

BUYING WOOD FURNITURE

Since furniture is such a major investment, you need to know how to get the most value for your money.

Furniture is classified into two groups: **case goods** which are wooden pieces such as cabinets, tables and chairs and **upholstered**. This fact sheet will cover case goods furniture. To learn about upholstered furniture, ask your Extension office for the upholstered furniture fact sheet.

Terms To Know

Genuine: When this term is used, such as "Genuine Walnut", all exposed parts of the furniture must be walnut.

Grouping This is a collection of furniture pieces which complement each other.

Hard Wood: Sturdy woods such as oak, ash, maple, birch, walnut, cherry, pecan and hickory have distinctive grain patterns and may be finished in their natural color. Mahogany is an imported hard wood.

Soft Wood: Pine and cedar are not usually found in "fine" furniture because they are easily dented and scratched and don't have as attractive a wood grain. Furniture made of these woods is often found in unfinished furniture stores.

Suite: This refers to matching furniture items intended for use in a particular room.

Veneer: This is a decorative finish found in all price ranges. It is a wood "sandwich" of five or seven layers bonded together and is stronger than the same type of solid wood. Wood veneers can't split or crack through, although very thin veneers can chip and be difficult to repair. Plastic veneers are photographs of wood. They are durable but hard to repair.

Construction Of Cabinets, Dressers And Hutches

- ◆ Drawers should have dovetailed joints; plywood bottoms fitted into grooved sides, fronts and backs; and barriers between drawers to prevent dust infiltration.
- ◆ Drawer interiors should be satin-smooth, with hardwood or metal centers or side drawer slides.
- ◆ Particleboard or plywood, covered with a veneer of natural-wood grain, often replaces solid wood for side construction in cabinets because thinly sliced wood tends to crack and warp.
- ◆ Sides should be $\frac{3}{4}$ " thick; plywood backs should be $\frac{1}{4}$ " thick and glued and screwed together.
- ◆ When appropriate, the piece should have built-in levelers to compensate for an uneven floor.
- ◆ Display lights in cabinets and hutches should have switches that are easily accessible.
- ◆ The hardware on all cabinets, dressers and hutches should be smooth, made of solid brass and not easily removed.
- ◆ Backs of quality furniture will be fastened with screws, not stapled on.
- ◆ All doors should line up, opening and closing properly. If they are recessed, they should be flush with the frame. If doors are surface-mounted, there should be no gaps.

Tables

- ◆ For stability, tables should rely on corner-blocks for strength and lag bolts that secure the legs onto the frame.
- ◆ Tabletops should be constructed either from solid wood or from veneer over several layers of plywood, bonded at right angles.
- ◆ If your tables will get heavy use, choose those with plastic-laminated tops.

Sources

- ◆ Side rails should blend well into the top of the table.
- ◆ Table sections should fit snugly together, with or without leaves in place.
- ◆ Slides on extension tables should operate smoothly.

Chairs

- ◆ Need diagonal corner blocks with lag bolts that go into the back posts to give strength.
- ◆ Decorative details add to the value of a piece if the rest of the construction is good.

Finishes

- ◆ There are four basic wood furniture finishes: oil, lacquer, high gloss and engraved. Whichever type you select, look for one that has a smooth finish, with no streaks and no excess finish in the corners. Make sure that matching pieces really "match" and that the finish is the same on each piece.

"In Store" Check For Quality

- ◆ Always check the label to see type of wood used, man-made components, care instructions and guarantee.
- ◆ Sit on the chairs. They should feel comfortable, sturdy, well balanced and not wobble or creak.
- ◆ Try to rock tables and chests from side to side. They should feel sturdy and not be easily overturned.
- ◆ Operate all moving parts. Be sure they work smoothly and easily.

Before Signing On The Dotted Line

- ◆ Ask the salesperson about delivery and set up charges. Ask how any delivery damage will be handled.
- ◆ Get a definite delivery date.

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