



Door Curtains & Portières

Expert advice on traditional placement and installation of drapery at doorways. **By Lynn Elliott**

EXTERIOR GLAZED DOORS

Old-house entry doors often feature glazing (a glass window or windows) as well as sidelights, compromising privacy and light control. "If the door is opened a lot, it's best to place a rod at the top and bottom of the glazed area or the door," says Dianne Ayres. Securing the curtain to the door will stop it from interfering with the door's function. Curtains for doors with glazing—whether exterior front doors and French doors—are typically hung on a top and bottom pair of sash rods. Sash rods are $\frac{3}{8}$ " curtain rods that may be round or flat. The rod is secured to the casing of the door by different types of brackets: swivel-end brackets, socket projection brackets, or inside-mount socket brackets.



SASH RODS

Aesthetic yet functional, curtains or drapery at the door or in the doorway act as privacy screens while adding color, pattern, and texture. Doorway drapery reached its height of popularity with the Victorians, but continued to be used in houses during the Arts & Crafts and Colonial Revival periods. David E. Berman of Trustworth Studios, and Dianne Ayres of Arts & Crafts Period Textiles, offer guidance here on how to hang period curtains, and various types of hanging hardware.

For sidelight curtains, sash rods with inside-mount brackets may be hung within the casings, but spring-tension rods are also an option. Measure the inside width of the sidelight window to determine rod length. Tension rods are adjusted by twisting the rod clockwise or counterclockwise. Sash rods for most glazed doors will range between 24" and 48". Round, brass sash rods with socket projection brackets are a period-appropriate choice because, although the style of curtains changed over time, the type of hardware remained fairly consistent. Still, most types of sash rods are discreet enough to work fine for a traditional home. Another option is the swing-arm rod, often used on French doors because they can be swung away to let light through. Swing-arm rods pivot on a hinge that allows the rod and curtain to be moved 180 degrees away from the window. They can extend from 20" to 36".

SASH RODS To install a sash rod with socket projection brackets, measure the width of your door's glass for the length of the curtain rod needed. Subtract $\frac{7}{8}$ " from the overall length of the rod to allow room for the rod to slide into the socket. "For doors, sash rods are most typically mounted about 1" to 1 1/2" above and below the glass, and about an inch to each side," says Ayres. Position each bracket and mark screw holes. Drill pilot holes and then fasten each bracket. Slip the curtain onto one of the rods. At the top of the door, tip one end of the



SWING-ARM RODS

rod in a socket and then slide the other end into the opposite socket. Repeat with the bottom rod.

SWING-ARM RODS A swing-arm rod is adjustable via a set-screw that loosens or tightens it. Extend the curtain rod to the width and lock it in place by turning the set-screw clockwise. At the top of the French door's glass, hold the bracket in place against the door frame and mark the position of the mounting holes on the frame. Attach the bracket with only one screw. Hook the rod on the mounting bracket and check for level. Drill pilot holes and, with rod in position, secure it with the screws. Repeat for the bottom rod. Hang the curtain. On French doors, swing-arm rods should mirror each other.

INTERIOR PORTIÈRES

Portières—drapery hung in the doorway between two rooms—were used as a means to separate the spaces, reduce drafts, and dampen sound. “There are no hard-and-fast rules for hanging them,” says David Berman, but, typically, “portière rods go *within* the casings. Usually you can see the ghost of where the portières were hung [on the wood-work].” Rods were 1 ½” thick and set 4” to 5” down from the head of the doorway, mounted inside the casing on socket brackets. “Portières are hung on rings so that they can open and close easily,” says Ayres. Berman notes pleat hooks were hidden in the upper folds of the portière for attachment to rings.

Hanging portières via a curtain header was never as popular. For portières over pocket doors, however, an outside mount was used so that the curtain didn’t impede each door’s movement.

Berman gets creative when hanging portières because the beefy hardware is often hard to find—and expensive. He uses copper plumbing pipes, which can be patinated or colored. “Copper pipes are stronger and look great,” he says.



INSIDE MOUNT



OUTSIDE MOUNT

“If you can’t get proper sockets, buy plumbing-bracket hardware; it looks made for the job.” Just like the copper pipe, Berman paints or patinates the brackets to match.

INSIDE MOUNT For high Victorian doorways, the rod was placed a few inches below the top of the door frame. Measure 4” to 5” down from the top of the frame for the socket bracket. Measure the width of one side of the casing, and find the center. Position the bracket at this central point. Once you’ve attached brackets, slip the curtain on the rod, and slide one end into the bracket, then maneuver the opposite end.

OUTSIDE MOUNT For a drape installation that completely covers the door, choose a curtain rod with projection brackets. Measure the height and width of the doorway. Add 2” to 4” to the width for length of the rod. For bracket placement, depending on the height of your ceilings, add 2” to 6” to the height of the doorway, and 1” to 2” to both sides. You may need a center support bracket to prevent the rod from bowing. If needed, use drywall anchors. Some brackets have locking screws. Holdbacks are placed a third of the way up from the bottom of the curtain, and 2” outside of the door frame. For instance, if a curtain is 72” long, the holdback is placed at 24” from the bottom.

COVERING SIDELIGHTS II Although not as common, mounting curtains outside of the jamb of an exterior door is also an option. Hanging drapery above a door in the same manner as the windows helps maintain the symmetry of a room—the door blends with the curtained windows. In a situation where there are no fixed sidelights and fabric panels are close to the door, holdbacks are necessary to keep curtains from catching in the door as it opens and closes.

MORE ON THE Curtains

Fullness refers to extra fabric across curtain width—how voluminous it is. As with window curtains, the fullness of door curtains varies based on the type of treatment. The standard for curtains on glazed doors and sidelights is 1½ to 2 times the width of the glass. Flat curtains weren’t common for glazed doors, but if that’s your preference, Dianne Ayres recommends adding an extra inch to the width to assure complete coverage of the glass. For portières, “Victorian curtain panels had 2 to 3 times the fullness; Arts & Crafts had 1 ½ times,” says Ayres.

Doorway drapery is seen from both rooms. In Berman’s house, “one set is a pin-striped red velvet on one side, and a rose chenille-like velvet on the other. They are sewn together with heavy blanketing and are edged in double-sided tape folded over the seam and stitched.”

Curtains on glazed doors are visible from inside and outside. Although the interior view is paramount, consider how it will be viewed from the exterior, too. Lightweight sheers and lace are delicate enough for thin sash and swing-arm rods.

