

Upholstered furniture

Consumer must search for under-cover information

Since the inner construction of a sofa or chair essentially is hidden from view, the consumer shopping for upholstered furniture has to search for the under-cover information.

But in the consumer's favour is the fact that what is visible - that is the colours, pattern and texture of the upholstery fabric - plays the key role in aesthetic appeal and value of the design.

The upholstery covering provides the single, most important clue to what the consumer is getting for her money because it affects the price of the furniture more than any other component. For example, an identical sofa can range in price from \$800 to \$1,600, depending on the upholstery fabric selected.

It's not unusual for retailers to carry a selection of fabrics so that a chair or sofa can be covered according to individual choice. Fabric selections frequently are organized by "grade", which is the manufacturer's code for the price range which ultimately affects the price of the furniture it covers.

Retailers should be asked for information on the durability of the fabric, that is whether it is appropriate for delicate, light, medium or heavy duty. For example, delicate and light-duty fabrics, and colours such as pale pastels and white, can give good service in living rooms used mainly for formal entertaining.

However, rooms used more frequently require furniture upholstered with sturdier fabrics. There are many light to medium-

duty brocades and velvets that contribute to an elegant appearance and at the same time give good performance.

In rooms where food and drinks are served stain-resistant finishes become important. Spills on fabrics made of synthetic fibres such as olefin, nylon, acrylic and polyester usually can be wiped clean. Heavy-duty upholstery fabrics are advised for family rooms and dens where all members of the family, of all ages, pursue their activities and where pets have access.

It is important to remember that light colours show dirt and dark colours show lint, dust and pet hairs. Medium-coloured fabrics, especially in tweed effects and prints, hide a multitude of sins.

Leather and vinyl often are chosen for family rooms because they can be wiped clean.

Ontario furniture manufacturers strongly urge consumers shopping for upholstered furniture to look for designs with the gold UFAC hang-tag. UFAC stands for the Upholstered Furniture Action Council, a trade association formed to lead the search for new methods and materials for the manufacturing of furniture that is more resistant to cigarette ignition.

The UFAC hang-tag signifies that the furniture design is highly resistant to cigarette burns which means "added value" to the consumer. Most upholstered furniture manufactured in Ontario today meets all UFAC construction criteria. Some consumers concerned about safety are replacing old fur-

niture with upholstered pieces that meet UFAC specifications.

Most industry experts agree that structurally sound furniture should last through the original fabric and at least one reupholstering. No matter how carefully the fabric was selected, it eventually will show wear.

In choosing between reupholstering an old piece of furniture and buying a new replacement it should be remembered reupholstering is not inexpensive. Costs for reupholstering one chair can range from \$400 to \$500, or more, depending on labour charges and the type of upholstery fabric being used. In some cases it would be possible to buy a new chair for the same amount of money.

However, if you paid handsomely for the original piece, or if it an unusual design, a particularly good form or a type featuring distinctive or elaborate details, the reupholstering approach seems advisable.

Details such as tailoring with neat, even stitches enhance the quality image. How well the fabric pattern is matched provides another important clue about quality. For example, if the left arm of a sofa or chair has a stripe down the centre, the right arm should have the same stripe in the identical place. Vertical stripes and patterns should match from the top of the seat-back down to the front of the frame. Horizontal stripes should line up too. Industry standards allow a half-inch margin for error in matching patterns. More expensive items reach for perfection.

When patterns such as bold florals

are featured, the dominant element of the pattern should be centred on the cushions. The pattern should flow smoothly from seat-back through seat-cushion and the front of the frame to the skirt, with all flowers fully matched from panel to panel.

For a quality look, velvet upholstery fabrics must be cut so that the nap goes in one direction. The nap of velvet should lie flat and feel smooth when brushed in one direction. When brushed in the opposite direction it stands up and feels and looks uneven. The direction of the nap also affects the depth of colour.

It's a good idea to check the reverse side of the cushions to make sure the fabric match is the same on both sides. For maximum wear, cushions should be reversible when design layout of fabric allows.

How well the seat-cushions fit into the seat-frame is another measure of quality. The cushions should fit snugly between the arms, lying flat without gaps between themselves and the front rail. A slight overhang - one-quarter to a half-inch - creates an appearance of better fit.

The stitches of seams holding pieces of fabric together reveal much about the quality of the furniture. The stitching should be so tight that the thread is barely visible.

When fabrics are thick, such as some woven jacquards, or exceptionally smooth, such as types made of olefin, the stitching should be checked carefully because even stitches are difficult to achieve in these

constructions.

Furniture featuring traditional styling frequently has decorative welt seams (achieved by covering cord with fabric) on the edges of the seat-backs, arms, cushions and pillows. For a neat, well-tailored appearance the stitching should be very close to the cord and the welt-seaming should appear straight and crisp. Special attention should be paid to corners since they can be a problem area.

Some contemporary styling features "basketball" seams - a single line of decorative stitches on each side of a structural seam. The decorative stitches should be straight and an equal distance from the structural seam. Additionally, they should not be so tight they cause the fabric to pucker.

The skirt frequently used as a finishing touch at the base of a chair or sofa almost always is lined in quality furniture. It also may have weights to make sure it hangs evenly all around. A skirt with pattern that matches also is essential for a quality image. The degree of matching can define the quality.

The quilting effects featured in some of the light-weight fabrics covering designs, mainly in the traditional or country mood, follow two main directions: a random pattern or an outline of a component in the print. Consumers are advised to check the quilting for broken stitches. If not done well, the quilting, which commands a premium price, can turn into a detriment rather than an asset.

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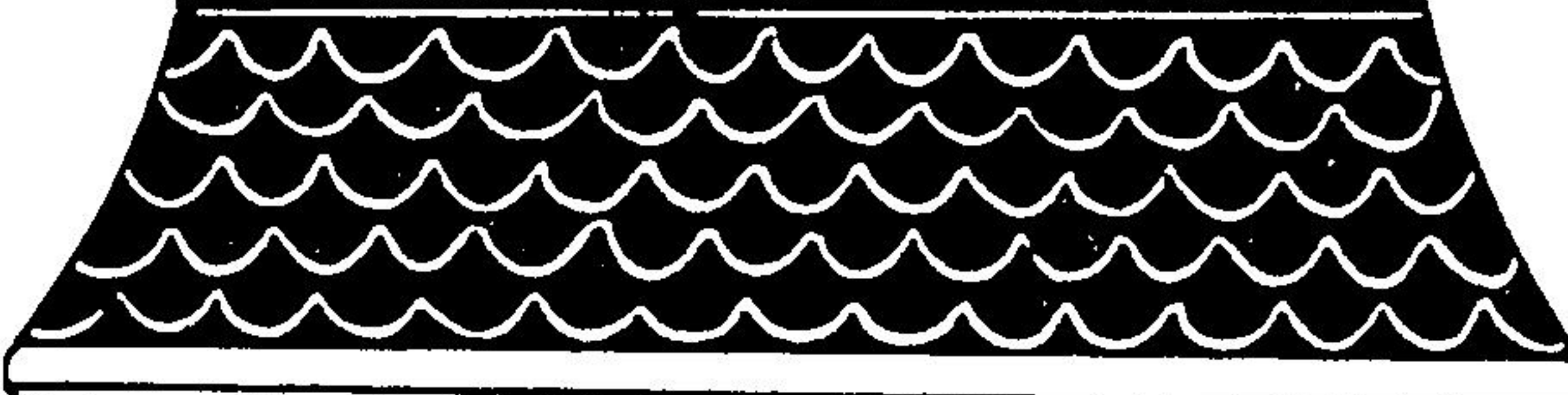
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