



The good sofa guide

Why our sofas and chairs are different.

When people are looking to purchase a new piece of furniture, they are often understandably confused as to what they should look for to ensure that it is of good quality and built to last.

With sofas and chairs this is made even more difficult because you cannot see inside and examine how it has been made.

We hope this guide will help you decide if a piece of furniture is of good quality, built to last and is good value for money.

The frame

The majority of upholstery sold in the UK is now imported from Eastern Europe, China and the Far East. Virtually all are made on a chipboard frame, which has been stapled together to meet the low price demands of the mass-market retail trade.

If you want a sofa or chair to last more than a few years you need to have 100% hardwood frame (Beech, Birch, Maple are most commonly used hardwoods). Most manufacturers using this type of frame will be able to give some kind of guarantee on the frame.

Our skilled frame makers manufacture frames in our own wood mill. We purchase beech or birch hardwoods from renewable sources, locally where we can, or from certified supplies in Canada, Scandinavia or the Baltic States. All frames are constructed using traditional methods of glued, screwed and dowelled joints and are deliberately over engineered to ensure that they are virtually indestructible. All our frames are guaranteed for fifteen years.

If you want to find out if frames is made of hardwood or not, try lifting the sofa. A hardwood frame will be fairly heavy to lift. If it is easy to lift it will most likely be a chipboard frame.

Springs

All our sofas and chairs have some form of steel springs in the seat. We do not use rubber, elastic or polypropylene webbing in the seat which is typically used in lower quality upholstery. Elasticated webbing is perfectly acceptable in the back of a sofa, which has loose back cushions, but metal springs should be used in seats and fixed backs if you want it to last.

At Wood Made Good, we use various types of metal springs. The type of spring system our designers select is dependant on the design itself and whether or not the sofa or chair should have a soft or firm seat. If a soft seat is required, we will use a coil spring unit. This type of spring system is commonly used in our more traditional models. A heavy gauge tempered steel spring is used if a firm or very firm seat is desired and is typically used in our more contemporary models. We give the same fifteen year guarantee to the springs as we do on our frames.

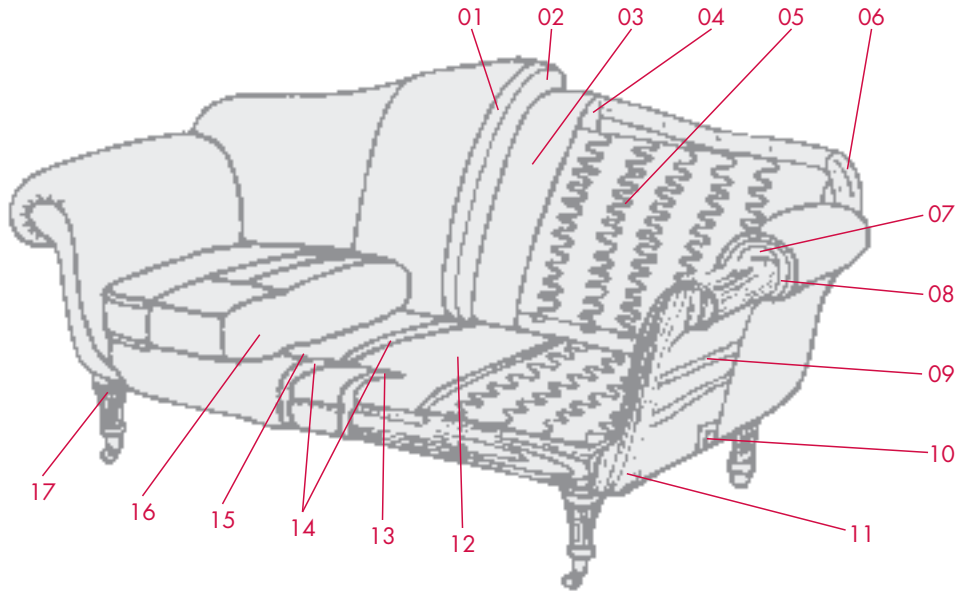
To find out whether a seat has metal springs or webbing, press the seat half way under the cushion. If it springs back it will be a metal spring. If it feels soft and soggy it is likely to be some sort of webbing.

Fillings and cushions

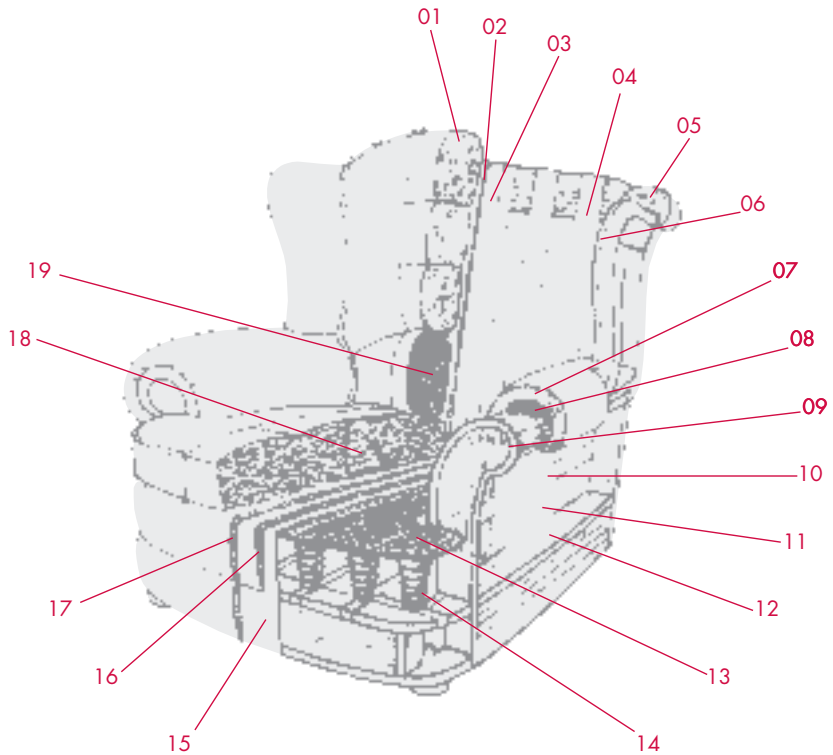
A good quality sofa or chair will be completely padded and insulated with high resilient materials such as polyester foam, felt, cotton wadding and Dacron fibre.

Usually on a low quality sofa you will be able to feel the frame when you press down on the arms or the back of the sofa. This is because they have used low quality fillings and in certain cases, cardboard or nothing at all. At Wood Made Good we use fire retardant fillings and cushions supplied by two of the UK's leading manufacturers of high resilient foams and fibres. We can offer our customers a choice of seat and back cushions dependant on the type of comfort they require:

Ingredients of a good sofa or chair.



01 25mm soft foam, 02 50mm firm foam, 03 Hessian canvas, 04 Triangular foam, 05 Tempered steel no-sag sprigs, 06 Hardwood frame fastened with dowels, screws and glue, 07 38mm high density hard foam, 08 Two layers of 25mm firm foam, 09 Elastic webs to support inside arms, 10 Fibre board and 6mm foam to support lower outside arm, 11 Rubber edge roll, 12 Hessian canvas, 13 Two layers of cotton wadding to soften seat above rail, 14 25mm firm foam, 15 Hand stitched indent, 16 Polyester fibre stuffing contained in compartments of interior cover, 17 Solid beech leg with brass castor



01 Soft feathers in top of back cushions, 02 Layer of foam, 03 Hessian canvas, 04 Elastic webs, 05 Firm foam, 06 Edge roll, 07 Firm foam, 08 Hard foam, 09 Edge roll, 10 Elastic webs, 11 Hessian canvas, 12 Hardwood frame dowelled, glued and screwed, 13 Wire mesh on spring unit, 14 Coil springs (18 springs in chair seat), 15 Hessian canvas, 16 Layer of felt, 17 Layer of foam, 18 Seat cushion filled with a feather and fibre mix, 19 Firm fibre in lumbar

Duck Feather: Probably the most traditional filling available. The cushion is used on top of a coil spring to give a soft luxurious seat. Feathers will flatten each time they are sat on and will require a daily 'plumping' up, to keep your furniture looking its best.

Polyester Fibre: Dacron hollow fibre, Quolofill and Wellman etc. are all polyester fibres used to manufacture good quality cushion interiors. Air is trapped inside the fibre and gives a medium seat but with the added benefit of recovering most of its shape after it is sat on.

Feather and fibre mix: This type of cushion combines the soft luxurious properties of feather, with the recovery of shape of polyester fibre. Both polyester fibre and feather and fibre mix cushions require regular plumping to maintain their performance and shape. Continual sitting, without plumping the cushion, will cause the fibre to flatten and not recover its shape.

Polyester Foam: If you are looking for your furniture to look neat and tidy even after it is sat upon, you should choose this type of cushion. These new generation high resilient foams recover 100% of their shape and require very little maintenance. We offer different grades of foam from very soft to very firm and we give a five year guarantee on this type of cushion.

Fire protection

The latest furniture and fire regulations were introduced in the UK in 1998. Since that year, all upholstery sold in this country should contain fillings that have been tested and pass these regulations. At Wood Made our sofa workshops keep documentary evidence from our suppliers that all of our fillings meet this standard. It is believed that a high level of imported upholstery sold in the UK does not meet these regulations. Recently, Trading Standards reported an increase in the amount of non compliant upholstery sold in the UK and claimed that as much as 50% of furniture imported from Poland would fail the regulatory tests for fire resistance. Unfortunately, Customs and Excise are unable to stop

this dangerous upholstery coming into the country because of European legislation, which allows the free movement of goods within the EU. To ensure that the fillings in a sofa or chair are fully compliant, the manufacturer or importer should be able to provide test certificates to prove it.

Fabrics

The fabric is usually the main feature of the sofa or chair and what attracts customers to that piece in the first place. However, not all fabrics will last more than just a few years.

In recent years the industry has tried to guide customers on the durability of fabrics in a similar way to the carpet industry. This is done through an abrasion resistance test known as the Martindale Rub Test (BS EN ISO 12947). In short, a fabric is rubbed until two threads are broken, or in the case of pile fabrics, when the pile has completely worn off. To be suitable for use on upholstery, British Standards recommend fabric has passed a minimum of 15,000 cycles. At Wood made Good we would regard this as suitable for light or careful domestic use and would only recommend fabrics for general domestic use if the fabric reaches a minimum of 25,000 cycles. For heavy domestic use or contract use, a fabric should be capable of over 40,000 cycles.

Fabrics must also pass the Furniture and Furnishings Fire Regulations (BS 5852 Part 1) for cigarette and match resistance, or be capable of use in conjunction with a Fire Rated interliner that meets the regulatory standard of 'Ignition Source 5'. In addition to its durability and 'FR' rating, a fabric should also have good resistance to natural light and colourfastness.

At Wood Made Good, we believe that we have probably one of the largest ranges of fabrics available anywhere, running into several thousands of fabrics and colours. Unlike some manufacturers, we do not restrict your fabric choice. Our workforce has skills to pattern match and manufacture our entire sofa and chair designs in virtually any fabric.

Leather

Nearly all leather furniture sold in the large discount stores is imported. Leather has gone from being a high value premium product, to becoming a mass produced commodity, manufactured mainly in China and Eastern Europe. The large stores now compete with each other to see who can sell leather sofas at the cheapest possible price. This is not without its problems; a recent BBC 'Watchdog' programme feature reported on imported Chinese sofas that were being retailed in the UK that were giving customers a highly irritating rash – this was probably caused by the chemical process to make the reconstituted leather covering the sofa (see below).

Although some sofas are often sold as “leather” they are often a combination of leather and vinyl, reconstituted leather or spilt leather (a skin is peeled and split to give two skins instead of one). It is easy to recognise the difference in quality between real leather and reconstituted leather.

One of the main reasons why the importers have flooded in to the market is that genuine leather is one of the few sofa coverings that has a natural resistance to fire and will often pass the fire tests without treatment. This they believe enables them to buy a product at low cost and avoid the problems of the UK fire regulations. Some importers are so ignorant of the legislation that they also believe that they do not have to use compliant fillings because the leather passes the tests. They are wrong. Not all leather will pass the tests (particularly reconstituted, split or grain corrected leather) and even if it does the law says that you must use fillings which also comply. If you are tempted to buy one of these sofas or chairs, you will be well advised to see test certificates first, not only for the leather, but also for the fillings used to make it.

Real leather is a natural product. It breaths, is warm to the touch and has individual characteristics, which can make each hide unique. Leather will always bear marks of its natural origin and these characteristics can show as healed

scars, growth marks, areas of differing fibre density and hair pore structure. These hallmarks in no way detract from the wearing qualities of the leather. They are signs discerning owners cherish when buying leather. With the passing of the time and use, it develops a patina or pattern that enhances its beauty.

At Wood Made Good, we only use full thickness, cowhides with as natural finish as possible. With care and attention, one of our leather sofas should last a lifetime. We use three main types of upholstery leather, from carefully selected suppliers and tanneries:

Aniline: Soft and unique, this type of leather is only made from the very best quality hides and is 100% dyed through the entire thickness. With this process in mind, no two hides are exactly the same and the texture dye and finish penetrations will differ. Every effort is made to achieve exactly the same finished hide, however some variation in colour may occur. The surface of the leather is also untouched showing all of its natural characteristics, with grain variation, scars and natural markings clearly visible. Aniline leather has only a light protective coating of transparent pigment and is the least durable of all the leather types. Aniline leather should be treated with care in domestic environments.

Semi-Aniline: This type of leather is made using good quality hides and is also 100% dyed through the entire thickness. As aniline leather, no two hides are exactly the same and the texture dye and finish penetrations will differ. Every effort is made to achieve exactly the same finished hide, however some variation in colour may occur. The surface of the leather will usually show fewer natural characteristics, however, some will still be visible. Semi-aniline hides have a light surface coating applied to the leather after dyeing to make it more durable than aniline leather and more suitable for domestic environments.

Pigmented/Corrected: This type of leather is the most commonly used upholstery leather due its durability. Corrected grain leather has all the strength of a full

grain leather but has had a portion of its grain layer removed in order to increase its usable area. Hides are usually corrected by buffing the outer surface of the leather grain to remove most of its natural characteristics before being given a coating of a colour and an embossed finish. Corrected grain hides are normally uniform in appearance and are very hard wearing, making them more suitable for heavy domestic environments.

Manufacturing

The majority of upholstery now sold in the UK is mass-produced. Fabrics and leather are cut in piles with automated cutting machines and upholstery is carried out on a flow-line or track system. Therefore, no operative is responsible for the final quality of the build except an inspector at the end of the line.

Here at Wood Made Good, every stage of production is conducted by one person.

Skilled wood machinists mill the frame parts before an experienced frame maker builds the hardwood frame. Skilled cutters cut the fabrics by hand, avoiding weaving and printing faults and ensuring that patterns are fully matched, before it is sewn by one of our skilled machinists. One upholsterer then makes the whole piece from start to finish and is responsible for its quality and finish. However, we also have product inspectors and it is their responsibility to ensure that every piece we make is as good as any sofa or chair that can be manufactured anywhere in the world.

Bespoke furniture

Every piece of furniture we make is made to order. The majority are made to our standard sizes, but with the vast number of fabric and cushion choices, it really is bespoke furniture. On some occasions, customers may have very limited space or a very large room to fill. If required, we can alter all of our furniture for length and alter the depth on a large proportion of our models for an additional charge.

After sales service

Complaints on furniture and in particular leather furniture to the Office of Fair Trading and Trading Standards have rocketed in the past five years. The main reason is the importation of low quality sofas and chairs and the enormous amount of damage caused by its transportation. It is quite common for customers to wait several weeks for delivery of their new furniture only for it to arrive damaged or just badly made. The problem for the retailer is then what does he do? It is virtually impossible to acquire spare parts to repair any damage, so they usually resort to offering a discount to the customer to keep the damaged piece. But who wants a new sofa with a rip in it? It is well known that there are warehouses full of damaged furniture around the country, which nobody wants.

Customer complaints at Wood Made Good are rare due to the high quality of our production. We therefore, do not have a customer service department. If a complaint is received it will be dealt with immediately by one of the directors of the company.

Accidents do happen in the home and sofas can get damaged through staining, cigarette burns etc. if this happens to one of our sofas or chairs you will usually be able to get a part re-upholstered or a damaged cushion panel replaced at a reasonable cost. We can also replace your cushion interiors after they are past their best, to prolong the life of your favourite sofa or chair. Very few retailers will even respond to a similar request even a few months after delivery because they are simply unable to supply spare parts and a renovation service on imported furniture.

We are proud of our service and quality – it's what makes us different.



No ordinary furniture

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