

Futons: a lighter type of sofa bed

By Ralph R. Echlinaw
Staff writer

WHEN WAS the last time you heard of a Japanese invention being refined and improved by Americans? It generally works the other way around, doesn't it? Maybe with consumer electronics, but not where futons are concerned. Futons? Aren't those like croutons, only bigger?

Well, rhyme doesn't connote similarity any more than might makes right, and futons have as much to do with croutons as sleds do with sofa beds. Which brings us back to futons. American ingenuity's answer to the traditional sofa bed.

A Japanese futon is a thin cotton mattress to sleep on. In fact, the word futon is Japanese for bedding.

A typical Tokyo morning might find thousands of Japanese rolling up their futons and sticking them in a corner until bed time returns. But intrepid entrepreneurs in this country looked at the futon and saw a mattress, stuffed with opportunity.

They made bigger mattresses, put

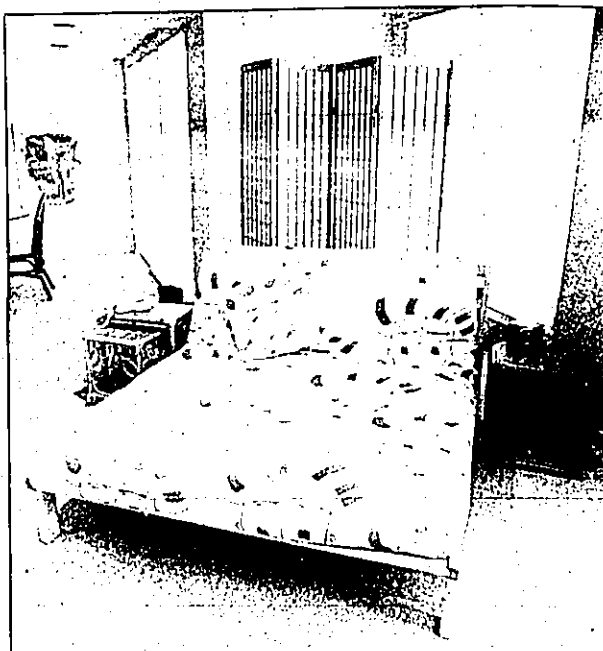
them on handsome wooden frames that converted into beds with the flick of an arm, and made a killing in the furniture market.

FOR MANY years, futons have been popular with college students. Much lighter than traditional sofa beds, the futon frames can be disassembled and transported in the back of a station wagon. It's easy to carry them up narrow staircases and assemble them in a small room.

The same utility make futons ideal for studio apartments and people on tight budgets. As a rule, a futon and a frame cost about half of what traditional sofa beds run.

Troy resident Murphy Callahan bought his queen-size futon from East/West Futons of Novi a year ago and uses it strictly for sleeping. "I broke my back three years ago and I've never slept on a bed that makes my back feel that good," he said. "I'd never go back to a mattress."

Callahan's futon mattress has a foam core that makes it softer and more resilient than strictly cotton




DAN DEAN/staff photographer


West Bloomfield residents Annette and Herb Rosen bought two full-size A-frame futons from East/West Futons of Novi last October. Annette put all-cotton futons on the frames and stuck them in an all-purpose room of her home. "People who have slept on them have said they were comfortable," she said. "I really am pleased with them."

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