



# Shutter proof

They keep heat in and light (and burglars) out. Shutters are a great asset for a country house—provided you install the right ones, says **Carla Passino**

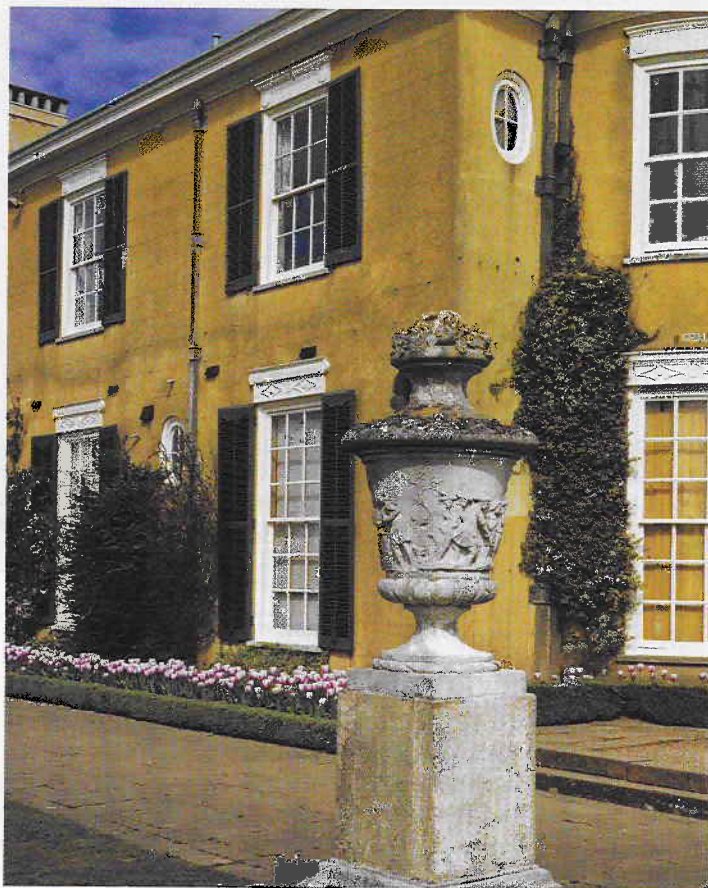
**A**LTHOUGH they're often considered a Mediterranean or an American import, shutters are an integral part of Britain's architectural heritage. Born out of the necessity to protect unglazed windows from the elements, they remained in use even after glass made an appearance. 'Wooden shutters were needed both inside and outside houses because early glazing was so fragile and thin,' explains James Mott of Project-Book, an online resource for owners of period properties ([www.projectbook.co.uk](http://www.projectbook.co.uk)). 'The first ones were very simple, of the ledged-and-battened variety.'

## 'Good shutters will last as long as your house'

Later, says Peter Scott of Martin Ashley Architects (020-8948 7788), 'half-glazed shutter-board-style windows became more common, and advancements in glass production in the late 17th century led to sash and casement windows with internal shutters. In grander properties, these shutters would have been panelled with mouldings to match the window details and glazing configuration.'

These more elaborate designs, however, did not detract from the shutters' purpose of improving insulation, retaining heat and deterring intruders, says Mr Mott—so much so that 'in the 18th and 19th centuries, many were fitted with bells or noise-making devices that served as a primitive type of warning'.

Today, growing security, energy-conservation and privacy concerns make shutters highly desirable. 'They're a bonus when buying



Polesden Lacey in Surrey benefits from elegant louvred shutters

a country house,' says William Marsden-Smedley of buying agents Prime Purchase. But if your house doesn't have any, don't despair. Instead, take a closer look at your windows. 'Panelled shutters fold into splayed recesses and people are often completely unaware that they're there,' says Mr Mott. 'You can often discover original shutters (screwed or nailed shut) that can be restored.'

Should your window inspection reveal no hidden shutters, you can have new ones made, in either period or contemporary style. Period replicas should mimic the original as closely as possible, and authenticity starts with careful placement. Although external louvred shutters look great on Mediterranean homes, they would be out of character in most English country proper-

ties. 'Many houses, especially in towns, did have external shutters, but not the louvred type,' says Linda Hall, author of *Period House Fixtures and Fittings 1300-1900*. '[They had] plain boards or panelled ones, the same as internal shutters.'

Besides, adds Mr Scott, sash windows—invented in the late 17th century—were usually fitted with internal shutters. Given that most historic country houses tend to date from the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, 'internal shutters are usually more appropriate'. Strictly speaking, however, shutters went out of fashion in about 1840, so aren't appropriate for Victorian and Edwardian houses, explains Mrs Hall. Replica shutters also need to match a house's character and architectural period, both in looks and in

installation techniques. The paneling on shutters was usually designed to match the panelling of the room or the doors.

However, if you prefer a contemporary look, Mr Heaton suggests choosing internal American (also called plantation) shutters, which have wooden louvres that can be tilted at different angles. 'They look stylish and allow control over the light coming into the room,' he says. They're also versatile because they can be designed to cover the full height of a window, only the lower portion, or be tiered in independently opening sets to match your windows' shape.

In grander country houses, says Mr Marsden-Smedley, shutters 'would be made from hardwood and painted'. However, hardwoods such as oak or maple can place a huge weight on window jambs. A Greener, more versatile alternative is basswood, a uniformly grained American hardwood that comes from renewable resources. Lightweight but strong, it doesn't warp in wet weather, and can be easily painted or stained.

Whichever material you choose make sure you buy made-to-measure shutters. There is no such thing as a standard window, especially in period homes, so each shutter should be built for each individual window opening in your home. Research companies extensively both through references and through vetting resources such as ProjectBook. Don't be afraid to ask to view finished shutter samples and examine the paint or stain finish for defects.

It pays to choose carefully. With minimal maintenance, good-quality shutters will last as long as your house.

For further information, visit [www.countrylife.co.uk/shutters](http://www.countrylife.co.uk/shutters)