

DRAPERIES: What You Should Know

As you entrust Urban Valet to clean your window treatments, please know that we desire nothing more than to meet your expectations and leave you completely satisfied with the entire process. With this in mind, we feel that it is important to have a conversation with you right up front about your window treatments and share with you some of the inherent risks and assess the likelihood that potential problems may arise. It is very important to us that you are aware of these potential risks, that you understand your options and that you understand the basic cleaning processes and the measures that we take to mitigate against damage to your window treatments.

Shrinkage:

We are often asked, will my draperies shrink?

First, we will follow the care label. Dry clean only is recommended for the majority of draperies. Dry cleaning is a process in which fabrics are submerged in solvent (yes, they get wet), agitated, extracted and then dried. The process is not unlike using a front-loading washer and dryer. The primary differences though, are that with dry cleaning one machine is both washer and dryer, and two, rather than using water as a cleaning agent, dry cleaning involves the use of a solvent. Typically, fabrics shrink much less in solvent than in water. The fact remains however, that shrinking may occur.

Why do some things shrink and others do not?

It's pretty simple, really. Shrinkage depends on two main variables. First, the *fabric type*. Natural fibers tend to shrink more than synthetic fibers. Cotton, linen, wool and silk, for instance, shrink far more than polyester or nylon. The second variable is *how the fabric is cleaned or processed*. The more heat used in the washing or drying process, the greater the likelihood of shrinkage. A standard cotton Fruit of the Loom t-shirt, for example, will shrink much more if it is washed in hot water and dried all the way on hot, than if it is washed in cold water and taken out to hang dry after 5 minutes tumbling in the dryer. Proper processing is very important.

Why don't you just follow the cleaning label, then everything will be fine?

We will follow the cleaning label. Draperies, like other textiles however, are manufactured from raw fabric. Depending on the manufacturer, the raw fabric may or may not have been dry cleaned or washed prior to being made into draperies (or clothes). In a case where the fabric is dry cleaned or washed prior to being made into a garment or drapery, we say that it is pre-shrunk. When it is not, we say that it is not pre-shrunk. We often think of cotton jeans & t-shirts as pre-shrunk, but usually not finer garments. The truth is, finer garments usually need to be preshrunk also, and they often times have been. When items have not been pre-shrunk, they will more than likely shrink when they are cleaned for the first time.

Well, I paid a lot for my custom draperies and they told me..

As our customer, let me ask you this. If you purchased a nice t-shirt on vacation and the kind waitperson at the pub told you that that the t-shirts were preshrunk and size medium would be fine, and then you got home, washed it for the first time (following the care label), and then found that it no longer fit quite right - what conclusion would you draw? Probably, the right one. The fabric was not preshrunk or perhaps it was preshrunk somewhat but not completely. Did the waitperson at the pub fib to you? Probably not. It's just that she was not in Thailand where the fabric was manufactured or in China where the t-shirts were made and she could not verify the process. All she had to go on was the care label, too. Well, the same dynamic may be true for the drapes that you have purchased and are about to have cleaned.

I just want my drapes cleaned, does it have to be this complicated?

I know, I feel your pain. If you are having your draperies custom made, let us clean the fabric before your seamstress begins to work with it. This way, you know that you your draperies have been pre-shrunk properly. If you have already purchased them or if you are using a vendor that cannot give you the fabric to have preshrunk, ask them weather it has been preshrunk. Request that they verify what they are saying. You are likely paying good money, after all. Where was the fabric made? Where in the process was it pre-shrunk? By the manufacturer of the fabric or by the drapery maker?

What do we do now?

In the end, we will know if your draperies care label is accurate because we will follow it – exactly. If your draperies shrink, we will know that the care label was improper and/or that the draperies were not preshrunk properly. Should this happen, they may still be usable just as they are. If not, our seamstress may be able to lengthen the hem on each panel to compensate for the shrinkage. Or, another option may be to shorten the shears, if there are any, so that they do not hang below the draperies. Just know, we will work with you to try and figure something out that is workable. After all, it's about finding a solution. So there are no surprises though, be advised that alterations are not included in our standard window treatment cleaning pricing and we should discuss the possibility of an additional expense beforehand.

Damage

Can you clean my draperies without damaging them?

We want nothing more than to clean your draperies well and return them to you in the very best condition so that you can proudly display them in your home. This is not always possible however.

What does tensile strength have to do with anything?

Tensile strength simply refers to the relative strength of something. In other words, how much tension can something (your draperies) withstand (before breaking). In the case of draperies, almost all of the fibers used in manufacturing CAN withstand the rigors of cleaning when they are NEW. After years of being exposed to sunlight, temperature fluctuations, humidity, heat etc., the strength of the fabric does begin to degrade and the tensile strength diminishes.

Can you assess beforehand weather or not the draperies are strong enough to make it through the process?

We can give you our professional opinion and help advise you the best that we can. Generally speaking though, the older the draperies the greater the likelihood that problems may arise. As a rule of thumb, 3 years or less you are pretty safe. 5 years or less, you should still be alright but there is increased risk. Over ten years, your chances are about fifty-fifty. Of course there are a lot of variables that affect the longevity of your draperies. Were they a high quality drapery to begin with? How much sunlight were they exposed to? Were they near a heat register? Moths, etc.?

Why did one panel fall apart and the others came out fine?

Generally, it's because the damaged panel(s) was in the sunniest window or received the day's most intense sunlight over a prolonged period of time.

Do I have any other cleaning options?

We want you to be informed before choosing weather or not to clean your draperies. If, based on the information outlined above, you feel that you would rather not process your drapes for fear that they may shrink or not withstand the cleaning process as I have described it, you do have a couple of other options. Although these options are characterized as "surface cleaning" and not quite as thorough, they may meet your needs without the associated risk. Urban Valet can steam clean your draperies by hand. This process will effectively remove dust and dirt particles. We can then press and re-pleat your draperies as appropriate. Another option that you may consider involves hiring a company to come into your home to "dry clean" your draperies on site. This process is similar to that in which upholstery is cleaned. A solvent is misted onto the draperies and then extracted. Again, not a deep clean, but perhaps appropriate for your situation. At this time Urban Valet does not provide this service, but we can make a recommendation if you would like.

Customer Consent

As a standard business practice, we want you to know that Urban Valet stands behind the work that we perform as it relates to workmanship and quality. We cannot be responsible however, for shrinkage or damage that may occur to your draperies for reasons beyond our control and as outlined in this informational document. This includes care labeling that is not truthful or accurate, minor or severe shrinkage, or draperies not being able to withstand the rigors of the dry cleaning process. By signing below, you are acknowledging that you understand the risks as outlined in the previous pages and that you assume said risk.

Name Printed

Signature

Date