



HOW TO BUY A SOFA

Local design experts on what to look for the next time you go couch shopping

BY GENE MENEZ

▶ FABRIC

Families with young children and pets aren't the only ones who shouldn't buy a white linen sofa.

"Even if you are an empty-nester and even if you have a ton of money to spend on an expensive silk or velvet piece, having a sofa with a durable fabric is smart," says Tristan Cliff, sales and design representative at Four Hands Home.

Technological advancements have yielded synthetic material with the look and feel of natural fibers that still protects against stains.

"You can spill red wine on it, and the wine beads up and rolls onto the floor," Cliff says. "It's pretty impressive."

▶ SIZE

Use common sense. Envision where the sofa will go, and measure how wide it can be without blocking doorways and walkways.

"A sofa gets too big when you can't walk around it," says Jette Hicks, manager of Copenhagen Imports. "It needs room to breathe."

Most couches are between 84 and 92 inches wide, but smaller "apartment" sofas are available. When buying for a small space, avoid bulky rolled sofa arms that waste space and instead look for a piece raised a bit off the ground to help the room feel larger.

▶ COLOR

Go with a neutral color, such as off-white, black, beige, gray, or blue.

"In five years are you going to want a pink sofa?" says Bret Taylor, designer at Skandinavia. "Chances are you probably won't."

If you're still dying to incorporate a bolder color like pink, you can add it with pillows, throw blankets, or other decor, which can be easily swapped when you grow tired of it.

"It's much easier to say goodbye to a \$40 to \$200 pillow than it is to say goodbye to a \$2,000 sofa," Cliff says.

▶ FRAME

A well-built frame "is the most important factor in how comfortable your sofa will be and how it will sit over time," says Heather Blue Harkovich, interior designer and owner of Heather Scott Home & Design.

Look for wood that has been kiln-dried. That process removes the moisture and creates the strongest frames.

"That will stop issues of splitting and splintering that you get from some of those cheaper pieces," Cliff says.

▶ FILLING

Personal preference will determine what you want inside your cushions. Someone who likes a firm "sit" will want high-density foam or memory-foam core. Someone who prefers a more plush feel will want more of a down fill. The latter, however, comes with a caveat.

"Cushions with down require a lot of maintenance," says Blue Harkovich. "You have to fluff the cushions regularly."

When you're looking at a sofa in the store, NEST Modern co-owner John Allison suggests, unzip the cushions and examine the inside. "If you find a bunch of loose threads and you're looking at a piece of foam, then you know it's probably not a real high-end construction," he says.



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