

Futons: alternative to traditional sofa bed

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futons. The mattresses also come with wool inserts or with daycote cotton filling. And there's a new one called "soft touch," made of polyester fiber mixed with the cotton to prevent matting.

JOE MULLER, owner of West Coast Futons in West Bloomfield, will have another futon mattress in stock soon with a three-inch convoluted foam core. "It's what I sleep on at home and it's excellent," he said. "That thing is very much like a mattress. It conforms to the curves in your body."

Muller also touts the futon's versatility in that the mattress covers can be taken off and washed. Or if you want to redecorate, you can buy another cover for about \$70. That's impossible with a traditional sofa bed.

"You can drop a pizza on (a futon), take the cover off and wash it," Muller said. "And it's childproof. There are no springs to break, so you can jump on it all you want."

East/West Futons and West Coast Futons carry a bevy of different covers, everything from solid colors to eye-catching designs. They even offer a service whereby customers can order

handpainted covers. "So it lets people be a little creative even if they're not artsy," said Mary Kay Ausum of East/West.

Ausum's brother and business partner, John Heinlen, said some people who had futons in college come into the store and gape at the latest variations. "They've really evolved into a nice piece of furniture that can go in any home," Ausum said.

INDEED, THE frames can be made with pine, poplar, maple, oak, cherry, walnut, ash and more. You can buy futons in sizes from twin-bed up to king size.

Many frames can be bought with any number of different style detachable arms. The A-frame futon frame can be used as a love seat or a chaise lounge and pulled out to bed form in about two seconds.

West Bloomfield resident Annette Rosen bought two full-size, A-frames from East/West last October. She put all-cotton futons on the frames and stuck them in an all-purpose room of the condominium she shares with husband Herb.

"People who have slept on them have said they were comfortable," she said. "I really am pleased with them."

Bloomfield Hills residents Nell and

Walter Hamilton bought a futon sofa for \$700 from West Coast Futons last December. "My wife saw the store and she told me she wanted me to go with her and look around," Hamilton said. "We liked everything we saw in there."

Unlike traditional mattresses, futons won't wear out with age in a few years. "The futon mattress will actually firm up a bit," Heinlen said. "It will not break down, will not become mushy."

THE ALL COTTON futons, in fact, become firmer with time, and some people like it that way.

Muller said he delivered a new frame to a customer and suggested they buy a new futon mattress that wouldn't be as hard as the one they had. "No way," the customer said. "It took me five years to get it that way!"

While some large furniture stores in the area carry a futon or two, Ausum said, the only place one can see a full line of futons are at the futon-only stores.

Ausum's sister, Nancy, runs another East/West store in Royal Oak. Altogether, as far as Ausum, Heinlen and Muller know, they have the only futon stores in the Metro Detroit area.

And business is booming. "The business is growing steadily as people discover what futons are," Ausum said.

Even dogs are getting with the program. Ausum's dog, Spats, sleeps on a small square futon on the floor. "My dog loves her futon," Ausum said. "And it keeps her off our furniture."

MULLER IS perhaps a greater argument for the efficacy of the futon business. As an advertising salesman for WOMC radio, he handled East/West's account.

Muller liked futons so much, and saw that East/West was the only futon store in the area, that he ditched his radio job to open a futon store.

And in an era when many people like to keep their money in the country, futons are a terrific buy, despite their Japanese ancestry. Muller gets his futons from Wisconsin and his frames from Tennessee.

East/West goes one better and buys futons from Third Coast Futons in Kalamazoo, making it possible for buyers to keep their money in the state as well as the country.

"This is a totally American thing," Muller said. "It's not an Oriental thing. Not any more. It's totally different."

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