

Buying a Sofa?

The heart and soul of any sofa is the suspension system found under the seat cushions. This feature directly affects the longevity, comfort and appearance of your new sofa, not to mention the selling price. A budget sofa for the guest room is a great idea. A budget sofa for the family room is a bad idea. Here is critical information that will enable you to properly comparison shop for a new sofa.

\$ FLAT RUBBER BANDS or WEBBING are stapled to the four rails of the sofa frame. These bands tend to stretch and “bottom out” very quickly. A perfect choice for a sofa that is rarely used.

\$\$ FLAT “S” SPRINGS are connected to the front and back of the frame rails with metal clips (which often tear loose over time). Weight is spread between the springs by running connecting wires to sides of the sofa frame. Even with 16-18 springs the sofa will probably “bottom out” after ten years. Sold everywhere.

\$\$\$ DROP IN COILS are a prefabricated all steel assembly that mimics the eight way hand tied system. Unlike the previous systems, coil springs cannot be “stretched” out of shape or torn loose from the frame. Sofa designers are somewhat limited because the sofa must be built around this “off the shelf” system. This system will outlast the rest of the sofa and is an excellent choice for a leather sofa. A “leaf spring” drop in variant is also available. Just as good, but not widely available.

\$\$\$\$ BENCH MADE 8 WAY hand tied coils are the gold standard for comfort and longevity. This premium system allows designers to optimize the sofa for appearance, comfort and durability. A skilled craftsman can adjust the number and spacing between each coil. The tension between the coils (approx. 27 per sofa) is fine tuned with cording. The result is that each person sitting on the sofa has their own independent comfort zones. This system will outlast the rest of the sofa and is excellent choice for a leather sofa.

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SOFA FRAMES begin as rectangular boxes made of either lumber, plywood or composite materials. Lumber is preferred because it glues well, staples well and can be easily shaped into curves. Staples and upholstery tacks do not hold well in cheaper materials. Ask to see a “cut-a-way” drawing that shows the construction method and materials. Price, durability and comfort depends on the quality of the frame.

CUSHION CORES can be much more complex than a block of foam. The right choice depends on style, fabric, suspension system and a person’s weight. Better sofa lines offer cushion options to fit these variables. A complex cushion core can easily cost \$200 more than the cost of three standard cores. \$\$\$ well spent.

PADDING is used to shape the sofa and protects the fabric from the wood frame beneath. There should not be any hard spots on the arms, front rail or back rail. Cotton padding is preferred.

LINING reinforces the fabric on the sides, backs and skirts. Used on high end sofas.

FIVE SOFA LEGS are better than four.

TAILORING is critical when dealing with stripes and large pattern fabrics. Particular attention should be given to seams and how the fabric flows across the sofa (front & back). Also, cutting complex designs tends to waste fabric and can greatly add to the overall cost. This is why pattern less fabrics are so popular.

WARRANTEES are your best guide to overall quality. Remember, even poor quality sofas must be initially comfortable or no one would ever buy one. But, after a couple of years, cheap seats loose shape and comfort.



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