

SOFA BUYING GUIDE

Here are a few things to keep in mind as you shop for your new sofa. Keep in mind that what is under all that beautiful new upholstery will make a difference in how comfortable and durable a sofa is in the long term. Take the time to "kick the tires" and understand what is underneath cushions before you make a decision.

Frame

A sturdy frame is essential for a comfortable, high-quality sofa. The best sofa frames are constructed from kiln-dried hardwood. Green wood can shrink, crack or warp as it dries. Kiln drying removes the moisture before the craftsmen begin to shape the frame, ensuring that the sofa will maintain its shape and stability over the long term. Quality frame construction also includes glued, doweled and screwed joints. Reinforcing blocks should be attached inside the corners of the frame for extra support. Plywood and particle board constructed frames held together with staples will not stand up over time and should be avoided. If you must choose a sofa without a kiln dried frame, then opt for 11 - 13 layer plywood over 5 - 7 layer plywood for better support.

Seating Support

Eight-way hand-tied springs have long been considered the premium choice for sofa construction. In this method a craftsman hand ties each coil spring to the other springs and to the sofa frame with twine. The twine crosses the frame from front to back, from side to side, and across both diagonals, thus creating the "eight ways".

Other forms of spring construction can provide good quality support as well. Sinuous springs are two-dimensional "S" shaped wires that run from the front rail to the back of the seat, spaced every few inches.

Support wires cross laterally and provide additional stability and support. A sinuous spring construction may be preferable in some cases. For example, a sleek modern sofa sitting low to the ground is better served by sinuous spring construction since it requires less space in the frame.

Web suspension is a form of seating support that may be used alone or with coil springs. Bands of webbing two to three inches wide cross the seat and back, and are tacked to the sofa frame to create a hammock-like platform for cushions. Webbing may be made of natural fibers such as jute, or man-made materials, such as polypropylene. While web suspension alone is considered the least preferable frame suspension, there is a quality difference among web-only sofas. High quality sofas that use web support structures are built with the use of a tensioner that securely fastens the webbing to the frames and ensures the stability of the deck.

No matter the seating support choice, when you sit on the sofa it should feel stable. Too much wiggle in the seat means that the springs are not attached well. If you choose a spring sofa, the quality and the quantity of springs are the best measure of a sofa's construction, so compare the construction specifications before you decide.

Cushions

Several different materials can be used to fill the cushions of sofas, alone or in combination with other materials. Down and feathers create the softest cushions and are considered by many to be the premium choice for cushions. High-quality down cushions should include down-proof ticking under the upholstery fabric. The ticking is a tightly-woven fabric that prevents the tiny down feathers from poking through the fabric and escaping the cushion. Cushions filled with nothing other than down require a great deal of maintenance with frequent, even daily, fluffing. They also carry the highest price tag. More commonly, down is used in combination with other materials. Blendown is a mixture of down, feathers and polyester fibers. Pads of blendown are wrapped around high density foam or foam-encased springs. This creates a soft

surface over the support materials.

High density polyurethane foam is the most common cushion filler. The higher the foam density, the firmer the cushion will be. Foam can be wrapped in down, synthetic-fiber (Dacron) batting, or cotton for a softer seating surface. Dacron-wrapped foam is the least expensive option, but it will have a limited lifespan.

Spring down combines the softness of down, the structure of foam and the resilience of springs. Coil springs are surrounded by high density foam edge supports, and then all is wrapped with down pads.

Fabrics

A wide variety of upholstery fabrics are available today in a variety shades and textures. But before you choose the fabric for your upholstery, take some time to think about your lifestyle so you can choose the best option for you. You may love the nubby texture of chenille, but if you have a cat with claws, you might want to reconsider. A household with children, pets, or adults who like to eat their dinner on the sofa should look for a low-maintenance performance fabric.

Natural fibers such as cotton, linen, wool, silk and rayon are comfortable as upholstery, but often require more maintenance than synthetic fibers. Many natural fibers can be damaged by exposure to sunlight or mildew in humid climates. Blends of natural and synthetic fibers are a great way to get a soft feel, but improve the hardness of your sofa.

Synthetic fibers such as polyester, olefin, and nylon are strong, stain resistant options. However, olefin and nylon are susceptible to sun damage. If you choose fabrics made of these fibers you should use window coverings or low-e window coatings to prevent fading. These fibers are also apt to pill when they receive a lot of heavy use. If your natural/synthetic blend upholstery fabric contains more than 50% of these synthetic fibers, then expect it to pill. Microfiber fabrics (made of polyester or nylon) are a popular option for upholstery. They are soft to the touch and tightly woven, thus they are durable and stain resistant.

Microfiber fabrics are available in a wide variety of colors.

Pile fabrics, such as chenille, velvet and boucle, are popular for their ability to mask dirt and resist wear in high traffic areas. Cotton velvet does have problems with crushing and can show track marks. Denim and twill are great options for a casual feel that stands up to daily use.

Scale

Before you even start looking at a new sofa you should take the time to measure the room where it will be placed. You should also take the time to measure any hallways, doorways or stairs that the sofa will have to travel through to be placed in the room, especially if there are odd turns and angles along the way. The best advice is to create a floor plan to get an idea of how the sofa will work with the rest of the furnishings in the room. Take the floor plan with you when you go furniture shopping to give sales associates an idea of what you are looking for.

You should also consider how a sofa fits your body frame and those of your guests. A low-to-the-ground frame might be difficult for some individuals to stand up from. A sofa with a deep seat may leave a petite person with their feet dangling several inches above the floor. Consider the overall atmosphere of the room that the sofa will be in, and the room's function. If you'll sit on the sofa to watch movie marathons, then you might choose a deeply cushioned sofa that encourages lounging. If the sofa will be placed in a more formal room that is used primarily for entertaining, then a sofa that sits more upright would be the right choice.

Styling

Custom order sofas allow you to combine everything you are looking for into one perfect piece. Quality furniture retailers can help you select the right combination of styling, construction and fabric for your budget and décor. Below are terms for different sofa style elements that can help you name what you want in a sofa:

attached back sofa	sofa with the back cushions attached to the body of the sofa.
box cushion	cushion with four sides connecting the top and bottom. A welt frequently runs the perimeter of the top and bottom.
box pleat	a flat double pleat made by folding under the fabric on either side of it to create an inverted pleat.
box pleat skirt	an upholstery skirt with alternating high/low folds of fabric to create a dentil pattern.
braid	a flat, woven trim used for decorative edges on upholstery to cover staples or tacks.
bullion fringe	a thick fringe composed of long, twisted loops of yarn covered in gold or silver thread.
bun feet	foot in the shape of a flattened ball, often with a slender ankle above.
button tufting	upholstery treatment in which buttons (usually fabric-covered) are sewn through the surface and tied down to create a tailored, sometimes undulating, surface.
camelback	sofa or chair style in which the back is raised in an arch in the middle, similar to a camel's hump.
chaise	a long chair for reclining. May have one arm, two arms or no arms at all.
chaise recliner	a recliner with a fully-padded extending footrest.
chaise sectional	a sectional sofa that incorporates a built-in raised footrest.
channel back	an upholstered chair or sofa back having deep vertical grooves.
Charles of London	style of arm on upholstered furniture which is low at the back and slightly raised and curved at the front. The inside of the arm is usually well padded and curves over the edge

	of the arm in the front, contrasting to a flatter treatment on the outside of the arm.
chenille	a soft thick fabric usually made of cotton or silk with a raised pile, that is used to make furnishings and clothes.
chesterfield	overstuffed couch or sofa with upholstered ends and no exposed wood. Back and arms are usually of one continuous curve.
chintz	printed and glazed cotton fabric, often in bright colors.
colorways	multiple variations of color combinations in which a fabric pattern is available.
couch	sofa or daybed.
cuddler	a large, frequently armless, component of a sectional that typically connects two additional components together at a corner.
damask	a light fabric, often silk, that depicts patterns, florals or other designs in the weave with a tone-on-tone or two-tone effect. Use for draperies or upholstery.
deck	the surface directly under the seat cushions on an upholstered piece of furniture.
denim	a coarse twill fabric made with cotton.
doweling	a construction technique in which wood corners are reinforced with glued dowels through the joints.
down	fine, soft feathers from the breast areas of ducks and geese; when used in seat and pillow cushions the effect is luxuriously soft.
down-proof ticking	a tightly-woven, inner lining of a cushion that prevents the migration of tiny feathers to a cushion's exterior.
dressmaker skirt	a skirt that extends from base of the cushion to the floor on

	upholstered furniture. Also known as a waterfall skirt.
eight-way hand-tied	construction technique used in upholstery in which individual seat springs are tied to the frame with twine running vertically, horizontally and diagonally.
fauteuil	upholstered arm chair with open sides.
gimp	a flat decorative trim or braid that conceals upholstery fastening points, such as staples or tacks.
jacquard	fabric with an intricately woven pattern. Damask and brocade are both fabrics produced on a jacquard loom.
kick-pleat skirt	a straight upholstery skirt that with smaller skirts placed behind the skirt vents at the corners and other skirt divisions. The smaller skirt may be straight or shirred.
Lawson arms	a low profile rolled arm that is of a modest scale.
loose back sofa	sofa with the same number of back cushions as seat cushions, but are not attached to the sofa body.
loveseat	a small sofa or double chair that seats two people.
micro suede	a variety of microfiber fabric that displays a distinct nap that makes it look and feel like suede leather.
microfiber	fabric made from extremely thin synthetic fibers. It is appreciated for its soft hand, durability and stain resistance.
mop head fringe	a thick fringe composed of long, twisted loops of yarn resembling the head of a mop.
nailhead trim	the decorative use of a line of tacks at fabric / leather attachment points on upholstered goods.
pile	cut loops of yarn forming surface with upright tufts. May refer to fabric or carpet. Velvet, ultra suede and corduroy are examples of fabrics with a pile.
pillow top	cushion filled with batting attached to a sofa seat or arm, ot

	to the top of a mattress.
pleated arm	arm of upholstered sofa, loveseat, or chair with the front plane covered by fabric continuing from the inside of the arm; the excess fabric on the front plane is pleated in a arch.
plinth base	box base for upholstered furniture, in lieu of legs.
plisspe	fabric with a puckered finish.
pub back	a soft, gathered and billowing cushions attached to the back of an upholstered sofa, chair or loveseat.
recliner	arm chair that reclines and extends a built-in foot rest.
rolled arms	arms on upholstered seating that curve outward into a rounded form, extending horizontally beyond the supporting post.
saddlebag arms	exaggerated pillow top style cushion attached to the top of the arm on an upholstered piece.
scatter back sofa	sofa with more back cushions than seat cushions.
sectional	upholstered seating consisting of two or more sections arranged together (and sometimes joined through brackets) to create a larger piece. Frequently sectionals incorporate a directional change, forming the shape (when seen from above) of an "L" or "U".
semi-attached back sofa	sofa construction in which the back cushions are attached at the top but loose at the bottom. Often, a hidden zipper in the lower portion allows access to the cushion for fluffing and the repositioning of fill materials.
settee	small sofa or loveseat with exposed, wooden legs.
sinuous spring	construction element of some upholstered furniture that uses a running s-shaped spring along the length of the deck (seat support).

skirt	fabric running along the lower perimeter of upholstered furniture, designed to hide the legs.
slipcover	a removable, fitted fabric cover for upholstered furniture.
slipper chair	a high-backed upholstered chair with short legs.
snuggler	an oversized upholstered chair. Also frequently called "a chair and a half."
T-cushion	cushion of an upholstered sofa, loveseat, or chair on which the arms are set back from the front edge; the cushion extends from the front edge of the seat to the front of the arm. The resulting outline is in the shape of a letter "T".
tête-à-tête	a small bench with an s-shaped back that crosses the seat that allows two people to sit facing each other. Also known as a courting bench.
theater seating	modular reclining chairs that can be joined at the arms, either flush, or in an arch and are designed for optimal screen viewing in a home theater.
theater sofa	a large sofa curved in an arch when viewed from above. Designed for use in a home theater, a theater sofa is intended to provide all of the individuals sitting on it a good view of the home theater screen.
three-over-three	a sofa with three back cushions and three seat cushions.
tight back	upholstery with a padded back directly over the frame of the piece, without additional back cushions.
tight seat	an upholstered piece on which the fabric covering the seat is attached directly to the frame and does not have a removable seat cushion.
toile	a white or off-white fabric printed with one color, commonly red or black, depicting classical or pastoral scenes.
topstitching	a single or double row of stitching close to the seam or

	edge on the outer side of the fabric.
tuxedo arms	slightly flared arms that are the same height as the back
twill	a sturdy weave of fabric that is distinguished by diagonal parallel ribs in the surface.
two-over-two	a sofa with two back cushions and two seat cushions.
wall-away recliner	a recliner that shifts the body forward as it reclines, instead of leaning the body back. Wall-away recliners require less rear clearance space and may therefore be placed closer to a wall.
waterfall back	two or more vertical layers of gathered and billowing cushions attached to the back of an upholstered sofa, chair or loveseat.
waterfall skirt	on a sofa loveseat or chair, a skirt that extends from base of the cushion to the floor. Also know as a dressmaker skirt.
webbing	the foundation, composed of interwoven strips of synthetic material, attached to the wood frame of upholstered furniture.
welt	fabric-covered cord used as a trim in the seams of upholstery or toss pillows.
wingback chair	a high-backed, upholstered easy chair with panels or wings projecting forward from the sides of the back and curving downward to meet the roll arms.