

## The benefits of specialization

# The Shape of Things to Come

**W**indows have changed dramatically over the past 40 years, from the 'standard' 36" x 54" rectangle to a seemingly infinite variety of shapes and sizes. As windows become larger and the shapes more complex, the challenge of shading them effectively becomes ever greater.

Blindtek Designer Systems, owned by Lee Miller and Steven Bemand, has been developing custom solutions to unique windows in the Northeast market for over four decades, selling to both wholesale and retail clientele. "Forty years ago our business was primarily spring roller shades, venetian and vertical blinds" said Miller. Twenty years ago it was pleated, cellular, woven woods, and wood blinds. But now, with ever-larger expanses of glass, uniquely shaped skylights and a desire for natural light, it's all about energy efficient UV-blocking LEED fabrics combined with motorization."

Miller, who had actually sold Blindtek in 1993, got it back in 1996. In 2010 he incorporated Specialized Shading Systems, Inc. to help distinguish between the wholesale and end-user aspects of the industry. "Specialized Shading Systems, Inc. was born out of a desire

to service our wholesale customers better and focus on the faster-growing part of our overall business," explained Steven Barnes, Vice President of Business Development for Specialized Shading Systems.

### The Purpose of Specialized

"The company always had a reputation for taking on jobs nobody else wanted, said Barnes. "In 2003 we engi-

neered three skylight Roman shades for the Montclair Art Museum; they were 20' wide by 30' long and weighed in at a hefty 1,000 pounds each and were 30' AFF (above finished floor)".

Miller adds, "Architects love to design art museums as large, open areas filled with lots of natural light. The issue with is that UV rays damage the art and therefore the art needs to be protected from the sun. The window coverings have to do this job and cannot fail to operate."

"The massive museum shades were designed for a large atrium glass sky frame over a public space that had to overcome many engineering obstacles," explained Lee, "but what was unusual ten years ago is becoming commonplace now."

Barnes and Miller go on to list several recent projects that would drive most fabricators into fits:

- 20' x 15' roller shade that required a 5 1/2' tube to avoid deflection issues
- 12' x 9' bottom-up blackout shade with no visible lift cords
- A Fifth Avenue residential project where all the openings were set up with three motors per window, and are operated by motion sensors.



Bottom-up solar screen triangles on roof and drop down roller shades on conservatory doors, using Satine in a twill weave, one of Mermet's Intelligent fabrics.

- An exterior shading project in upper Manhattan consisting of many triangular shades and two massive shades that had to traverse over a hip ridge to cover two elevations of glass.
- A conservatory full of triangular bottom-up shades using a woven wood material the company had custom woven in China.

### The Specialized Mindset

Miller has a saying that everyone at Specialized Shading Systems is familiar with: “They landed a man on the moon. We can make a shade for that window.”

Barnes explains, “The ‘man on the moon’ quote is what I like to call a ‘Lee-ism’, sometimes our industry gets stuck inside the box. They forget to be truly creative when it comes to window coverings simply because manufacturers are so focused on being mass marketers. To send a man to the moon took people to think outside the box and believe they could do it, as long as it doesn’t violate the laws of nature or physics.”

“At times, making ‘Specialized’ window coverings requires us to think outside the box and find solutions to problems using parts or ideas from other ancillary industries.”

When asked for some examples, Barnes mentioned the sailing industry, explaining that durability, sun- and weather-resistance, lightweight strength and other key aspects of designing for sailboats easily translate over to specialty shading designs.

Working with complex window situations has given the team at Specialized Shading Systems unique insight into how to best manage such projects, especially now that motorization is such a key aspect of nearly every installation.

“Because motorization requires integration not only with the electrician and the AV technician, but also with

the millwork vendor, we really like to get involved in a project right from its inception,” said Barnes. “It’s best if we can work with architects to plan specific construction details.”

“After 42 years in this industry, we have developed a reputation for being able to handle all specialty needs,” said Miller.

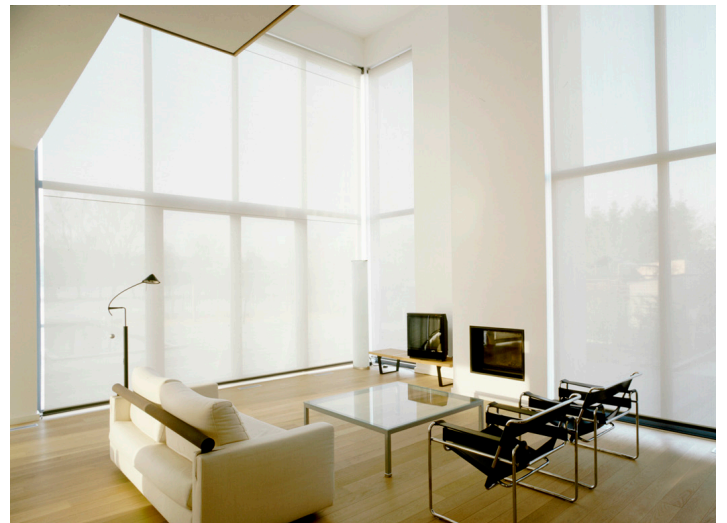
“We are even recommended by our competition when it becomes evident that something falls outside of standard offerings is required. This includes unusual shapes, bottom-up, skylight, exterior applications, extra-wide or extra-tall

shades that exceeds aspect ratio limitations, stainless steel awnings and even European-style outdoor living spaces.” This detailed knowledge experience guarantees that Specialized Shading Systems is able to engineer their products to be service-free for many years. If a service issue arises, regardless of whom or what created it, a rapid response team of techs headed by Paul Berliner comes to the rescue.

“Architects are our best clients,” said Miller, “because they recognize the intellectual property that we offer is invaluable to bring functionality to their most challenging designs.” But Miller goes on to say that the company

has worked with nearly every type of player in the building trade.

“Better general contractors like to recommend us for the jobs they are awarded, because while the motorized shades represent only 5% of their construction budget, if not laid out properly and coordinated between the various subcontractors, it can represent 50% of the overall problems. Our expertise helps eliminate that source of stress. We even get calls on jobs from AV specialists and electricians who are awarded projects but need us to consult or make something special for them.” ▽



Top: Solar Roman shades on curved glass section of English conservatory.

Bottom: Solar screen shades in a series of floor-to-ceiling windows.