

Smart shopper SOFAS

A new sofa is a big-ticket purchase, so it pays to look beyond aesthetics to what lies beneath: construction, fabric and filling, writes *Georgia Madden*.

The sofa is arguably the hardest-working piece of furniture in your home because it can be so many things: a spot to relax, to eat dinner, to accommodate an overnight guest or even a place to work. It can also be one of the most expensive, so you need to know that the sofa you buy is not just good-looking and comfortable but will last the distance.

Buy the best you can afford, says Melissa Bonney, director at Sydney interiors firm The Designory. “With sofas, you get what you pay for,” she says. “If you want a style that will stand the test of time and look great for years, expect to pay more for it.” Shannon Baker, interior designer at Max Sparrow, concurs: “When you consider the cost per use, a slightly more expensive sofa seems good value, given the hard work it does to support and keep you comfortable day after day.”

You’ll find something for everyone among the latest raft of designs, says Tanya Rechberger, lead designer at King Living. “This year, we’re seeing a mix of profiles, with both robust, heavier profiles and slimmer silhouettes trending. We can also



LEATHER LOVE

If you’re in the market for a leather sofa, these are the things to assess in-store, according to Dana Skornicki of Natuzzi Italia:

- ✦ Make sure the sofa is made from genuine, full-grain leather.
- ✦ Ask if it is quality-certified and tested for stain resistance.
- ✦ Find out where it is made. Leather produced in the Northern Hemisphere is considered the best.
- ✦ A genuine leather sofa should be made from a whole piece of leather or large pieces, not reconstituted or patchwork pieces.
- ✦ Check the leather has a good ‘hand’ and feels soft and supple to the touch.
- ✦ Don’t be put off by natural markings on the leather – they’re a sign of quality.

expect to see a shift towards a more relaxed, casual aesthetic.” Organic lines are taking over from the sharp, tailored styles of the past couple of years, says Baker: “We’re seeing soft curves in rich tones, such as petrol blue and deep teal, which ooze elegance and sophistication.”

Many new designs take their cues from the past, says Bonney. “There’s a revival of vintage-inspired shapes and textural fabrics such as velvet.” And don’t toss out your grandparents’ sofa just yet; floral and tartan-patterned sofas are making a comeback, says Christine Gough, interior design leader at Ikea Australia. Leather is having a moment, too, says Bonney, particularly luxe textures such as suede (the underside of the skin). According to Dana Skornicki, Pacific sales and product director at Natuzzi Italia, trending leather hues are topaz blue, jade green and grey.

With more people moving to smaller homes, clever, compact sofas are on the rise, says Jo Mawhinney, director of product, brand and experience at Living Edge. “One of the biggest European trends filtering through right now is light-footed sofas with slender legs and seating raised above floor level, making the sofa appear less dominant in a small living room.” Some feature adjustable armrests and ▶

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT
 Kristalia ‘Tenso’ **3-seater sofa** with linen-cotton upholstery, \$9990, Fanuli. Cassina ‘Bow’ fabric **4-seater sofa**, from \$19,240, Space. Jeremy leather **3-seater sofa**, \$6670, Natuzzi Italia. Jasper II ‘Package 1A’ Smart **4-seater sofa** with polyester upholstery, from \$10,189 (Carrara marble tray table \$520 extra), King Living. Copenhagen **5-seater sofa** with polyester upholstery, \$2899, Freedom. Orson fabric **4-seater sofa**, \$2199, Harvey Norman. **OPPOSITE** Ligne Roset ‘Cover 1’ leather **2-seater sofa**, \$16,375, Domo.



SIZE WISE



Choosing a sofa with the right proportions to fit the scale of your room is crucial, says Melbourne interior designer Frances Cosway of White Pebble Interiors:

- ✦ If a sofa is too small, a room can look cramped; too big and it can get lost in the space.
- ✦ Measure the floor space and other furnishings in the room before choosing a sofa to ensure you'll have enough room to move around comfortably.
- ✦ Leave 50-70cm between the sofa and other furniture, such as the coffee table, and about 1m between the sofa and dining chairs or stools.
- ✦ To help visualise how a new sofa will look, mark out its size on the floor with masking tape.
- ✦ When measuring up, be sure to leave a little room between the wall and sofa to create a feeling of space.

backs, she says, so you can adapt the sofa for different uses, whether it's watching television, sleeping or working.

Sofa design has kept pace with the evolution of the modern living room in other ways, too, says Rechberger. "We have been offering storage solutions and shelving in some of our sofas for many years, but recent advances such as wireless phone charging have only been possible in the last few years as mobile technology advances. We are particularly interested in ensuring the technology is upgradeable so that your sofa can last a lifetime," she explains. Another key trend, according to Stewart Burke, product and marketing manager at Harvey Norman, is for dedicated home-theatre sofas that come loaded with all the mod cons: "Think powered recliners, lighting, charging stations and storage."

When choosing a sofa, allow plenty of time to sit on it so you can make sure it's comfortable, advises Jane Novembre, marketing director at Domo. "The three things to assess are seat depth, cushion type, and arm and back height," says Christine Found, spokesperson at Sofa & Soul. "Deeper seats are great for lounging and napping, while narrower seats make it easier to stand up."

Also consider how your sofa is made as this will affect its lifespan. According to Novembre, the best-quality frames are made from hardwood or steel. For Rechberger, steel always comes out on top. "A steel frame is the strongest way to construct a sofa, especially one with removable and modular components. If you can feel empty spaces behind the fabric, or there is timber or cardboard directly under a cover, it's a sure sign of a cheap sofa."

For a design you can sink into, you'll need comfortable cushions. "The ultimate cushions combine premium, high-resilience foam with a plush feather or down wrap," says Anna McRae, brand and creative director at Molmic. When it comes to the upholstery fabric, look for one with a high rub rating and good light resistance so it won't fade or wear prematurely, advises Novembre.

And before handing over your credit card, make sure you've measured up properly, advises Found. "As well as measuring the room itself, measure the doorway, the lift it might travel in and any access points. The last thing you want is to discover you can't get your new sofa through the front door." **H&G**



FROM TOP Alex fabric and rattan loveseat, \$1120, and 2-seater sofa, \$2230, Cotswold Furniture. Allana fabric 3-seater sofa with chaise, \$1999, Amart Furniture. Monti leather 2.5-seater sofa, \$6069, King Living. Camille linen 3-seater sofa, \$2699, Provincial Home Living. *For Where to Buy, see page 190.*

