

# Selecting Quality Furniture

## What to look for when buying wood furniture and upholstered pieces

### Which materials are used in a quality furniture frame?

The longevity of a sofa or upholstered chair depends largely on the quality of its frame. Throughout history, durable hardwoods (such as oak or maple) were considered to be superior for furniture frames. However, new technologies have introduced other, more durable materials, such as hardwood and softwood plywood, steel, plastic and strand board.



### What should I look for when buying wood furniture?

Make sure pieces sit squarely on the floor and don't wobble. Drawers and doors should open and close easily. Turn chairs upside down and examine the joints. Are they snug and free of excess glue? Are drawer interiors smooth? How are drawer fronts attached? Higher-quality pieces will have dovetail (interlocking) joints in which wedge-shaped tenons on one side fit into corresponding spaces on the other side. Look for support blocks on drawer bottoms

and dust panels between drawers. If you are considering a dining table with leaves, make sure to have the opening and closing mechanism or technique demonstrated.

### What factors affect the price of wood furnishings?

The type of wood a piece is made of is one determining factor. Expect to pay more for furniture made of a rare wood such as mahogany versus furniture constructed of a common species such as pine or oak. A complex, handcrafted finish or a piece that entailed a high level of workmanship will also cost more than something that was mass-produced.

### Is "solid wood" furniture constructed of one solid piece of wood?

Not necessarily. Solid wood furniture is made completely of solid boards of wood. Sometimes several thinner boards are glued together in a block to make the wood more stable and to reduce the chance of warping. This block can be carved into various furniture components, such as table legs, chair backs or bedposts.

### What is "engineered wood?"

Engineered wood is made from slices of wood (plywood) or the pieces of wood that remain after a tree is milled into lumber (particleboard or fiberboard). Furnishings made with engineered wood are sometimes described as "all wood."

### What are veneers?

Veneers refer to thin layers of surface wood that are applied to a core of a solid-wood, plywood or particleboard core. Veneering

affords manufacturers the ability to match grain patterns or create intricate designs.

### What kind of foundation should I look for in a sofa?

Traditionally, eight-way, hand-tied, coil-spring construction was considered the hallmark of quality upholstery. Today, other alternatives, such as new steel-spring configurations, are considered just as good. In general, the number of springs and how they are reinforced determine cost and quality. Be sure to ask how the foundation of a piece is constructed before you buy.

### What kinds of cushions should I look for in upholstered furniture?

Most back and seat cushions are made from some type of polyurethane foam. Depending on the product's design, cushions may also include a combination of springs, cotton or polyester fiber and down. Density is used to gauge the durability of foam; in general, the higher the density, the more durable the cushion. Better-quality upholstered furniture uses foam with a density rating of 1.8 to three pounds per cubic foot. Try out a piece in a store by sitting back and relaxing as you would at home; this will help you make sure the piece is right for you.

### What are the most durable materials for a sofa?

Leather is the most durable option. Fabrics combining a tight weave and durable fibers like nylon or polypropylene are good choices for active use.

—Research courtesy of the American Home Furnishings Alliance