

Leather Furniture?

Top grain leather upholstery will still look good after 15 to 20 years. Prices reflect the various combinations of leather, cushions, springs and frames. Bottom line, top grain leather costs twice as much as quality fabric and lasts 3 to 4 times longer. Also, leather is also easier to clean and never really goes out of style.

Cow hides are split into 3 or more layers of leather. They are called top grain or split leathers.

\$ Bonded leather is made from ground up leather leftovers. A bonding agent is mixed in and the material is run through an embossing roller. Sits hot. Easy to clean and should last five years.

\$ Bi-cast leather is a split grain with a painted on finish. Embossing rollers press a leather pattern into the finish. Bi-cast leather “sits” hot and the surface finish can crack and peel away. Tends to feel stiff. Easy to spot clean and should last five years.

\$\$ Quality splits receive a much lighter surface finish before going through the embossing rollers. Tends to have a rubbery/stretchy feel and “sits” hot. Easy to spot clean, should last eight years. Suede is a split leather.

\$\$\$ Top Grain Leather is graded and classified according to how much surface preparation is required to meet various standards. Cheaper hides require extensive surface correction (standing/buffing/embossing). Top grain is durable, sits cool, but is harder to spot clean. Top grain is your best value in broad price range.

\$\$\$\$ Full Top Grain is rare and very expensive. Few stores offer it. This premium leather may even have minute wrinkles, healed cuts and slight color variations. Remember, it has not been sanded or embossed or painted with finishes. Hard to spot clean.

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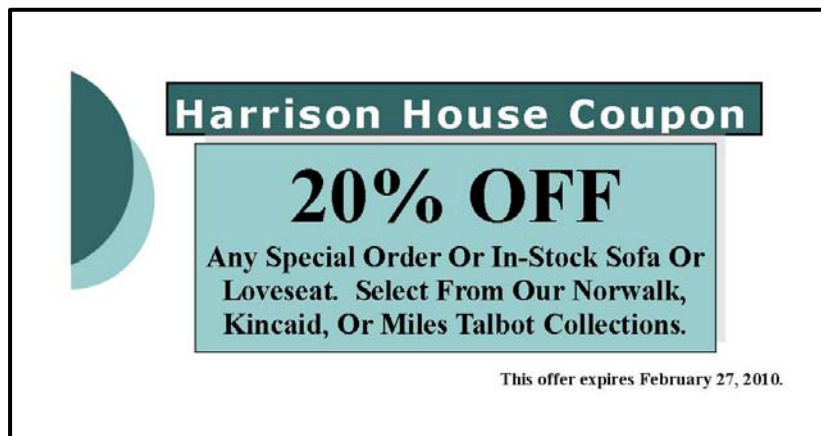
The rest of the story...

We have seen that different grades of leather have different properties and production costs. The right choice depends on your budget and amount of use or abuse your leather furniture will receive.

1. Since all of these products will be sold as “leather” shopping by phone or the internet is tricky. Also combinations of leather, bi-cast leather and vinyl are sold as “leather”. Leather seats matched with vinyl are a great compromise, but be aware that these materials will change to two different colors over time.
2. Shopping by brand name is also tricky because most manufacturers vary their quality to sell to low, medium and high end shoppers. Caveat emptor!

So let’s go shopping at your favorite furniture store. You will quickly discover a price range that you are comfortable with (bonded/bi-cast, splits, leather match, top grain and full grain). The staff will be delighted to answer your questions and show you their leather samples. Use your knowledge to stay in budget and compare “apples to apples and oranges to oranges”.

3. Ask to see a “cut-a-way” drawing of construction features. The construction options are endless and manufacturers are guilty of exploiting every one of them in a price driven market. Generally, better grades of leather go on solid wood frames with coiled springs under the seats. Cheaper leather could go on frames made of plywood with rubber bands under the seats. Even more savings come from sewn in seats without zippers.
4. Ask about the warranties



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