

Ultimate Guide to Sofa Shopping

How to Identify High Quality Upholstery That Will Last

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NUMBER 1 THING TO LOOK FOR:

Made In America

Pieces made by an American manufacturer are a lot likelier to:

- Be made with environmentally responsible materials that are free of potential toxins
- Use lumber from sustainably managed forests
- Not cut corners in construction to ensure a long-lasting piece of furniture

SUSPENSION

The part of the sofa directly underneath the seat cushions.

Poorly made suspensions result in sagging sofas.

Best: 8-WAY HAND TIED - The well-established gold standard of suspensions, this option holds up the longest. Beware of imported furniture claiming to be 8-way hand tied - it's likely not genuine.

Good: SINUOUS SPRINGS - One of the most common types of sofa suspensions, this is a good option if your budget doesn't allow for 8-way hand tied. Quality of sinuous springs varies widely - make sure the piece has a good warranty. Since this is less labor intensive, the price should be lower than 8-way hand tied pieces.

Good: POCKET COIL - A newcomer to the sofa suspension scene - and still somewhat rare - this suspension is similar to mattress coils.

Good*: WEBBING - Certain sofa and chair styles require this type of suspension because they are designed with a slim seat deck. Webbing quality varies widely and we wouldn't recommend it for hard-working sofas, but it can be fine for occasional chairs that don't get heavy use and are from a reputable manufacturer. Avoid webbing on very inexpensive pieces.

*WITH
RESERVATIONS

Avoid: Drop-in coil springs (often referred to as just coil springs) and Grid or Flexolator systems

WARRANTY: The best manufacturers offer a lifetime suspension warranty

FRAME

The sturdiness of the frame depends on its material
and how the pieces are joined together

Best Material: SOLID HARDWOOD - Look for kiln-dried and "FSC certified from domestic forests" to ensure the lumber is properly managed.

Best Material: ENGINEERED HARDWOOD - Not to be confused with lower-quality plywood, engineered hardwood is made of at least seven layers of wood and can be just as sturdy (if not sturdier) than hardwood. That's because engineered hardwood doesn't expand or contract from changes in climate and humidity

Material to Avoid: Standard plywood, MDF, and Particle Board

Best Joinery: Double dowel, corner block, and mortise and tenon

Joinery to Avoid: Pieces that solely use screws, nails, and glue

WARRANTY: Well-made, sturdy furniture should have a lifetime warranty on the frame

SEAT CUSHIONS

Typically made of an inner core surrounded by a soft layer of either poly-fiber or down; cushion construction affects both comfort and longevity.

All cushions should be rotated and flipped weekly to maintain their structure

Best: INNERSPRING CORE WRAPPED IN DOWN OR FIBER - We like this cushion for being both supportive (from the springs) and soft (from the down). It is the firmest cushion option; down-wrapped cushions are a little softer than fiber-wrapped ones. Innerspring cushions are encouraged for leather pieces because the firmer the seat, the less leather will stretch out.

Good: FOAM CORE WRAPPED IN FIBER - Most cushion foam is petroleum based, but many good manufacturers will use a soy-based foam instead. The foam is surrounded by a polyester fiber (go with recycled polyester for an eco-friendly solution). Softer than innerspring cushions, this is a good choice if you like to sink into your sofa a little more.

Good*: FOAM CORE WRAPPED IN DOWN - While often advertised as the most luxurious option, this cushion needs to come with a warning: must flip and fluff daily to keep from looking like a pancake. While nice to sit on because of it's softness, many people find it too high-maintenance.

Avoid: 100% DOWN CUSHIONS - Simply too flat and difficult to maintain. Not to mention you can often feel the sofa springs through the cushion

Avoid: FOAM ONLY CUSHIONS - We like the added softness of wrapping the foam in fiber or down and find that foam-only cushions lack some comfort.

WARRANTY: Look for a cushion warranty of at least 5 years, many manufacturers offer a longer warranty

BACK CUSHIONS

Back cushions are filled with either poly-fiber or down - each with their own pros and cons.

Regardless of filling, look for channel stitching, which helps the filling stay in place

Best: 100% FIBER FILLED - We like this option because it's soft and keeps its shape

Good: MIX OF FIBER & DOWN - Less commonly available, a mixture of fiber and down gives you a softer cushion with some of the resilience of fiber. You'll have to fluff and rotate more than the 100% fiber filled.

Good*: 100% DOWN - While all down doesn't make the best seat cushion, it can be nice and soft as a back cushion. We recommend with reservations because it requires a lot of fluffing and rotating to keep them looking their best. We prefer this kind of back cushion on chairs, where it's less of a pain to fluff a single cushion than the two or three on a sofa.

*WITH
RESERVATIONS

WARRANTY: Look for a cushion warranty of at least 5 years, many manufacturers offer a longer warranty

FABRIC

With infinite options of what you can cover your sofa or chair with, it's hard to figure out what will hold up. While fabric will typically wear out before the structure of the sofa does, you can pay attention to some characteristics so it lasts as long as possible.

Double-Rubs:

A test to determine durability, the higher the number, the longer it takes for the fabric to wear out. Look for a heavy duty rating of at least 15,000 double rubs.

Performance Fabrics:

A term used to describe any fabric that has an inherent ability to resist soiling and is easy to clean. A great choice for busy homes or if you're choosing a light fabric. Some common types are:

- Crypton
- Revolution
- Sunbrella
- Any Indoor/Outdoor fabric

Washing Codes:

Fabrics come with their own language of how they should be cleaned. Make sure you know your fabric cleaning code and keep the necessary supplies on hand to quickly address any spills or dirt. Always spot test a small, inconspicuous area before cleaning. The codes are:

- W - Spot clean with water-based shampoo or foam upholstery cleaner
- S - Spot clean with water-free cleaning solvent. Do not use water
- SW - Spot clean with water-based upholstery cleaner or mild cleaning solvent
- X - Clean only by vacuuming or light brushing with a non-metallic stiff brush

WARRANTY: The fabric itself is usually not covered by warranty or you may find a fabric warranty for a year.

If there is a warranty: wear, fading, shrinking, or pilling is NOT covered.

A good manufacturer will assist with any fabric issues by working with the fabric manufacturer.

COMFORT

Paying attention to the dimensions of a sofa can ensure you get something that's going to fit just right

Seat Depth:

Probably the most important factor for determining comfort. Decide if you like a deep or shallow seat. Height can play a determining factor here, with taller individuals liking a deeper seat while shorter individuals may prefer less deep. That said everyone might prefer a deeper seat if you like lounging. Look for a measurement called:

INSIDE SEAT DEPTH - THE DISTANCE FROM THE FRONT OF THE SEAT TO THE BACK CUSHIONS

- 25 - 26 INCHES: The deepest seat we would recommend. Anything more than 26 inches starts to get a little ridiculous. This seat is going to feel super deep. Good for really tall people or for those who want to comfortably fit two people laying down.
- 23 - 24 INCHES: A seat that feels deep, but that still lets most people sit upright. Shorter individuals can always sit with a pillow placed behind them if it still feels a little deep.
- 21 - 22 INCHES: A comfortable depth for sitting upright and good for smaller spaces.
- LESS THAN 21 INCHES: Usually found on small sofas like settees or chairs.

Back Height:

How high the back is determines if you'll be able to lean your head back or not. This is measured by the

INSIDE BACK HEIGHT - THE DISTANCE FROM THE TOP OF THE SEAT TO THE TOP OF THE BACK

- 18 INCHES OR MORE: The tallest end of the spectrum - look for this height if you like to lean your head back on the cushion.
- 16 - 17 INCHES: Middle of the road - you may not be able to lean your head against the back cushion, but this height will still provide a lot of support
- 15 INCHES OR LESS: The lowest back height, this sofa can still provide a comfortable spot to sit, you just sacrifice some lounging options.

Arm Height:

Pay attention to arm height if you want to be able to lean against the side of the sofa. The measurement here is called

INSIDE ARM HEIGHT - THE DISTANCE FROM THE TOP OF THE SEAT TO THE TOP OF THE ARM

- 10 INCHES OR MORE: The tallest arm height creates a cozy nook to lean against.
- 7 - 9 INCHES: Very versatile arm height that gives you a plenty of support for leaning.
- 4 - 6 INCHES: Less ideal for leaning against, but a pillow can usually help make up for the difference.

Seat Height:

Sofa seat height doesn't vary too much, but you may want to pay attention to this if you are nervous about how easy it will be to get in and out of the sofa. Firmer, innerspring seat cushions will also assist with ease of standing from the sofa.

Seat heights typically range from 16 inches to 20 inches. If you want a taller seat, look for something with a seat height of 19 to 20 inches.