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64 In The Box

Inspiring Design with Color

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 2009

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DESIGNER DOG!

How to Shop for Custom Upholstered Furnishings



In today's world of shopping for bargains, you may ask, "why spend a lot more money on a piece of custom furniture when less-expensive furnishings are available?" We are bombarded with enticing deals on websites and in catalogs showing attractive, affordably-priced sofas and chairs. But what's underneath less expensive, fabric or leather upholstered goods?

I worked for a furniture manufacturer that prided itself on quality workmanship and once again witnessed the making of a beautiful, well-crafted chair. Last week Kravet's Steve Bolick, who heads quality control for Kravet's furniture division,

demonstrated the work involved in creating a quality piece of furniture. Susan Lorenz, who is Kravet's vice president of sales for furniture and showrooms, filled in details about the company's commitment to building high-quality pieces.

Here's what any consumer should look for when shopping for upholstered furnishings:

- The frame should be made of kiln-dried hardwood solids and engineered hardwoods. Using engineered wood is good and helps give added strength to the frame. Quality engineered wood is made by turning a hardwood log with machinery to cut long, thin pieces of solid wood that are stacked and glued under high pressure. (Remember that



Miss Paisley -- I adopted her from Atlanta Pet Rescue.

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ABOUT ME



[Susan Currie](#)

My passion for interior design has allowed me to turn my avocation into a successful vocation. Before making my home in Atlanta, I lived and worked as a designer in New

engineered wood is not the same as pressed fiber board made from wood chips and pieces. Avoid furniture that's made with fiber board.)

- Look for an eight-way tied coil spring system. Sinuous springs can also be used in areas like backs to give reinforcement.
- Foam made from petroleum and soy-based products should be used in strategic areas of the frame. (For instance along the front edge where the upholstered frame meets the loose cushion.) This eliminates sharp edges and adds to the comfort of the piece.
- Cotton-blend batting is added between the foam and the decorative fabric. This additional fiber helps give a luxurious feel.
- Stretchy fabrics like chenille and silk need to be backed so they upholster nicely and are more durable.
- Patterns should match up. There's nothing worse than stripes or patterns that don't line up from the front to the back.
- Another good sign of a quality upholstery job, is the piece's decorative fabric also is used on the deck under the cushion. This fabric should line up and match with the other exposed fabric.
- All fabric should be pulled tight when it's stapled to the frame. Staples should run along the frame so not to be seen.
- Skirts on sofas or chairs should be added so they are the same length from the floor all the way around. Furniture manufacturers like Kravet make skirts to fit each specific piece. That means a skirt is added as one of the last steps in the upholstery process.
- Decorative trim like welt is added to hide staples while giving a beautiful finished look. Look for welt cord made with bias-cut fabric. Steve pointed out that he takes care to turn hidden welt cord seams all in the same direction so that the welt stands up nicely.

How can you find out if the furniture you are looking at is well-crafted?

- Ask questions of the representative who is helping. Do they have any literature from the maker? Visit the maker's website for more info.
- Lift up cushions. Look under the chair. Push gently on the sides and outback to make sure they are tight.
- Engage an interior designer who can identify the best furniture resources.
- Designers can also help you select fabric that are best suited for your needs so that your investment holds up for years.

[For further information about this topic, please click here to contact me.](#)

Posted by Susan Currie at [11:47 PM](#) 

Orleans. I currently own an interior design company in Atlanta. Before this, I worked in philanthropy as a fundraiser and in television news and public relations. I earned a degree in Interior Design in addition to holding a degree in Communications. I collect art, travel, and enjoy time spent with my family and friends.

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