

sun damage

Sun is a great destroyer of fabrics, especially the darker materials, which have low reflective qualities. However, there are choices you can make and precautions you can take to slow this inevitable process – without having to live like Miss Havisham in perpetual gloom.

The upholstery fabric on your sofa is the most visible sign of the quality of your furniture, and your choice of curtains can make or break your interior scheme. That's why it's well worthwhile pausing to think about how to protect them from the ravages of strong sunlight.



It's a popular misconception that it's the UV in our sunlight that fades our furniture and soft furnishings. In fact, not a lot of UV manages to come in through window glass, which is why we don't get a tan sitting in the window seat.

It's light itself that poses the problem. It is composed of various hues and wavelengths – think about the rainbow here – each of which affect certain shades. Blue wavelengths in light, for example, tend to affect red dyes, causing significant fading and colour loss.

In fact, red comes off pretty harshly overall. Research has shown that sun-fading most affects any colours that feature reds as a dominant element. For example, Persian rugs will often feature corals, burgundies, oranges and ambers – all of which contain red – which tends to make them particularly susceptible to sun-fading.

This is because red has one of the smallest molecular makeups of any colour and therefore doesn't have the mass to resist the damaging effects of the light. Also, because of their size, red molecules tend to be very compactly pressed together, so that they absorb the full heat and intensity of the sun, which literally bakes the colour out of them.

The damage inflicted by the sun can be slow or relatively

See Habitat Issue 2 *Art Speaks Louder Than Words* for information on art and sun damage. Available online: www.resene.co.nz/homeown/habitat/habitat.htm.

slip, slop, slap

rapid, depending on where your furnishings are positioned. Look for fading, especially in contrast with parts of the fabric that don't often see the sun. Degradation in the textile is another giveaway; sunlight can make the fibres so weak they eventually give way to the touch.

You'll often spot the problem after your sofa or curtains have been cleaned. Suddenly you can clearly see faded or yellow streaks, especially in folds or on edges exposed to direct sunlight.

So, what to do? Firstly, we have to accept that no fabric is completely resistant to sun damage, but some are less prone to fading than others. Acrylic and polyester stand up to sunlight better than many other textiles and tend to retain colour over time. Cotton, rayon, and acetate offer slightly less sun resistance, and acetate is often blended with silk or cotton to make it more sun-resistant.

Another obvious answer is to use lined curtains, blinds, or shades to protect fabrics from the sun. And in the interests of your window dressings, lined curtains naturally resist sun damage better than unlined ones. However, it can be poor economy to fit quality drapery fabric with an inferior lining that will deteriorate long before the curtain itself and have to be replaced, sometimes several times. You're better to spend a bit more and do the job properly the first time round.

Then, there are window films, which have come a long way since the products of the '70s. Designed to block out UV rays, window film can be helpful in preventing sun-fading, especially on north-facing windows. Available in a choice of subtle colours, they not only reduce the intensity of incoming light, but also serve to keep your home cool during the hot summer months. And remember, if this is an option that may work for you, be sure not to overlook any skylights! **H**



Of course, it's not just your upholstery that gets damaged by the sun – your exterior paintwork can also have a hard time of it. Resene uses the finest pigments available in its paints, but even these can change over time. Any fading will be very gradual, but after a few years you may be able to spot the difference between the shaded and exposed areas of a building.

However, all is not lost! Just as you can slap on sunscreen to avoid sunburn, there are industrial UV absorbers available to protect your paint. Only the first one or two microns of your paint surface need to degrade before you start losing gloss and the colour starts changing. Applying a UV absorber such as Resene Sun Defier over the top of your paint is one of the cheapest ways to help minimise this. It can be used as a finish coat over freshly painted organic hues to protect these most vulnerable shades, doubling the lifetime of even the most light-sensitive pigment compositions.

Not all paint changes are due to fading, though. One phenomenon that often wrongly gets blamed on the sun is lime staining. This occurs when lime in a painted surface leaches through and sits on top of the paint as a white deposit. The only way to avoid this is to block off the lime in the first place with a product like Resene Limelock.

Chalking – the formation of fine powder on your paint as it weathers – is also sometimes mistaken for fading. Happily, chalking can be easily washed off using Resene Paint Prep and Housewash for an instant fresh clean.

See the Resene Caring for Your Paint Finish brochure for more ideas to keep your home looking its best.