



## What to look for when you want the best value for your money

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On your pathway to adulthood, there is one milestone that's actually a whole lot of fun: buying furniture. *Real furniture*. But how do you stretch your limited budget? And what should you look for when you choose pieces?

We got some advice from Sean Juneja, co-founder of interior design startup [Décor Aid](#), and NAPO-certified personal organizer Darla DeMorrow of [HeartWork Organizing](#) on how to shop for furniture and get the best value for your budget, no matter what it is. Here's your shopping strategy.

*More: [5 things to look for when buying vintage furniture](#)*

### 1. Examine the piece from top to bottom, front to back

For example, DeMorrow says you'll want to see how the back of a chest of drawers is constructed. "If it's put in with staples, walk the other way" if it's on what's supposed to be a high-end piece. She says she's seen staples on \$800 dressers in big-box stores, so don't assume price equals quality.

"Check the joinery, and make sure it's strong," says Juneja. If you pull open a drawer and see [dovetail construction](#) (interlocking pieces of wood holding two parts together), that's sign of high quality, says DeMorrow. "That is awesome."

For upholstered furniture, Juneja says, "The seams should be straight, not crooked."

## **2. Avoid cheap veneers**

Juneja explains how can you tell a cheap veneer from a quality one. Look closely at the edges where two surfaces meet. "You can see the thickness, and the thicker, the better. Also check the corner flaps. Make sure they meet neatly and cleanly and there is no peeling or curling. Tap it; it should not feel flimsy or hollow."

## **3. Notice how the upholstery textiles look and feel**

Natural fibers and fabrics are preferable, but even high-end pieces have synthetics woven in for durability. Juneja likes a fabric composed of half or less synthetic. "A nice texture looks richer." He adds, "It should feel sturdier, which usually means it is thicker and will hold up. It should feel soft to the touch and good against the skin." He says velvet and tweedy-looking fabrics wear well and look newer for longer.

If you go for synthetic, look for ultra or microsuede. "It doesn't shed, has a very thin pile and is very soft. The thin pile doesn't collect dust like thicker weaves, and they are durable and versatile and available in any color imaginable," Juneja says. He adds that if you have pets or kids, many of the new outdoor fabrics are both durable and look just as good as indoor fabric.

## **4. Look for upholstered furniture that's easy to clean**

"Easy to clean" doesn't have to be synthetic microfiber. DeMorrow says that what's most helpful is removable upholstery. "Look for cushions that come off the couch and have zippers." You'll be able to clean those covers on a gentle cycle in the washing machine or at the dry cleaner rather than hiring someone to come in and professionally clean your furniture.

## **5. Even better, consider slipcovers**

They've come a long way from those loose, sheet-like things people used to tie over their sofas. "It's amazing what you can do with custom slipcovers," DeMorrow says. Quality slipcovers can look just like regular upholstery, but they're removable for easier cleaning.

## **6. Discount stores are a good option... if you manage your expectations**

Juneja says consumers can find replicas of designer pieces at discount stores like Wayfair. "It's a great way to get a high-end-looking piece without a major investment." These pieces should last five to 10 years, depending on your care. And that may be all right. "They are a good resource for people who want to update their space and make it look stylish without spending a lot of money." DeMorrow's daughter had an Ikea dresser that lasted nine years, and for the price, she considers that pretty darn good.

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## **7. Look closely at the floor samples of pieces you're interested in buying**

Make sure it's not banged up, scratched, broken or wobbly. "If it's coming apart in the store, why would you expect it to last in your home?" DeMorrow cautions.

## **8. Consider buying floor samples**

About those floor samples — you can sometimes buy them. If a sample is in great shape and for sale, go for it, advises Juneja. "You can save a lot of money by buying at the end of the season, when stores are

changing over their merchandise to new designs." Ask about any floor samples the store may have in the back as well.

Do examine those floor samples thoroughly, test them, ask how long they were on the floor, and find out if it was ever returned. Make sure there's minimal or no damage and that there aren't any screws or pieces missing. Verify that the price is below the retail price.

### **9. Don't dismiss RTA furniture as "low quality"**

Not all RTA — ready to assemble — furniture is low quality. DeMorrow says it's a great way to save money on quality pieces, especially for tables. You can buy a table with a sturdy, beautiful top with legs you screw in yourself, and all that means is you haven't paid for the furniture company to ship the air around a fully constructed table.

### **10. Consider what the next few years in your life look like**

If you're young and think you may be moving around a bit, this may not be the time to look for heavy, quality, heirloom furniture. It's fine to buy cheaper, lighter pieces.

### **11. Buy your furniture, and *then* paint your walls, not the reverse**

DeMorrow says this is a common mistake. "Paint comes in an infinite number of colors, but the sofa you like is only going to come in two or three colors, unless it's custom," she says. You could fall in love with a sofa or accent pieces that don't work with your wall paint. So give yourself more flexibility. "Have a color direction, go shopping, and make your choices, and then you can adjust your wall colors if necessary."

When it comes to furniture, the better armed you are with a decorator's intel, the better deal you'll get for your money. Now you know what to look for, what questions to ask and what secrets to exploit to nab furniture you'll love.