

Twelve checks before you sit on the showroom floor

Twelve checks before you buy

1 Lift one front corner

A quality sofa weighs 90 to 130 pounds for a three seater. A budget sofa often weighs 60 to 80 pounds because the frame is hollow.

2 Tap the frame edge

Solid kiln dried hardwood (oak, maple, beech) sounds dense. Particleboard or pine sounds hollow.

3 Push down on the seat near the front rail

It should give 1 to 2 inches and bounce back. More than 3 inches means low density foam (1.5 lb or less) that will compress in 18 months.

4 Look under the cushions

Eight way hand tied coil springs are the gold standard. Sinuous (zig zag) springs are acceptable. Webbing alone is a red flag.

5 Check cushion density

Look for 1.8 lb high resilience foam, ideally with a feather or down topper. The label should be visible inside the cover.

6 Examine corner joints

Dovetail or double dowelled joints with corner blocks last decades. Stapled or screwed joints fail in 3 to 6 years.

7 Test the seam allowance

Pull gently on a seam. Quality stitching uses 1/2 inch allowance and 8 to 10 stitches per inch. Stretching means trouble.

8 Match upholstery to lifestyle

Top grain leather and performance polyester (Crypton, Sunbrella) handle kids and pets. Linen and chenille do not.

9 Ask about the warranty

Quality manufacturers warrant the frame for life and cushions for 5 to 10 years. Budget brands warrant 1 year on everything.

10 Check return policy specifics

30 day in home trial with full refund (minus delivery) is the standard for legitimate brands.

11 Ask where it is made

North Carolina, Italy, Quebec, and parts of Eastern Europe still produce furniture grade frames. Southeast Asia varies dramatically.

12 Sit on it for 10 minutes

If you feel pressure under your thighs or hips after 10 minutes, you will hate it after 10 years.