

Wise buying saves time and money

Buying upholstered furniture requires an understanding of how sofas, love seats and chairs are made.

Once you get an idea of how the fabric meets the frame and what goes between, you will be in a better position to discern value in meeting your needs.

The attraction of upholstered goods is frame and fabric. Sleek contemporary or romantically traditional, the style is only as good as the wood frame.

Better quality frames are made of seasoned, kiln-dried hardwood that is connected firmly with screws, glues and dowels.

For added strength, all frames are reinforced with corner blocks, which must be screwed, glued and doweled, in order for you to get your money's worth.

Ask the furniture salesperson to show you the underside of the piece, if possible. The foundation will be covered but the legs will be exposed enough to evaluate quality.

On chairs, inspect as much as possible on the joining of the legs to the frame, usually a good indication of quality. Simple screwed-on legs could be a sign that you will want to consider a more securely fastened chair.

Be sure to sit in as many varieties of sofas and chairs as possible, paying close attention to the feel. For instance, on sofa arms can you feel the wood frame under the padding? If so, you might want to consider a better model.

On sofas, sit on both sides and the middle. You will be testing the springing. One test is to remove the side arm pillow or bolster and sit deep into the corner.

Better quality sofas will place springs flush to the arms. The springing will tell you a lot about the quality of the sofa or chair.

Ask questions about the quantity of springs, how they are fastened to the frame and how they are tied together.

Better quality sofas have more springs, and they are hand-tied together eight ways, to assure comfort.

Due to style, some contemporary sofas are unable to provide eight-way, hand-tied springing.

Good quality chairs and sofas have tightly woven hands of webbing beneath the springs.

Look closely at tailoring, usually a good clue to quality. Stitching is better than stapling fabric to frame.

The cushioning can be synthetic, but it must be dense enough to provide comfort. When you are sitting on the sofa, see how much the corner of the cushions "kick up." Better cushions will kick up slightly to compensate for the weight of the person.

Another clue to quality is strip decking. When the corners kick up, you should be able to see the same fabric in the gap on better goods.

Much of what you are unable to see on upholstered goods determines the price. But so does what you can see, especially the cover.

Most sofas and chairs are priced according to the grade of fabric. And a choice of grades is usually available.

With this in mind, a good suggestion is to learn about the various fabrics, with an eye especially to durability.

Tightly woven fabrics usually resist soil better than loosely woven fabrics. Know what kind of use to expect.

Cost and quality also are determined by the application of the fabric. See if it is straight. With patterned fabric, the job of matching the cushions is more time-consuming and requires more material. But the end appearance is usually worth it.

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