

PRESS RELEASE

Fabulous fabrics

The fabric of an upholstered piece is the most visible sign of quality and style. Anton Odendaal from leading furniture retailer, Rochester, offers a roundup of the most popular upholstery fabrics currently on the market.

22 June 2014, Johannesburg: When attempting to find the right upholstery fabric for their furniture, consumers are likely to wonder which type best suits their needs. Anton Odendaal from leading furniture retailer, Rochester, explains: "When it comes to upholstery, there are numerous natural and synthetic options available in an almost infinite variety of colours, textures and patterns. In order to select an appropriate upholstery fabric, consumers must remember to consider the durability of the fibre, along with design factors such as colour and texture. This approach promises to direct you towards the type of upholstery fabric that will best accommodate your lifestyle needs."

He says that in the current world of upholstery fabric, coatings and backings are the key drivers: "Backing and the weights on the different kinds of fabrics make all the difference with regards to how the upholstery looks, feels and its longevity." Even though there are a wide variety of fabric upholstery choices available, Anton says that he has identified four different types that are currently dominating the market: "Overprinted microfibers, with PU coatings and bonded backings offer the fabric a wonderfully heavy feel, much like leather. Velours and velvets are also coming back in a big way, while AirLeather fabric is increasingly in demand."

Here is an overview on the pros and cons of the top four types of upholstery fabrics:

Microfiber: Microfiber upholstery fabric comprises a selection of tiny fibres that are woven or spun together – hence the term "micro" fibres. The actual filaments are made from several different kinds of synthetic or natural materials, which are all lightweight and boast a downy soft finish that is often likened to suede. "The soft finish belies the supreme strength and sturdiness of this kind of fabric," says Anton.

- **Pros:** Apart from excellent durability, microfiber fabric has many benefits, including the fact that it drapes well, it retains its shape over extended periods of heavy use, boasts incredible colourfast qualities so the colour won't fade over time, and it is resistant to moisture and repels stains. The fabric's inherent stain-resistance is largely due to the fact that the incredibly thin fibres are really tightly woven and naturally repel water and stains.
- **Cons:** There are only a few drawbacks to microfiber fabric – if stains are not treated right away, they can be incredibly difficult to get rid of, the material is prone to water marking, when moisture penetrates the surface of the fibre and causes discoloration, and the fabric has a tendency to be

affected by high levels of static and cling, gripping dust, hairs and other small particles.

Velvet: “Velvet is a sumptuous fabric that's associated with wealth and luxury, even though modern machines have made it more affordable,” explains Anton. Among fabrics, velvet remains on the upper side of the cost spectrum, as it requires more thread and more time to make. Velvet can be made with silk, cotton, rayon and acetate threads. One of the methods used to produce velvet is through a special weaving technique that creates what is referred to as “pile cloth”, because the ends of thread that are sticking up create a soft pile.

- **Pros:** There is nothing quite like the luxurious plush tactile feel of velvet, which is one of this kind of fabric's major draw cards. Best used sparingly for a feature piece, the successful inclusion of velvet-upholstered pieces into a décor scheme has the ability of adding a certain lavish glamour to any space. Soft-to-the-touch and boasting an incredibly plush aesthetic, it can also be used to great effect to add rich and inviting texture to a décor scheme.
- **Cons:** One of the biggest disadvantages of velvet is that it can be difficult to clean, especially if it has been stained. In this instance, it is recommended that you use a heavy-duty steam cleaner to get the stain out, and if that is unsuccessful, to hire a professional to deal with it. Another disadvantage of velvet is that it tends to wear quickly with rough use, and it will quickly fade if left in the sun. It is not a good option for furniture that will be used regularly, and if used in abundance, it has a tendency to make the décor appear on the gaudy side.

Velour: “Velour is similar to velvet in that it boasts a thick, soft nap that gives it a wonderfully inviting luxurious touch. However, unlike velvet, it is a knit, which gives it a certain amount of stretch and elasticity,” notes Anton. Typically manufactured from cotton, velour can also be made from artificial materials, such as polyester for example.

- **Pros:** Velour is plush, easy to maintain and much more affordable, when compared to velvet. It is also more giving than velvet, much easier to maintain, and far more durable, meaning that it is less likely to become damaged and worn through high levels of wear.
- **Cons:** As an upholstery, velour holds very few drawbacks. It can be very flammable, and hence velour upholstery should always be treated with flame-resistant compounds to ensure its safety. Aesthetics are another possible drawback – while some consumers love the faint shimmer inherent in velour that is caused by the nap's fluctuation as it moves and reflects ambient light, others consider it to be a cheap and gaudy imitation of velvet.

AirLeather: “A comparatively newcomer to the market, AirLeather is a fabric that imitates leather – aesthetically, it is very difficult to tell them apart. It boasts all the luxury and comfort of real leather, as well as a host of other benefits as well,” notes Anton. It is manufactured using top-secret advanced nanotechnology.

- **Pros:** AirLeather comes in at a much more affordable price point than genuine leather. Another major benefit is that it is 100% breathable – adapting to the body temperature and keeping you über cool in summer and warm and cosy in winter. It also boasts a very realistic leather-look – successfully achieving the look and texture of real leather. It is heavyweight and highly durable, while remaining super soft and drapable.
- **Cons:** Although it is more affordable, AirLeather is not leather – it isn't as durable, it doesn't boast that genuine leather smell, and its natural patina won't improve with age. AirLeather is durable, but it won't last you a lifetime in the same manner that good quality genuine leather will.

Some buying advice...

Anton advises that when choosing your fabric upholstery, it is essential to consider the long-term economic impact of your choice: “Bear in mind that the only real reason why one couch of a similar size, nature, and construct is less expensive than another, is the choice of upholstery. By cheapening the covering, the same couch can be offered at a much more affordable price point. Although this may save the consumer money at the point of purchase, it will end up costing them more, as the cheaper upholstery just won't offer the same durability when compared to a more expensive option. As a result, it will actually end up costing more, as it will need to be replaced sooner. For this reason, it is always a good idea to invest in quality and buy the best quality upholstery that you can afford.”

He says that when selecting upholstery, it is imperative that you ask the sales person what the rub count is: “I recommend anything equal to or larger than 20 000 for optimum longevity. If the sales person in question can't answer you, then it is better to walk away for the deal all together.” Also, be sure to ask if the upholstery comes with some kind of guarantee – Rochester for example, offers 2- and 1-year guarantees on many of the upholstery covers it offers. Says Anton: “If a retailer is confident enough to guarantee the upholstery, it is a sure sign that they believe in the quality of the product in question, which offers you added peace of mind. Also, remember that the Consumer Protection Act offers an automatic 6-month money-back recourse for any manufacturing defects – so even if the couch in question does not come with a guarantee – you still have some kind of recourse. This doesn't however, apply to self-inflicted damages, soiling and spillages.”

Lastly, Anton says that he always recommends that customers treat their upholstery with some kind of protective treatment, like MasterGuard for example, to ensure added longevity: “MasterGuard's fabric stain protection aids in the prevention of oil- and water-based stains, such as chocolate, milk, orange soda, tomato juice, red wine and coffee, from penetrating into the upholstery and fabrics, guaranteeing ease of cleaning and increasing the lifespan of the upholstery.”

ENDS

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