

What Leather to Buy or What NOT to Buy

Written by Chris Repp

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Here is a guest article from our friend in Spain, Lee Bryan of www.colorcare.eu.

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What to buy or what not to buy, that is the question!

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Don't get caught out by the spotty sales assistant!

The most common problem that consumers have when considering leather items is their complete lack of knowledge when it comes to the actual 'types' of leather and their durability and how they 'fit' their needs. To confuse matters even more they are often dealing with a 'commission only' salesperson, who is in the business of selling furniture not understanding leather or their needs.

Understanding leather is not just about knowing the individual names (protected/corrected, aniline, semi-aniline, nubuck, suede, bicast, and so on) of leather types, but also how the

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leather will wear, will it fade, is it good with children and/or pets, how its processed, how much maintenance it requires, how will it feel in the cold weather, or warm weather, the list goes on!

Very few people know that when a hide is first tanned it is actually quite thick. In order to get a thinner, softer hide, the original hide is split into 2 or 3 mirror hides. The first or top piece is the top grain hide and the only piece that has any strength. All the strength of the skin is in the out layer. The under skins are called split's and have limited use and little strength.

Understanding how your leather will perform is very important when you are selecting furniture.

For example, ANILINE leather's are very porous and delicate and do not perform in everyday use as well as protected leather.

If you have children, pets or a husband who likes to put his feet up, then an ANILINE leather sofa is definitely not for you.

Being porous the ANILINE will absorb dirt, oils and grime and these will eventually block the pores of the hide and ruin the feel and finish.

It is also susceptible to fading, even with indirect sunlight the colour can change dramatically.

The low durability factor means that basically it cannot be cleaned. It will also mark and stain rather easily. An easy way to determine if leather is too delicate is to take your fingernail and run it across the leather and see if it leaves a trace mark.

Protected/Corrected leather is the ROCKY BALBOA of the leather world!

PROTECTED/CORRECTED grain leather is the leather that will give you the look and the durability that 99% of us want. This type of leather is taken from the middle section of the hide and then has a coloured topcoat spray applied, followed by a grain pressed into it.

This process sound extremely un-natural and could put people off of buying this type of leather, but the fact remains that 99% of leather on the market is protected/corrected grain!

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Everything from automotive leather, to regular sofas, boat and plane interiors have protected leather in them.

It is very soft, but also very durable and good quality PROTECTED leather can often feel as good as ANILINE leather, but with more than 10 times the durability.

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Now for the rubbish that's out there on the market!

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In many countries, the use of the term 'leather' is illegal when used in conjunction with these 'products'. Firstly we have BICAST and followed by RECONSTITUTED LEATHER.

BICAST is a relative newcomer to the furniture industry and is either 'made' up of splits or reconstituted leather which then has a polyurethane (PU) coating bonded to them, using rubberised glue. These tend to have a high gloss finish and are either in an antique dark brown, black or cream and have an almost military grain pattern. You will actually be able to 'stretch' BICAST between your fingers, not unlike chamois leather.

It has virtually no strength and will likely fail within 12 months.