's of London have "dipped back into their archives with a range of fabric designs for the home, and we have premier stockist status for these products."

William Morris and cohorts from the arts and crafts movement were among those drawing up the designs, says Liz, "which are really exciting as they look totally fresh and new, but were actually first drawn more than 150 years ago."

So, there are ways save energy and staying beautiful.