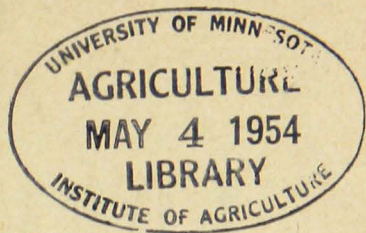


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LOOK

WHEN YOU BUY FURNITURE

CHARLOTTE KIRCHNER



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UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
Agricultural Extension Service
U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

LOOK! **When You Buy Furniture**

Charlotte Kirchner

FOR MOST FAMILIES the purchase of new furniture is a major long-time investment. It usually demands a careful evaluation of family needs, a review of budget possibilities, and an adjustment of family likes. In addition to all these, the family is confronted with decisions concerning furniture styling, the choice of wood, finishes used on wood surfaces, and methods and materials used in upholstered furniture.

Before You Make a Decision

CHECK THE USE that will be made of the furniture you buy. Then plan your purchases to fit your family group.

Who will make the most use of this piece of furniture—father, mother, teenager, growing youngster?

Is the size right for use by family members?

Is the finish too fine for the wear and tear of family use?

Can you count on the cleanability, wearability, and livability of the upholstery material? (Growing children can be hard on upholstery.)

Will the family be proud of your choice of style and color selection? This question is often especially important for teenager members.

Will the selection of this furniture help you to teach your children good standards of beauty and practicality in home furnishings?

CHECK THE SIZE of each individual piece.

Does it fit the room size and shape? Modern houses, with their small rooms and large window area, are poor places for large pieces of furniture.

Does it fit the members of the family who will use it most often?

Does it fit the scale of the furniture already on hand?

CHECK THE EFFICIENCY of storage furniture.

Can the piece be used for more than one purpose? A chest of drawers can often serve as an end table, a serving table, or a bedside table.

Can the piece be used where wall space is limited? Some cabinets can be placed at right angles to the wall to serve as room dividers as well as storage units.

Are size and depth of drawers well planned for holding clothing, linens, or equipment?

Are shelves in cabinets and bookcases adjustable?

Are there one or more standard-size filing drawers in the home business desk?

CHECK THE COMFORT of sitting and sleeping furniture.

Are chairs and sofas of a comfortable height and depth?

Do chair backs give support at the proper height and slant?

Are occasional and dining chairs sturdy enough to insure confidence?

Can chairs be easily moved for TV viewing or to accommodate guests?

Are bed springs good and firm and the mattress well constructed?

Let These Things Guide You

In any furniture you select look for these:

Quality—You will find it in the fineness of wood, in the solidity of construction at joinings, in the rigidity of bracing at corners, in the firmness of upholstery, in the smoothness of coverings.

Beauty—You will recognize it in styling and good lines, in clear color and smoothness and sheen of wood

finishes, in the choice of fabric for upholstery, in the absence of cheap decoration, in the way in which furniture is adapted to use.

Ease of care—You will appreciate shapes and sizes that will be easy to move, plain and finely finished surfaces that will be easy to dust, pieces free of ornamentation that collects soil, new upholstery fabrics that resist soil and stains.

What Do You Know About Wood Furniture?

Which is better, solid wood or veneer construction?

There are both kinds of construction on the market today and either may be good or bad depending on the actual construction and finishes used.

Solid wood construction is found usually in pieces made of pine, birch, maple, ash, oak, and cherry. Solid wood is more generally found in casual furniture for porch or cabin and in colonial reproductions that fit into many types of modern homes.

Veneer construction stretches a limited supply of fine cabinet woods. It

makes possible attractive surface patterns through grain matching that would be impossible on solid construction.

A veneer is made by gluing thin layers of fine cabinet wood, such as mahogany, walnut, or rosewood, on a core of strong but less expensive wood.

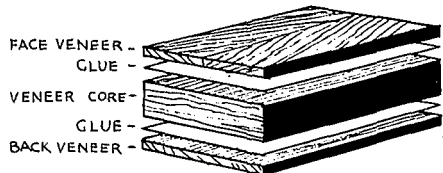


Fig. 1. Veneer layers

A good veneer is beautiful, strong, and less liable to warp and split than solid wood. But if poor glue is used or if the process is improperly carried out, the result is a veneer job that may prove more costly in the long run than more expensive solid or veneer construction.

On all veneered pieces of wood there are some solid wood parts. Plywood or veneer is used on flat surfaces; solid wood is used for legs, frames, stretchers, rails, corner posts, and carved sections. Veneer construction is often found in the expensive reproductions of traditional furniture but it is also used in cheap furniture. So be sure to check style, construction, and finish when making your choice.

What type of joining is best?

The joints of well made furniture are either doweled together or are joined by mortise and tenon construction. In drawers a dovetail type of construction is used. In all of these the use of good glue is essential.

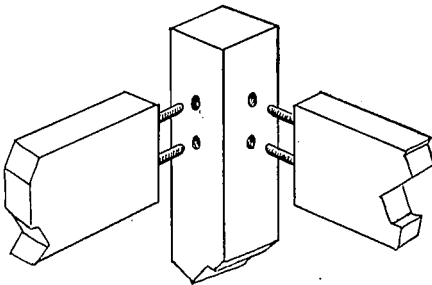


Fig. 2. Dowel construction

In **dowel construction** the dowel is a wooden pin of hardwood. Strength is added if these pins are grooved either straight or spirally. A hole to fit this pin is bored in the pieces of wood to be joined, then the dowel and the hole are coated with glue, and the dowel is pressed into the hole. This type of construction is used in the finest furniture.

In **mortise and tenon construction** the peg is an extension of one of the pieces

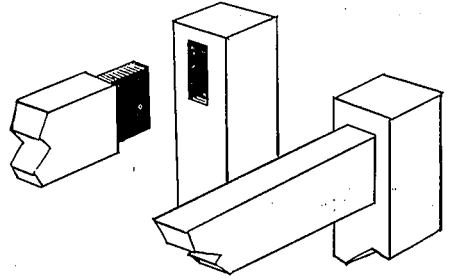


Fig. 3. Mortise and tenon construction

to be joined. A socket to fit the peg is bored in the second piece. Joints made with dowel or with mortise and tenon construction are often reinforced with triangular blocks of wood glued and screwed into the corners.

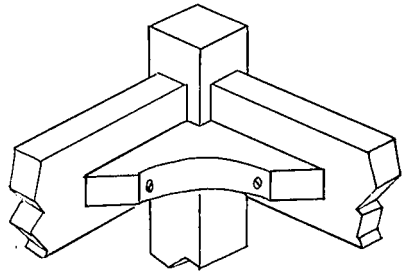


Fig. 4. Reinforced joint

In good furniture the drawers have dovetailed joinings at both front and back. Side panels of chests are fitted snugly into grooved corner posts, and bottoms of drawers are fitted the same

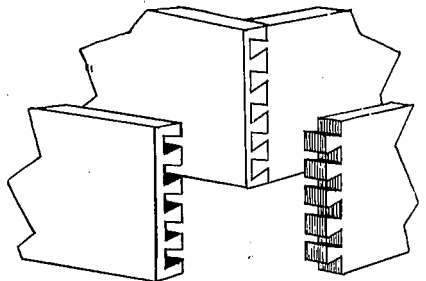


Fig. 5. Dovetailed joint

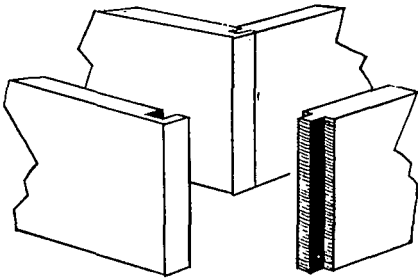


Fig. 6. Matching grooves on bottom of drawer

way into matching grooves on the four sides of the drawer.

In poor-quality furniture joints may not fit closely; they may be nailed or screwed together; a poor grade of glue may be used which allows joints to separate quickly under use; they will not be reinforced and the sanding and finishing which makes joints less conspicuous may be poorly done.

What is important in surface finishes?

Furniture finishes include varnish, lacquer, oil, wax, sealer, or paint. All of these finishes except paint may be applied over a stained surface. Any of them may be well or poorly done.

Check for these things:

- Clear, attractive color in stain
- Careful, smooth finish over the entire piece of furniture
- Absence of tears or drapes in the paint
- A soft sheen instead of a hard shine in varnished pieces

Values in Upholstered Furniture

Upholstered furniture requires much handwork and this is reflected in the price asked for well made sofas and chairs. Much of the quality of upholstered furniture is hidden under its cover. To make sure of what one is buying it is well—

What is meant by dust proofing the drawers in chests?

In well constructed furniture there will be a thin panel set into the frame between drawers to keep dust from sifting through.

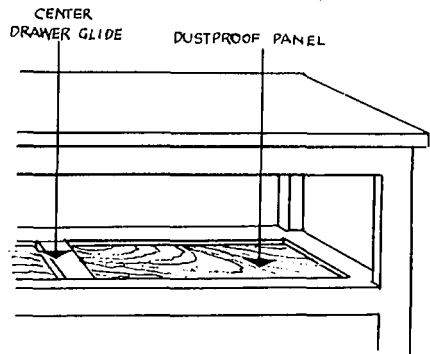


Fig. 7. Panel between drawers

Look for these additional indicators of good buys:

The back of a chest is set into the frame and screwed or nailed into place.

Good center or side drawer guides are mortised into the frame.

Insides of drawers are sanded and shellacked or lacquered smoothly.

The backs of chests of drawers are shellacked or finished like the rest of the outside surface.

Not too much decoration is applied. Furniture stands steady and sturdy.

If furniture is labelled, the name of all exposed woods appears on the label. Furniture labels should also indicate the type of finish used.

—To look carefully at such underneath construction as can be seen, at quality of covering, at beauty of styling, and at the workmanship of the covering.

—To feel the way springs are secured and the quality and depth of padding.

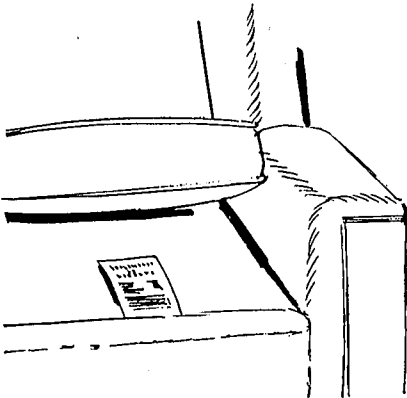


Fig. 8. Labels important

- To read any attached labels.
- To ask questions of the salesman.

You will find these things in good-quality upholstered furniture.

The piece has a hardwood frame with either dowel or mortise and tenon construction and with corner blocks added for strength and rigidity.

Exposed parts of the frame are smooth and well finished.

The outside covering has well matched seams around the edges of the cover construction. The outside covering is square with the grain of the fabric.

Welting is used to give a well tailored appearance.

Seat springs are attached to strong interwoven webbing or to metal strapping.

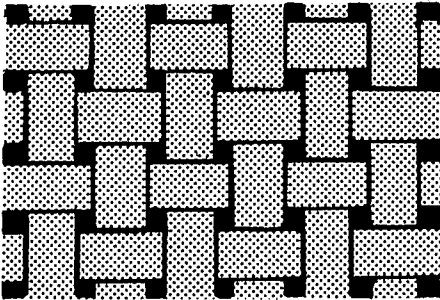


Fig. 9. Interwoven webbing

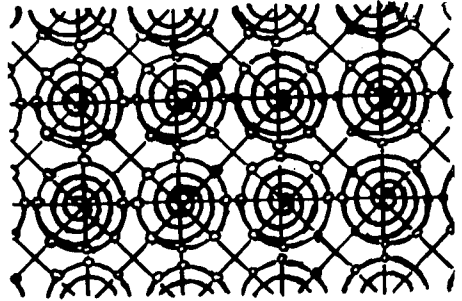


Fig. 10. Seat springs tied eight ways

Seat springs are set close together.

Seat springs are tied eight ways over the top.

Seat springs are covered with burlap under the filling.

Filling is hair, moss, down, or foam rubber.

There is a layer of upholsterer's cotton over the filling, if hair or moss is used.

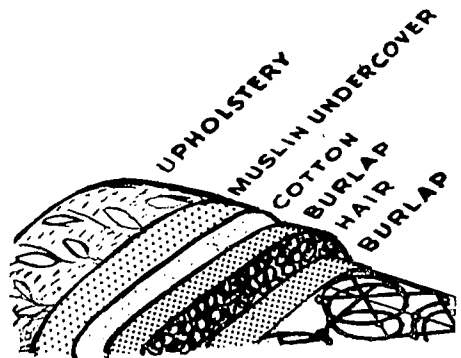


Fig. 11. Layers in well constructed furniture

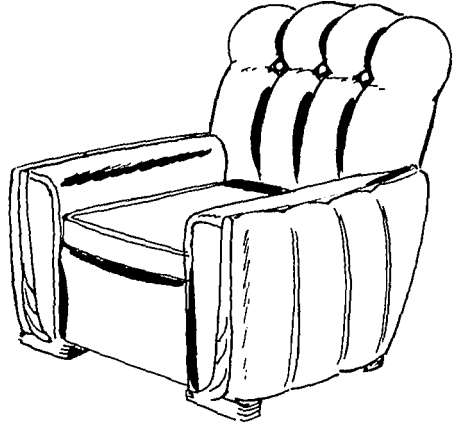
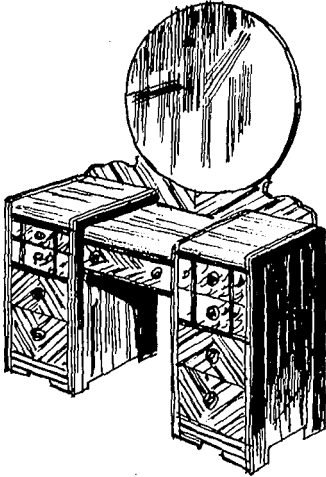
Extra padding (edge rolls) is applied at front edge of seat.

Back construction is similar to seat construction except that the springs may be lighter.

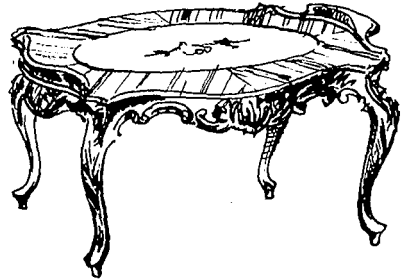
Upholstery fabric is of firm, close weave in well selected colors.

Watch Out for Mere Floor Appeal

- Harsh, bright colors
- Poor fabric patterns



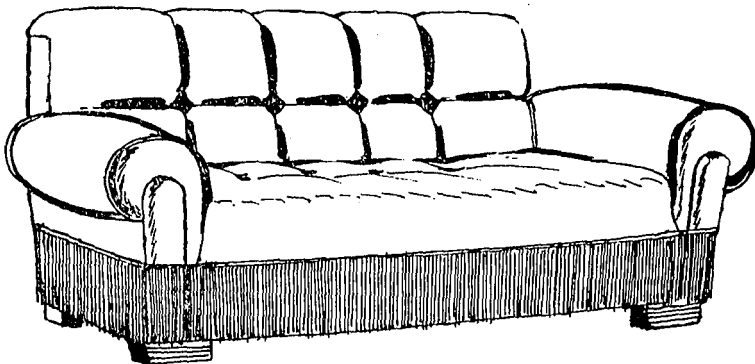
- Heavy, bulging lines



- Elaborate veneer designs

- Sets of chair and sofa

- Ornate carvings



- Elaborate added decoration

Generally Speaking . . .

Mix styles if you like, but keep the general style either formal or informal.

Mix woods if you like, but be careful. A well selected piece or two of blonde will fit in with dark woods, but knotty pine will look odd with fine mahogany.

Remember that light, delicate chairs do not go well with massive tables and that small, flimsy end tables look out of place next to an overstuffed sofa. Pick pieces of furniture that go well together, that are sturdy in construction, and that are in scale with one another.

Choose some pieces with straight lines and some with curves to avoid monotony.

Avoid loosely woven fabrics with long float threads in the upholstery fabric.

You may not want to buy them but ask about and look at these new things:

Molded plastic and glass fiber chairs.

Plastic upholstery materials.

Foam rubber construction.

Molded plastic drawers for chests.

Metal-framed furniture.

Nylon and spun plastic upholstery fabrics.

Your County Extension Agents

A familiar expression heard on Minnesota farms is "see your county agent." Every county in Minnesota has a county agricultural agent, and many counties also have home and 4-H Club agents.

Actually these county agents are part of a four-way partnership among the United States Department of Agriculture, the University of Minnesota, the county government, and farm people.

It is the job of the county Extension staff to bring to farmers and homemakers the latest information on farming and homemaking methods and to conduct 4-H Club work in the county.

Local committees, cooperating with the Director of the Minnesota Agricultural Extension Service, hire these agents and map out their programs.

Most county agents have their headquarters in the county courthouse. They are available to answer your questions and help solve your farming and homemaking problems.

This bulletin is one of many published by the University of Minnesota Agricultural Extension Service as an additional service to bring up-to-date information to your attention. These Extension Service bulletins are distributed through your local county agents or through the Bulletin Room, University of Minnesota, Institute of Agriculture, St. Paul 1, Minnesota.

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