

Upholstery: Leather



Leather basics help RSAs win with customers

By Erin Berg
Associate Editor
@FTErinBerg

HIGH POINT — Consumer demand for leather upholstery has grown on average 3% over the past three years, and today's more sophisticated consumers have access to a wide range of information at their fingertips.

One disadvantage of having so much information available is that it can confuse the consumer. The retail sales associate (RSA) who is informed and prepared to break through some common misperceptions about leather can increase the opportunities because it gives the salesperson greater confidence and, consequently, the ability to win sales.

FAQ: Why is leather hot/cold?

Leather adapts to the temperature of its environment or what is nearest to it. If ambient temperature is 70 degrees, the leather will feel cool or cold to you because normal body temperature is 98.6 degrees. If the room is 90 degrees, the leather will feel hot. However, the type of leather will affect the amount of time it takes the leather to adapt to the body temperature. For example, pure aniline dyed leather (see Glossary on page 16) will breathe and assume body temperature rapidly.

FAQ: Can I have leather furniture if I have kids/pets?

Leather is very durable and lasts 15 to 20 years compared

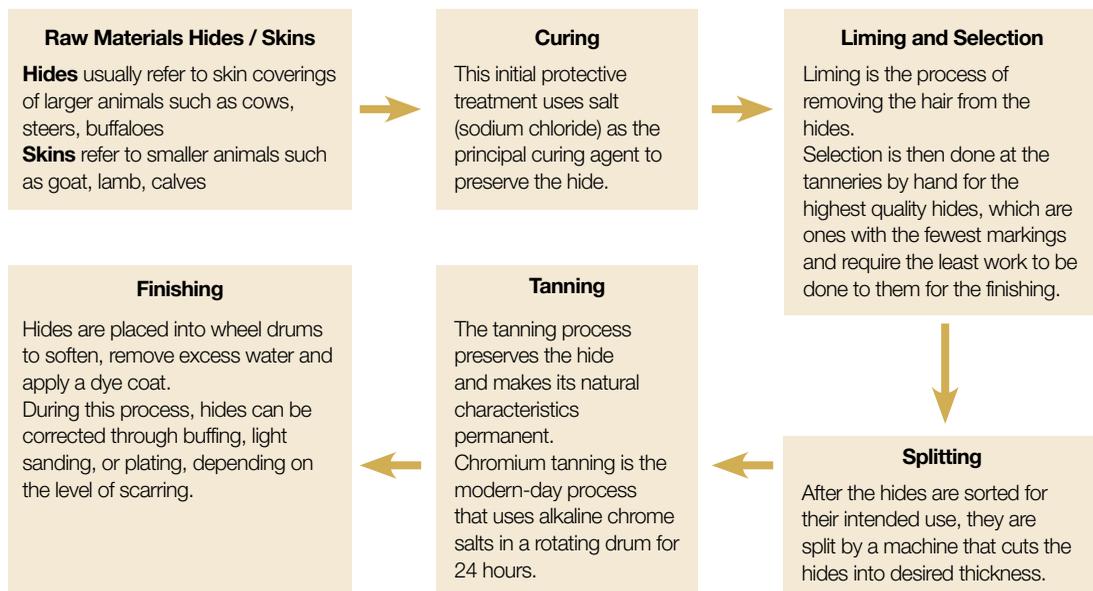
with about five years with fabric. It ages well, and it stretches and retains its shape without sagging. Leather is more resistant to animals than fabric-covered furniture, does not absorb animal odors and cannot be penetrated by animal hair, but it can be damaged by the sharp claws or teeth of dogs and cats.

FAQ: Will leather crack or split?

Direct exposure to sunlight and heat can damage leather ¹⁶

ABOVE: These leathers from Muebletex's highest selections are full aniline finished with wax and oil providing pull-up and showing many of the natural characteristics typical in each individual hide.

What goes into making leather?



Glossary

Aniline – The non-toxic, transparent dye used that allows the characteristics of the hide to remain visible.

Corrected grain – Refers to top grain leather that has been sanded to reduce flaws then pigmented to cover the sanding and printed with an artificial grain.

Drum dyed – The process of immersing leather in dye and tumbling in a rotating drum.

Embossing – Altering the natural grain of the leather by using etching, engraving, plates or rollers to create a uniform grain pattern; embossing can be used for design creation or hiding defects.

Finishing – Term to collectively describe steps or techniques performed after the dyeing treatment, such as rolling, pigmented spraying, lacquering, antiquing, waxing, buffing, glazing, waterproofing and flame-proofing to provide more abrasion and stain resistance and/or more even coloration.

Full grain – Leather that has not been corrected to remove marks or imperfections and includes the entire thickness of the hide.

Grain – The natural or embossed pattern and texture of the hide.

Hand – Term used to describe the softness or feel of the leather.

Hand-antiqued – Also referred to as “hand-rubbed,” it is the process of rubbing a contrasting color on the leather surface to accentuate natural grain or embossing.

Hide – The raw material, usually referring to the skin coverings of larger animals such as cows, steers, horses or buffaloes.

Leather – The term includes all hides and skins that have been tanned.

Liming – The process of chemically removing hair from the raw hide.

Machine-antiqued – Application by machine of a darker color over a lighter one to create dramatic highlights.

Naked leather (or pure aniline) – Any leather that receives all of its color from aniline dyes and has no topical applications.

Nubuck aniline – A top grain leather that has a “nap” effect caused by removal of the epidermis.

Patina – A luster that develops over time and with use on pure anilines and nubucks.

Pigment finish – A process of coloring and coating the leather.

Pull-up – Full grain aniline leather that gets its color from dyes and when the leather is pulled the waxes and oils in it cause the color to dissipate and become lighter in the areas pulled tight.

Sauvage – A two-tone effect that adds depth and character to the leather.

Semi-aniline – Leather that has been aniline dyed and then slightly pigmented for color consistency and resistance to liquids.

Skins – The raw material, referring to the skin from smaller animals such as goats, pigs, sheep or calves.

Split – The term for the underneath portion after the hide is split during the tanning process; splits are often used for suede.

Suede – Formed from split leather and can be further divided or sanded to reach appropriate thickness for the intended use.

Tanning – The process of converting raw hides/skins into leather through the use of chemicals.

Top coat – A synthetic polyurethane resin (gloss or matte) that is applied as a transparent protective coating to make leather more resistant.

Top grain – The top and most durable layer of the hide after it is split during the tanning process. This layer is usually “corrected” through abrasion or sanding to reduce any flaws.

Waxy hand – Describes leather that has a waxy feel and look to it.

Weight – Describes the thickness of leather in ounces or millimeters. (See Weight/thickness conversion chart below)

Yield – Refers to the amount of usable area after all waste has been discarded.

Weight/thickness conversion

Leather used for furniture is usually in the 2-3 oz. range. Recliners and motion sofas require heavier weight for durability to withstand movement in the furniture.

Ounces	Inches	Millimeters
1 oz.	1/64	0.4 mm
2 oz.	1/32	0.8 mm
3 oz.	3/64	1.2 mm
4 oz.	1/16	1.6 mm

Upholstery: Leather

Leather

continued from p14

by fading and drying it. Fading is commonly seen in semi-aniline and aniline leathers and less common in fully finished leathers that have a protective top coat. Drying of leather from the sun will damage any kind of leather regardless of the finish. The sun's heat causes the natural oils to evaporate, eventually stiffening and cracking the leather.

FAQ: Why is one leather grade more expensive than another?

Raw hides come from many different sources all over the world, and climate and other conditions vary greatly in those regions, affecting the hide characteristics and quality and therefore requiring different levels of correction. Other factors such as special surface treatments and the age of the animal also affect the final cost.

FAQ: Are there supposed to be marks and blemishes on the leather?

The marks are your assurance that you have real leather. There are corrected leathers and other finishing processes that will reduce the appear-

ance of some of those natural marks and blemishes, but it is important to know that those are natural characteristics of the raw material, just like the ones on human skin.

FAQ: Are animals harmed to make leather?

Leather is a by-product of the beef industry, and if not used to make leather products, the hides and skins would be disposed of as waste.

FAQ: How is bonded leather different from real leather?

Bonded leather is a composite of leather and polyurethane. It is a more affordable alternative that offers the look and feel of 100% leather. **TI**