

REINVENT YOUR SOFA

Breathe new life into much-loved furnishings by investing in reupholstering or slipcovers

BY LOUANNE LITKE



Over time, even the most finely crafted sofa can begin to look tired or dated, but just because something is showing a little wear doesn't necessarily mean it needs to be replaced. If it is well constructed, with good design lines, all your sofa may need to look fabulous is reupholstering or some well-fitted slipcovers. That's where a professional designer can really help.

A design professional can help you evaluate your furniture and point you in the appropriate direction, or take the pressure off by handling furniture refurbishment on your behalf. A good designer will help you identify your personal tastes and enhance them with professional creativity and ideas. The result will be money well spent, and furniture to get excited about.

Buy new or renew?

One of the advantages of reupholstering furniture as opposed to buying something new is the opportunity to own a truly couture item – something that's custom and

unique to you. Reupholstering furniture can sometimes cost the same as purchasing a new piece, so it's important to be thoughtful about the investment. The best candidates for reupholstering are furnishings that are sturdy and were built to last. Check that the frame is solid and inspect the legs, back and arms for unwanted squeaking or movement. If it is a valuable heirloom piece that is no longer solid, consider having the joints reinforced.

Expand Your Vision

Don't be thrown off by the general appearance of your sofa as there are many ways to transform its style and mood. For instance, you can give a classic sofa a minimalist spin by requesting knife-edge (plain) seams instead of piped seams: add top-stitching beside these plain seams for a casual or more technical appearance. For a playful and dramatic effect, use bold, contrasting fabric for the piping, or replace basic piping with a fabulous prefabricated

trim, like brush fringe or lip cording. Transform front pleated faced arms from classic to contemporary by selecting flat-cut arm faces.

If neutral is your goal, rev it up by using a contrasting fabric on the outside of the arms and back, giving the piece a "private club" appeal. In contrast, combining three to four fabrics creates an inviting, homey look. Decorating on a budget? Reupholster only the worn areas: e.g., coordinate new fabric for the seat cushions with the unworn body section.

Inject sophistication into your room by re-covering your sofa with a sleek, reflective fabric, such as an upholstery grade taffeta. Calm down busy rooms using solids, and energize plain rooms with patterns and a shot of colour. Give the seating a distinctly vintage appeal by requesting a feather-filled pocket around the internal foam core. This creates the attractive pillowy surface seen on various heritage pieces. These are just some of the ways to alter the presentation of your furniture.

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What Affects Your Costs

The costs for slipcovers or reupholstering are fairly straightforward. Basically, your investment will cover fabric, labour, delivery and taxes. Additional charges may apply where the frame needs significant work, however, most workrooms provide minor reinforcement as a complimentary service.

There is typically no extra cost associated with using multiple fabrics per piece, however, if capturing specific pattern effects becomes time-consuming, there may be a small increase in labour costs. This occurs when stripes need to be lined up across multiple surfaces, or a large cameo in the pattern must be isolated from the fabric for specific locations.

Fabrics that have little substance or are very stiff and thick can be tricky to work with and extra time-consuming to apply. Occasionally, linings may have to be installed behind white or light-coloured fabrics to conceal folds around the seams.

Creating slipcovers is typically more time-consuming for the craftsperson. Good slipcovers are fully lined and have hidden zippers for easy removal. In addition, natural-content fabrics require pre-washing prior to cutting if you wish to wash the slipcovers over the long run. Slipcovers are worth the additional moderate cost, since they retain the furniture's current upholstery, thereby expanding the options for the look of your room.

Choosing Fabric

When selecting fabric for your sofa you need to consider things like sunlight exposure, potential soiling, cleaning and frequency of use. Blended fabrics, like cotton/polyester, will be strong and resist moderate staining, shrinking and fading in sunlight, while maintaining a touchable feel. Alternatively, you can upholster with something delicate, like silk, but you must use finer fabrics in appropriate circumstances.

There is nothing like a fabulous furniture makeover to enhance your enjoyment of your home. With a little effort, planning and professional advice your sofa will be ready to show off. ■

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See SOURCES on page 84 for contact information. PHOTO Terry Guscott