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Buying upholstery is sometimes like a guessing game because much of the craftsmanship is hidden beneath the fabric. Much like buying a car, many important features are out of sight. The color and style may attract our attention, but our long term satisfaction will depend on how well it's made. So how can you tell you're getting a good sofa? Here are some tips to look for and ask about.

Good tailoring on the outside probably means good components on the inside. Look for uniform padding and even straight lines. Welt cording should be crisp, straight, and evenly applied. Seams should be so tight that the thread is barely visible. Fabric patterns should appear in the same place

How to Buy a Sofa

on each arm and in the center of each cushion. Cushions should be snug fitting.

A good hardwood frame is the "skeleton" of your furniture. Your sofa should have a frame of at least 1-1/4" thick kiln-dried hardwood. Kiln-dried means that the moisture level of the lumber has been mechanically reduced to control warping and shrinking. Hardwoods hold fasteners securely so joints will not loosen and fabric staples won't slip out. Major joints should be double dowelled, reinforced with corner blocks, glued and either screwed or nailed in place.

Steel springs provide quality comfort. Sinuous wire springs in seat backs and coil springs in the seats themselves are the standard for fine upholstery. Your sofa should feature eight-way hand tied coil springs under the seat cushions. There are other, less expensive ways to craft upholstery, but no other technique gives better support and comfort. Test the springs by bouncing on the seat to check for squeaks and support.

The padding gives upholstered furniture its final shape and comfort. Seat cushions should feature foam with a density of at least 1.8 lbs per cubic foot. Dacron polyester blankets

wrapped around the foam core add down-like softness, round the seat cushion edges, and give them a shapely "crown." You may have the option to add down or other luxurious materials to the tops of the cushions as well. Beware of shredded foam in seat and back cushions. It will compact and settle over time.

Every edge of the hardwood frame should be covered in padding. Firmly explore the top of the back, the top of the arms, and the front of the arm. You should not be able to clearly feel edges of the hardwood frame.

Selecting the fabric is largely personal. It has to look good and feel good to you, and fit your lifestyle. A quality upholstery manufacturer will have hundreds of beautiful fabrics to choose from in a wide range of prices. Since so much fabric is needed to cover a sofa, the price of the fabric can have a big impact on the price of your sofa.

Information for this article was provided by Taylor King. Sofas and upholstered furniture from Taylor King and other fine manufacturers are available through Decorating Den. Call (636)244-1623 to make an appointment for a personal upholstery consultation.

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