

Gordon's Window Decor

SMART AND BEAUTIFUL



Owner Gordon Clements.

Gordon Clements began his professional life as a chemical engineer. So how did he become a premier window decor specialist and purveyor of products that are quintessentially Vermont—artisan created, energy efficient, and green manufactured, with an emphasis on beauty and simplicity?

And all offered by a company that holds the values of community, personal relationships, and quality service paramount?

Taking a look back in time, the logic of Gordon's Window Decor comes clear. ▶



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WHAT'S IN STORE

In the Beginning

With a chemical engineering degree earned in 1967 from the University of Toronto, and an MBA in finance and marketing received 3 years later from McGill, Gordon spent several years in the world of industry at firms like Colgate-Palmolive and Dupont of Canada, amassing an extensive background in product development, marketing, and venture analysis, providing the bedrock skills that would serve him as an entrepreneur developing his own company.

Now Gordon's daughter Kelly Conklin is poised to eventually take over the business. She graduated in documentary film making from the Newhouse School of Communication at Syracuse University where she interned for *National Geographic*. Kelly quickly set up her own successful documentary film company, Bare Bones Media, and shot documentaries in New Zealand, Australia, and Japan as well as making videos for Echo and the State of New Hampshire. However, when film grants dried up, she gravitated back to the business she grew up in. Kelly discovered she really did love the GWD business and is now working through a succession plan to lead the business. Presently Kelly manages the Internet as well as the EcoSmart wholesale business to window treatment dealers across the U.S., Canada, and even in Ireland.

Living just over the border in Montreal, Gordon and his wife Dianne were attracted to the communities and educational opportunities they saw in Vermont, realizing that they wanted their daughters to grow up in the Burlington area—and in Essex, specifically. That was when he decided to launch a wholly new company from Vermont that he would eventually market locally, across New England, and around the world. And that's how a chemical engineer became Vermont's premier custom window treatment specialist.

The Business in Vermont

Gordon started out in 1986 in a small suite in the building at Fort Ethan Allen, where the company is headquartered today. He did everything from purchasing to fabrication to sales and installation, with help from Dianne when she wasn't teaching at UVM. Their children helped out growing up, and his wife, three daughters, and two sons-in-law have all worked in the business and, although follow-

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ing their own dreams, they presently form a strong Family Advisory Group, meeting three to four times per year to provide their own talented and unique input to guide the direction of the business.

Since then, the company has expanded to fill the building at the fort and now has a workforce of 28 employees, including office

staff, skilled interior designers, and a production crew who create custom draperies and

Top: Judy Lanpher assembling a cordless EcoSmart shade, and Shavakat Pashayev cutting fascia for EcoSmart roller shades. Below: Priscilla Letorney reviewing marketing layouts, and Julie Krebsler cleaning the rails of an EcoSmart insulating shade.



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Gordon and his daughter Kelly Conklin with their EcoSmart assembly crew.

soft goods like pillow shams and spreads, as well as the line of EcoSmart roller shades and insulating cellular shades, in house. The EcoSmart insulating cellular shade is arguably the most advanced of its kind in the world, delivering the maximum in durable, long-lasting energy efficiency at the lowest possible cost. Gordon's products also include motorized treatments utilizing the latest in motor technology and controls to the point you will soon be able to drive your shades from your iPhone.

Gordon's is experienced in working with interior designers from across the country, who appreciate the company's single-minded focus on window treatments for their clients.

There's even an on-site cleaning and repair operation where clients can bring Gordon's shades made five, ten, fifteen years ago or longer for cleaning and refurbishing, or they'll clean and repair their competition's products, too, if clients ask them to. Customer satisfaction is a priority at Gordon's Window Decor. "We're loyal to our products and loyal to our customers, as well," Gordon says. "And we are loyal to our employees."

Gordon has also stressed "green" elements for his products, carrying a line of decorator wood-alloy blinds fabricated from recycled materials. And he creates his shades using environmentally responsible fabrics free of volatile chemicals.

Gordon put his chemical engineering

background to use when developing products like the EcoSmart line of roller shades, room darkening shades, and energy-saving insulating cellular shades, as well as environmentally friendly flame-retardant fabrics. Many items qualify for LEED certification and his energy-saving shades—which add an impressive R-4 insulation value to existing windows—qualify for tax credits when installed with tracks that help to raise and lower the shade smoothly while reducing drafts between the shade and window frame.

Examples of the fine detailing of Felix Hardy-Gutierrez's custom creations.





Mary Ann Ebersol creates a client's color strategy that will tie the home together.

The showroom and factory reveal the company's ethic and culture. This is where clients can see the enormous variety of choices for their home or office, but the showroom is only the first stop on the way to designing a custom treatment. The site visit is where designers tailor the installation to a client's personal tastes. Designers assess the client's goals, the rooms in question, the decor in place, and other spaces in a location that interact with the window decor. ▶

More of Felix's custom touches adding character to an EcoSmart shade.



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WHAT'S IN STORE



Sarah Leary preps the bonded polyester fabric that goes into every EcoSmart insulating shade.



A wall of sample shades demonstrating the many control choices.

They plan for energy efficiency and climate control, and even consider sunlight control to minimize damage from ultraviolet light. Gordon's specializes in a non-metallic film for windows that provides UV protection for floors and fabrics; protects against heat gain, glare, and broken glass; and acts as a form of safety glass, making it difficult to break the

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Robbie Babineau, part of Gordon's customercentric install team, fine tunes a insulating slider.



Priscilla Letorney demonstrates the EcoSmart insulating shade with side tracks that pays for itself.

glass to gain entry into the home.

"We consider the juxtaposition of our design to the exterior architecture, also," Gordon notes, saying the impression a window treatment makes when viewed from the street is an integral part of the image his designers consider. ▶

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WHAT'S IN STORE

Satisfied Clients—and Employees

Gary Dean, facilities manager at Merchant's Bank in South Burlington, describes upgrading window treatments in the Kennedy Drive boardroom with a Gordon's designer. "The new treatment that included drapes and roller shades for sun control resulted in a great new modern look for the Merchants Bank Boardroom. The roller shades allowed for additional options to control the natural lighting while not eliminating the view."

Julie Benay, principal of Swanton Schools, says, "Gordon's met with us to develop a strong understanding for our needs and budget. Then they did a formal presentation to our board outlining the pros and cons of the alternative products we had been considering, including a full life cycle cost analysis of each. The choice was to spend more up front on the EcoSmart insulating shade for the more attractive return on investment, and I am glad we did as the shades are beautiful, the school looks so much better, and we have seen a real drop in our fuel costs."

Walking through factory showroom and workshops, it's clear this is a place that encourages empowerment and productivity. Workstations display photographs and personal trinkets among the tools of the trade—colorful threads, fabrics, and sewing notions—creating a relaxed atmosphere.

And work schedules are flexible. Employees receive a list of tasks and deadlines, and they set their own schedules for completing their jobs.

"It's great for us single moms," says Shannon Partridge, a production worker with a growing family. "With no set hours, we know the work, when it needs to be done. If we have to take time off during the week, we can come in on a Sunday. As long as we get our work done." She and her co-workers say that people feel like they matter. "They recognize you here," says Lisa Kinney. "They're really good to you."

Felix Hardy came to the United States from Cuba 30 years ago. He's been working for Gordon since 1989, creating soft goods according to custom specifications provided by the designers. He enjoys the variety in his work, but also likes thinking about his creations going into the homes of customers. "You feel good knowing that you do some-

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Gordon demonstrates the convenience of motorized shades.

thing that people are enjoying even after many years,” Felix says.

Shavkat Pashayev emigrated from Uzbekistan in 2006, and two years ago, he came to Gordon’s to work on custom shade fabrication. With a background in tailoring learned from his mother, Shavkat has a natural feel for the work. His teacher, Felix, said he learns quickly. He is now the principal fabricator for the PVC-free, EcoSmart Roller Shade line of shades. “I think I can do this for a long time and learn many different things,” he says.

The workers fabricate about 75 percent of the products sold by Gordon’s Window Decor. All other products must pass through a long and rigorous evaluation with Gordon before he’ll associate the company name with them. “As the last sentence of our mission statement says, ‘Our success is measured by our customers’ satisfaction and referrals,’” Gordon says.

Gordon’s Window Decor

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