

# Lampshades

Lamp and shade designer Sue Johnson

**T**he basic purpose of a lampshade is to screen the light bulb and hide the hardware. But to put together a lamp that will look great in your home you have to consider more than just covering a bare bulb.

Sue Johnson has spent the last 33 years designing lamps and shades in her Berkeley, Calif., shop, and she's learned a few things along the way. She spoke with *Inspired House* about how to choose an appropriate shade for any lamp.

## What should you think about when choosing a lampshade?

Consider the lamp's role and location in the room, the shape and proportion of the lamp base, and the style of both the lamp and the room (see sidebar, p. 55).

Table lamps and floor lamps provide general room illumination as well as task lighting for reading and other activities that require brighter, focused light. With lamps, the higher the shade is from the floor, the broader the spread of light into a room. If you don't have overhead fixtures in a room, you can use floor lamps with large top openings on the shades to bounce light off the ceiling and into the room to create ambient light.

A lamp used for reading requires a shade large enough to cast light on the book and to allow for a higher-wattage bulb. The bottom of the lampshade should be at the same height as your shoulder when you're seated next to the lamp. That way, the shade will be low enough to hide the bulb but high enough to spread light over whatever you are reading.



# Illuminated

sheds light on what to look for in a lampshade **BY ANNE COREY**

## What are the guidelines for pairing bulb wattage and shades?

The top of the shade must have an opening wide enough to vent heat from the bulb. The size of the shade's top opening and the distance of the bulb from the top of the shade determine how much wattage you can use. For example, for a 100-watt bulb, the top opening should be about 7 inches wide. Generally, the smaller the opening, the less wattage you can use. To test a bulb, hold your hand over the shade after the bulb has been on at least 10 minutes. Warm is O.K., but if it's hot, use less wattage. There should be about 3 inches between the bulb and the shade. Paper and fabric shades are lined with vinyl to give them structure and good light diffusion. The vinyl lining also protects the fabric and paper from the heat of the bulb.

## How should you shop for shades?

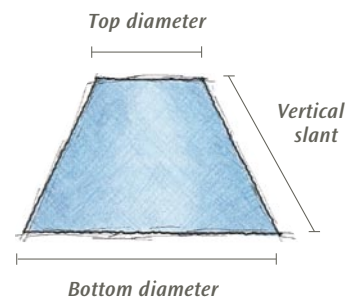
Whenever possible, take the lamp base with you to the shop so you can experi-

ment with different shade options. Ask about the return policy or if you can take a shade on approval.

I encourage customers to look for shades they really like instead of focusing on what will give them the best light. They can take a shade home and try it out. If it doesn't provide enough light, we'll choose a broader-sloped shade or lighter materials. Or we could apply a white liner. In general, the lighter the inside of the lampshade, the more light is reflected out.

We also experiment with raising the shade to get the broadest spread of light. Shade risers screw onto the thread at the top of the harp (see sidebar, p. 54). They come in sizes from 1/2 inch to 2 inches and screw together so you can raise a shade by small increments until it is at the perfect height on the lamp. We send risers home with customers so they can adjust shade heights when the lamp is in place, since different table heights affect where the shade looks best on the lamp.

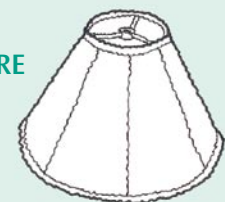
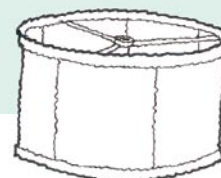
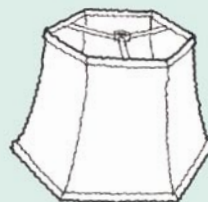
Make sure you ask about replacement shades. We have many customers who



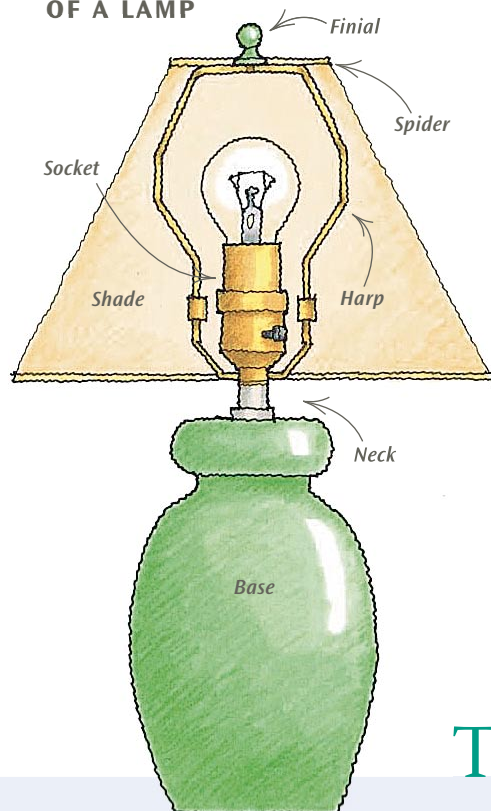
## MEASURING A LAMP SHADE

LAMP SHADES have three measurements: top diameter, bottom diameter, and vertical slant. The measurements are usually given in that order—top width x bottom width x side slant. You'll need to have these measurements when you're shopping for a replacement lampshade.

## Common lampshade shapes



## ANATOMY OF A LAMP



bought lamps from discount stores, and when the shades fell apart, they couldn't get replacements. Many of the shades sold with lamps at retail outlets today have European—or uno—fitters under the socket and won't work on American lamps with standard harps. We have to rewire these imported lamps with a standard harp and three-way socket so they can use standard shades.

### What are the advantages of a custom-made shade?

You can get almost any size, shape, color, and material you want for a one-of-a-kind look. Many papers and fabrics can be laminated to a vinyl shade—in general, natural fibers laminate well. One natural material we use a lot is mica, which we line with a thin, light-diffusing parchment to screen the bulb. Sometimes we laminate it with designs or natural leaves.


Often customers send us fabric to be used for the shade, or so we can match

trims, borders, or parchment samples to a fabric color.

You can incorporate other items into a custom-made lampshade, including shells, family pictures, old postcards, fruit-crate labels, music manuscripts, old deeds, book dust jackets, hand-marbled papers, and custom wallpapers.

### What should you expect to pay?

For our handmade shades, prices range from \$35 for a small parchment drum up to \$300 for a mica floor lampshade. If we incorporate a hand-cut design, the shade may end up costing \$400 to \$500.

Lampshades can also be bought at retail stores, lighting showrooms, and online lighting stores. The prices for these shades will vary widely depending on materials and quality of construction. 

*Sue Johnson is owner of Sue Johnson Custom Lamps and Shades, in Berkeley, Calif. Anne Corey is assistant editor.*

## The language of lamps

**HERE ARE SOME TERMS** to help you navigate the world of custom lamp shops and retail lighting showrooms.

**FINIAL** The ornament, often made of metal, crystal, ceramic, stone, or wood, that fastens the lampshade to the harp.

**FITTER (OR FITTING)** The clip-on metal form, the spider,

or the uno, all of which allow the lampshade to be fitted onto the lamp. *The clip-on* allows a lampshade to clamp directly onto the light bulb. *The spider* is a three- or four-spoked cross frame near the top of a shade that allows the shade to be attached to the harp by a finial. *The uno* is a round metal piece, either

threaded or slip, that fits snugly onto the lamp socket. A threaded uno fitter allows the shade to hang down from the socket, as on a floor lamp. A slip uno holds up a shade on a table lamp.

**HARP** Vertical metal supports that hold the lampshade on the lamp base. Measured from the flat plate on top to the bottom where it connects at the socket of the lamp.

**LAMP BASE** The actual body of the lamp, usually wired with a light socket.

**LAMP SHADE** A translucent or opaque covering on a lamp

that screens and diffuses the light source. The shape of the shade directs the light and enhances decoration.

**RISER (OR RAISER)** A small metal disk that comes in 1/2-inch to 2-inch sizes, used to raise the shade. The riser screws onto the top of the harp, the lampshade sits on top of the riser, and the finial secures the shade.

**SOCKET** Electrical hardware at the top of the lamp base that contains the lamp bulb and usually the switch. Double-headed sockets can increase the amount of wattage you can use.



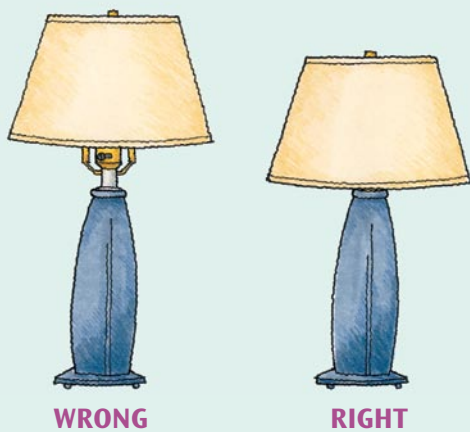
**TYPES OF FITTERS**

# 5 tips for choosing a shade that works

**MATCHING A SHADE TO A LAMP** can be tricky. I prefer that the lampshade have more volume than the lamp, but I tell customers to trust their own eye and preferences. Here are some basic guidelines to keep in mind.

## 1. Hide the hardware

The shade should be long enough to cover the socket when viewed at eye level. You can adjust a shade by changing the harp or adding risers.



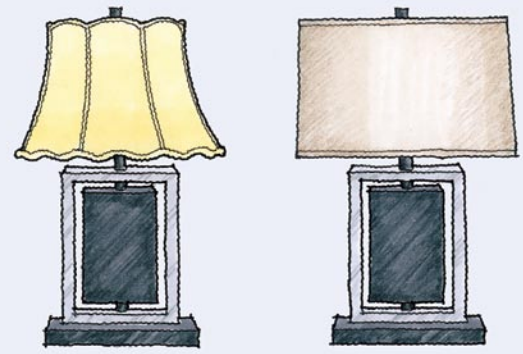
## 2. Choose your emphasis



Make sure shade and lamp complement each other rather than compete. If you want to emphasize the shade, choose a subtle lamp base, and vice versa.

WRONG

RIGHT



WRONG

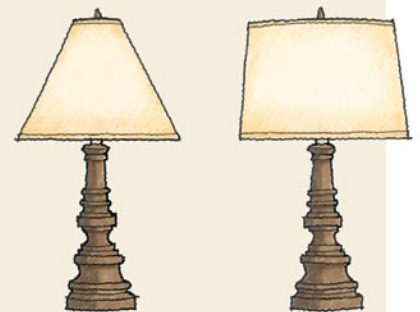
RIGHT

## 3. Reflect the size and shape of the lamp base

A slender base, such as a candlestick lamp, often looks better with a small shade. Likewise, a wider base takes a larger shade. For a square base try a square shade, for an urn-shaped lamp choose a flared shade, and for a round or cylindrical base choose a round or oval shade.

## 4. Consider the use of the lamp

Task lighting calls for a broader shade to provide illumination for a work area. For reading, you need at least a 60-watt bulb, so the shade has to have a 4-inch opening at the top to vent heat.

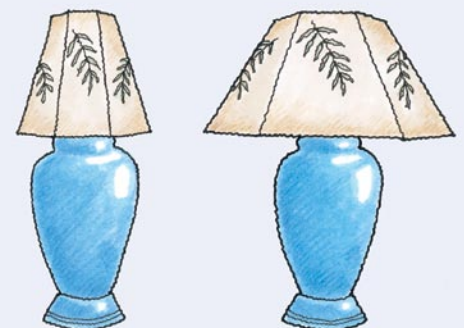


WRONG

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## 5. Put it into proportion

The shade should be about three-quarters the height of the lamp base, and the bottom of the shade should be wider than the widest part of the base.



WRONG

RIGHT