

Leather upholstery buying guide: Helpful hints for your shopping trip

Leather upholstery is now more affordable than ever. Now most people can afford leather whether it is in a high-style contemporary design or an elegant, Old World form. This guide will help you figure out what you want in your leather sofa.

Underneath it all

Let's face it, the main difference between leather upholstery and regular upholstery is that it is covered in leather, not fabric. Therefore, the foundations of a well-built frame and a sturdy seating support system still apply. See our Sofa Buying Guide for a complete checklist of what to look for underneath it all.

Cushions

Like the frame, when it comes to the cushions of leather upholstery, many of the options that are available in fabric upholstery apply. (See our Sofa Buying Guide for a complete checklist of what to look for in cushions.) The best-selling leather upholstery features high density foam cushions, but blendown and spring-down are also available and are becoming more prevalent in the market.

Hides

The advantages of leather upholstery are that it is strong, yet soft. It doesn't tear, burn or puncture easily. Leather upholstery breaths, therefore it doesn't get cold and moist in the winter or hot and sticky in the summer. When you shop for leather upholstery, expect to find a wide array of styles and colors. No matter the styling, the leather should be soft, supple and comfortable to sit on.

The hides used in construction are what distinguish leather upholstery. Many different terms are used to describe the leather preparation processes. Definitions of some of the options available in leather upholstery appear below.

aniline leather

a translucent dye applied to leather in vats. The translucent quality allows the grain to show through, but it can also show imperfections, therefore only the best quality hides are used for this process. May also be referred to as true aniline, naked aniline, pure aniline, naked leather, unprotected leather, or natural leather.

LEATHER UPHOLSTERY SHOPPING CHECKLIST

Frame

- Kiln-Dried Hardwood

Seating Support

- Eight-Way Hand-Tied Springs
- Sinuous Springs
- Web Support

Cushions

- Down and Feathers
- High-Density Foam
- Spring Down

Hide

- Full Grain
- Top Grain
- Aniline
- Bi-Cast
- Split Leather
- Leather Match

Scale – Room Dimensions

- ___ Feet ___ Inches by
___ Feet ___ Inches

bi-cast	split leather with a polyurethane coating that gives it a high sheen and increases durability.
corrected grain leather	leather that has been buffed and coated with pigments or other finishes to hide imperfections. Also known as protected leather.
full grain leather	leather that has not been altered beyond hair removal.
leather match	furniture upholstered with a combination of leather and vinyl. The vinyl is dyed to match the leather and is typically used on the sides and back. Leather is reserved for the cushions or "everywhere the body touches."
pigmented leather	leather with coloration applied to the top surface, as opposed to dyed. This process hides imperfections and adds durability.
pull-up leather	full grain leather that is treated with oil or wax so that it develops an aged patina over time. More common on traditional styles, it is also known as oiled or waxed leather.
semi-aniline leather	aniline dyed leather with a layer of matching pigment added to improve color consistency and add protection.
split leather	the lower layers of a hide that are removed to create a uniform thickness on a top grain hide. These lower layers are also processed and treated with a protective sealant for use in upholstery.
top grain	leather with the outermost layers of the hide left in tact. Generally considered high quality.
vegetable tanning	the process of making leather using tannins obtained from bark, wood, or other plants and trees.

Scale

Before you even start looking at a new sofa you should take the time to measure the room where it will be placed. You should also take the time to measure any hallways, doorways or stairs that the sofa will have to travel through to be placed in the room, especially if there are odd turns and angles along the way. The best advice is to [create a floor plan](#) to get an idea of how the sofa will work with the rest of the furnishings in the room. Take the floor plan with you when you go furniture shopping to give sales associates an idea of what you are looking for.

You should also consider how a sofa fits your body frame and those of your guests. A low-to-the-ground frame might be difficult for some individuals to stand up from. A sofa with a deep seat may leave a petite person with their feet dangling several inches above the floor. Consider the overall atmosphere of the room that the sofa will be in, and the room's function. If you'll sit on the sofa to watch movie marathons, then you might choose a deeply cushioned sofa that encourages lounging. If the sofa will be placed in a more formal room that is used primarily for entertaining, then a sofa that sits more upright would be the right choice.

Styling

There is a wide variety of choices available in leather upholstery. Traditional to modern styles, and everything in between are available in all price ranges. If you don't find exactly what you are looking for, ask about custom order. Quality furniture retailers can help you select the right combination of styling, construction and leather quality for your budget and décor. See our sofa buying guide for a list of different sofa style elements that can help you name what you want in a sofa.

Leather and Fabric – the Best of Both Worlds

Several home furnishings trend setters are taking a new direction in upholstery by combining leather and fabric on the same piece. This combination is happening in both contemporary and traditional styles. On traditional styles you may see rich brocades and velvets combined with leather and finished with a nail head trim. In contemporary styles the sheen of bi-cast leather contrasts with soft microfiber fabrics that look and feel like suede.

Leather Protection

When you buy something you love, you want to protect it. We buy upholstery to live with and sometimes life gets messy and sometimes accidents happen. That's where a protection plan like Protection First comes into the picture. Think of it as insurance against life's little mishaps, spots and spills or other mishaps.