

OUT AND ABOUT

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Shades of Amber is a unique name, so I expected exceptional owners as well as a one-of-a-kind business with a distinctive service. I was not disappointed in the least.

Yes, there is an "Amber" behind the company name. Brad and Amber Unfred are a husband and wife team who specialize in designing window coverings. But these are not just your everyday, run-of-the-mill window coverings. These are beautiful, custom-made works of art that you will never see in another home, Amber says.

Brad and Amber are customer-oriented. Married for over 11 years with four children, they love working together. "It's a blast," Amber says. "I love it!" Brad smiles, adding, "It's like having your best friend around you the whole time."

When I asked how they got into this business, Brad and Amber exchange a knowing glance. "It's not that fabulous of a story," Brad shares, explaining how his father was a homebuilder and his mother was an interior designer. "It really started when Amber made some draperies for our first home, and friends and family asked if she would make some for them. It snowballed from there."

Now in their eighth year, Amber stopped doing all of the sewing three years ago as the business grew and expanded. "As far as we know, there is no other business in town that focuses completely on every facet of window coverings exclusively," Brad points out. "We focus 100% on all aspects of window coverings and nothing else." This includes blinds, motorization, custom draperies and custom soft treatments, which are the more decorative types of treatments.

Based in a home office, the number one focus is the client. "Everything we do is primarily in our customers' homes. The nice thing with that is 99.9% of the time, I'm going to the client's house to see what's going on in the house; the style; everything that's happening inside the home," Brad says. "It makes it easier when our clients don't have to travel to us—we travel to them. It makes it more personal." Amber adds how the idea is to serve their clients in the best way possible. Brad meets with them, and Amber is behind-the-scenes contributing her design ideas and creativity.

The first consultation with a client involves Brad looking at the home, assessing the client's needs, and asking many questions: Do they need privacy with the window covering? Do they have children? Do they have pets? "I don't want my client to spend money on a window treatment when they have cats that sit on the windowsill and get fur all over the treatment," Brad explains. He likes to walk around the home with the client to find out what the room will be used for and to get an overall feel of the clients needs and lifestyle. After assessing the need, he then provides an estimate. Soft treatments may take up to four appointments in order to discuss style, fabric, etc.

"It's a collaborative effort with our customer," Amber says. "We don't push our tastes onto the customer. It's a friendship we develop, which they appreciate." She adds, "It's about the end result and the customer loving what's in their home. You need window coverings for functionality, but it can create such a level of beauty in your home—it's about the function and the beauty at the same time."

Brad has spent an hour in a home, and other times he has been in a house 20 hours before the staff begins to design anything. "People can have a hard time envisioning how things are going to work, so they are really entrusting that we will explain it as best as we can," Brad says. "But they are also trusting that the final product is going to be what they're expecting."

Brad and Amber both have a creative, as well as a technical side, which they see as an advantage. "I know what can be done and what cannot be done," Brad points out. "I think one of my strongest points is being able to identify a problem issue and work around it." This skill has proven invaluable when it comes to motorizing blinds and draperies as well, which is one of the fastest growing categories in window covering.

Amber agrees, "We know what works and what doesn't work." With this expertise in their business, Shades of Amber continues to grow. Amber's mother, Madaline States, is the office manager. Brad and Amber pride themselves on personally researching and selecting each product they sell in order to ensure the highest quality and best value, Amber added.

"We have all our soft treatments done locally in Colorado Springs," Amber says. "Many people in our industry will ship work out-of-state, which is really semi-custom. Ours is 100% custom work. We can do anything."

Shades of Amber designs the treatment and selects everything with the customer. The window treatments are fabricated by skilled professionals in the Colorado Springs area. Each one is highly trained in their craft with a combined experience total of over 80 years. "Every job that we do is custom and unique to that home," Amber shares.

Shades of Amber also works hand-in-hand with about 15 interior designers in Colorado Springs, one in Chicago, and one in Texas, who turn to Shades of Amber for window coverings. There are six designers

who are exclusive to them, meaning when they are decorating a home, they work only with Shades of Amber. "Many designers in town do a very good job. It's the fact that covering windows is not the easiest thing to do," Brad says. "Many designers rely on us to do that for them."

In 2005, their treatments were in the Parade of Homes house that won "Best Interior Design"; "Best Overall Home"; and "Best Master Bedroom." "Our business survives primarily on word-of-mouth and referrals," Brad states. "You can't stay in business if you're not doing a good job."

Brad and Amber have thoughts about adding an employee, but they have high expectations. It's our reputation on the line, Amber says. "We've been very selective in who we hire and the professionals we rely on. Everybody who is going to represent Shades of Amber in a customer's home has to have the same philosophy as us."

And that philosophy seems pretty straightforward: It all needs to jell together by always doing your best. "Our customers' happiness is number one," Amber says. "When we walk out of a house, we want them to absolutely love everything," Brad adds, "We want our clients to tell everyone they know 'We had our window coverings done by Shades of Amber and it was a great experience.'"

For more information on Shades of Amber, call 719- 265-9921 or check out their Web site at www.shadesofamber.net. 

SHADES OF AMBER

By Stacy Schubloom



Amber & Brad Unfred, Owners

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