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The Home Designer Designed To Last - Furniture Buying 101

By Brandon Neff



Custom furniture designed by Brandon Neff. Photo courtesy of Brandon Neff Design

beneath the fabric.

Terms like eight-way hand-tied springs and kiln-dried hardwood are infinitely more important to your decision than kid-friendly-stain-resistant-fabrics and oil-rubbed-bronze-nail-head-trims. Will buying a sofa, or chair that's built right cost you more? Of course. However, will that piece last longer, maintain its integrity and support over time, and cost you less long-term? Absolutely. Furthermore, It's even more important to furnish high traffic rooms, like family rooms, with better quality furniture, so it will hold up to more wear and tear. In addition, a great frame can be re-upholstered, thereby extending the value of that piece.

Here's what I want you to do: take this column with you on your next shopping trip, and compare the following list to the choices you're considering. Don't be afraid to ask the salesperson to explain how their products are made, and where. If the answer you get is, "I don't know," or "I'll have to check and get back to you," I want you to step away from the showroom and go to your next destination. Now, read on, and digest the basics. Consider this a "CARFAX" for home furnishings.

Eight-way, hand-tied springs. Each coil spring is placed in the seat by hand and tied into place with twine using a series of interlocking knots. Steel coil springs are set within the furniture frame and tied together in eight directions. Each piece of furniture has a unique spring pattern and height to provide just the right degree of comfort.

Kiln dried hardwood. Kiln dried frames are superior because you can be sure about the reduction of the moisture content to a satisfactory level. This drastic reduction in wood's moisture content is important so that the wood doesn't warp or shrink with changes in humidity and temperature.

Double-dowel joints. Double-doweled joints provide extra strength and durability. All corners should be reinforced using corner blocks secured by both glue and screws. Additionally, look for mortise and tenon joinery as an option to double-dowels. These supply superior strength to the frame.

Sinuous springs. These are heavy-gauge steel springs that have been heat-formed into continuous "S" shapes. They are cut into lengths and affixed to the frame. Look for these primarily for support to the back. Conversely, drop-in springs are mass-manufactured, welded units that are more cheaply manufactured and considered to be of lower quality than sinuous springs.

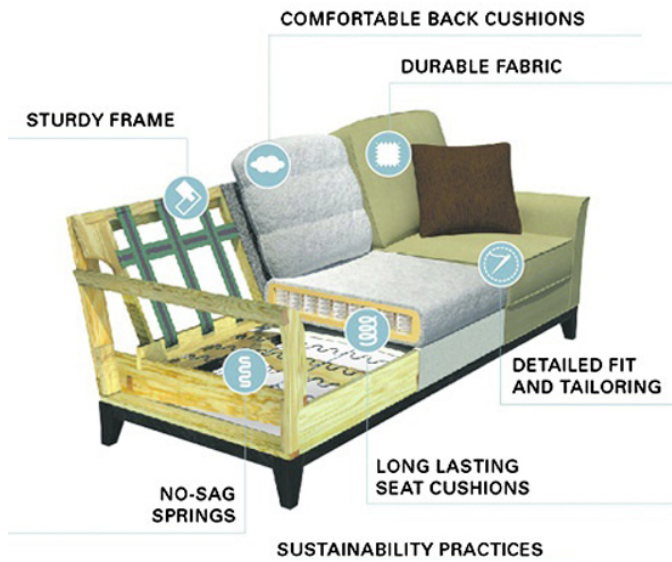
I always encourage my clients to buy the very best they can. Building a furniture collection can take time, and you want to do it purposefully and with an eye toward quality. Remember, your home is your sanctuary - furnish it wisely.

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Yes, Virginia, there is a better sofa - or chair for that matter. When shopping for upholstered furniture you truly get what you pay for. And, in this era of eco-friendly, sustainable and value-conscience purchasing nothing fits that model more than well-built home furnishings. It seems nothing is made to last these days.

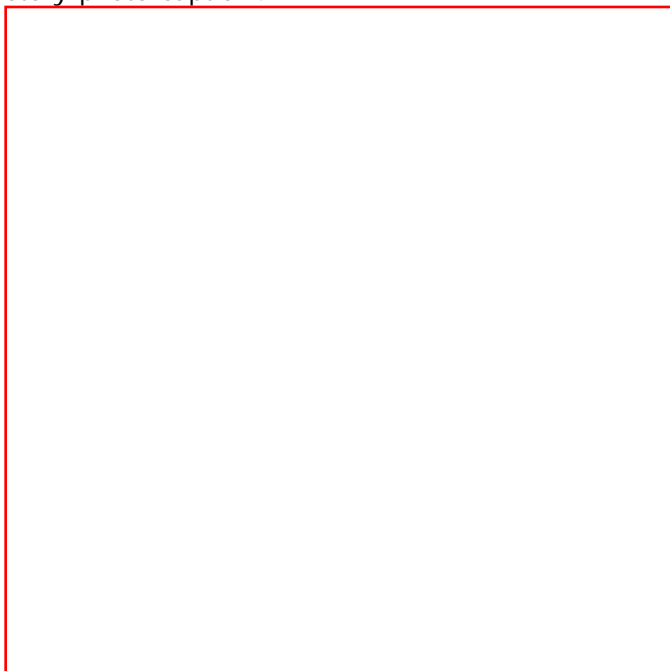
My family has had furniture pieces handed down over generations that still look and work beautifully today. I seriously doubt you'd be able to hand down half of the stuff I see being offered up from those self-help big box stores, and that sad furniture you purchase next to the oversized detergents and tube socks. Well, maybe you could hand down what's left of them. Truly, something that endures and performs well, year after year, is the definition of value. So, before you click "add to cart," on that economy furniture website you're surfing, step away from the computer and take a few notes - knowing what you're buying, and why, will make your decision a lot easier.

For starters, quality has nothing to do with the fabric a piece is upholstered in - looking under the hood is the key. Most consumers get sidetracked by the color and texture of furniture rather than taking the time to find out what lies



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