

Fabulous FURNITURE 2002

Sink into the security of a sofa

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With the unsettling rainbow of warnings that alert us daily to our unsafe world, Americans are staying home more with family. Home brings warm predictability, and sprucing up the nest seems a natural way to seek order and security.

No piece of furniture speaks more to comfort and reassurance than the trusty sofa. And when it's time to re-outfit the living room, family room or great room, the sofa is a great place to start.

Once relegated to the front parlor, perhaps even sheltered in plastic, the sofa is no longer unapproachable. In unpredictable times, the sofa is consistently ready to embrace. But where do you begin? Between fabric, style and frame, a near infinite number of sofa samples exists.

LIFESTYLE

"You need to choose a sofa that will fit your lifestyle," said Lisa Wolfe, an interior designer with Walker Buzenberg Furniture in Plymouth.

Do you have children? Pets? Messy significant others? That will determine how durable a fabric you will need.

How would you characterize your decor? A shabby chic couch will look like an unkempt bed in a more traditional room.

What about color? A sofa that's well-cared for should last at least 10 years, so choose a color you not only like now, but that you'll like a decade from now.

According to Pat Roubie, an interior designer and regional trainer for Ethan Allen, one common mistake that people make when looking for a sofa is to say that they want a certain style.

"They might say they want

shabby chic for the comfort, but don't like the welting and wrinkled effect," she said. In that case, a sofa with crispier and cleaner lines might better suit their style.

Many furniture stores, including Ethan Allen, offer a service where a designer will assess your needs and your home's decor and make suggestions. Oftentimes this service is free, or the fee is subtracted if you buy a sofa.

Kevin Konat, owner of Classic Interiors in Livonia, says the first thing he recommends is that the sofa be comfortable for everyone who will be using it. Then, think about fabric.

"It amazes me that some people spend one to three years to find the style and fabric they want. They're depriving themselves of something because of an exact idea," he said.

But with more than 10,000 fabrics to choose from at his store alone, it's only the most finicky customer who wouldn't find a sofa to please.

SIZE, FABRIC

Size is another consideration — especially since sofas, like fast food, have supersized over the years.

Jean Kim, owner of Up Country in Birmingham, says that a full-size sofa is 90 inches, which is a great size in a great room. But if your living space is a bit more diminutive, then, she says, a condo sofa is a good option. It still seats three, but is 80 inches in length.

Kim says regular vacuuming is key to a sofa's longevity, and of course, choosing a durable fabric from the start.

"A very pet-friendly and child-friendly fabric is Sensuede. It is also the most expensive, but it's very durable," she said.

A fabric trend that has been receiving more attention lately



This left arm sofa with chaise by Bernhardt is perfect for any great room. It's stylish and comfortable, yet durable. You'll find it, along with other furnishings to fit your lifestyle, at Walker Buzenberg Furniture in Plymouth.

is upholstery combos, which entails using different fabrics for different sections of the sofa, or using reversible cushions.

Seamus Cassidy, general manager of Jimmie's At Home, which has stores in Birmingham, Novi, Livonia and Shelby Township, says that there's a casual elegance involved in mixing fabrics. Jimmie's At Home sells many designer lines, including Jessica McClintock and Tommy Bahama.

With the McClintock sofas, the customer chooses from 11,000 fabrics to coordinate five fabrics on one sofa. The base is one color, back pillows another, accent pillows yet another fabric, and so forth.

"They all coordinate, and these are overstuffed. When you sit on them, they swallow you up," said Cassidy.

STYLE, PRICE

One trend that Cassidy has also been noticing is the desire to bring the outdoors inside. His store also carries couches that have a tropical wood

frame. If a fabric sofa costs \$1,300, its leather counterpart would be close to \$2,000.

Though sofas obviously have a wide price range depending on make, style, fabric and frame, an average sofa will run about \$2,000.

While there are stores that sell floor models for the customer who need it yesterday, most furniture stores encourage the customer to choose the exact colors and style they want. A typical wait once the order is placed is from six to 10 weeks.

But before you get overwhelmed by choices, do your homework. Do you like a traditional look? Then a sofa with a pleated skirt, an attached back and a rolled arm will probably suit you.

A style popular with the age 25 to 35 crowd is the transitional style. It's not quite contemporary, but more hip than traditional. A sofa in this genre would have no skirt, perhaps show a tapered leg, have a squared-off back and have a flat arm.

Contemporary style is very free-form, is void of pillows for the most part, often has ultra-colorful fabrics, and may mix steel on the legs.

And if you're just not sure what you want, don't be afraid to ask.

Many designers are so familiar with the areas they serve that they know the layouts of houses in subdivisions. They know how to ask the right questions about room size, and, more importantly, can help guide you to the sofa that's right for you.

And when you sink into your new sofa after a long, hard day on the planet Earth, whether it has flat arms, rolled arms or sleek contours may not matter. What does count is that those arms will always be ready to enfold you with a big embrace.

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