



Photo courtesy of Hästens


BEDDY BUYS

With up to a third of life spent in sleep, it pays to get the right mattress

BY DEE GIBNEY



FOLLOWING THROUGH ON AN ILL-ADVISED DARE, I once lounged on Leonardo da Vinci's bed. It still stands in his 15th-century manor house-turned-museum in Château du Clos Lucé in the Loire Valley. As alarm bells clanged, my instigator and I, having snapped the coveted photo op, melted into the puzzled German tour group now trooping into the room.

The bed is quite a marvel, an elaborately carved dark oak four-poster draped with heavy burgundy curtains with gold cord tiebacks and matching spread. Such beds, originating in the 15th century, were a mark of status and one of the showiest pieces of furniture in the home, often incorporating coats of arms and precious metals and gemstones into the intricate carving. It's where one entertained and received guests. Bedding was so precious it was handed down through the generations. 

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Photo courtesy of Sweet Dreamzzz

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Photos courtesy of Marshall Mattress



But the luxurious beds of the nobility, with their canvas-bag mattresses filled with wool, feathers, cotton or straw, topped by a feather-bed, would not hold a candle to even the most basic mattresses available today.

There are plain mattresses, memory-foam mattresses, latex mattresses, gel mattresses, or organic mattresses, ortho mattresses, single-coil and pocket-coil mattresses and every combination thereof. Price points range from around \$500 for a bare bones big-box store loss leader to \$100,000 for a Hästens hand-made Vividus, the Birkin bag of mattresses, with a select waiting list.

For the consumer, the choice between cheap and pricey is overwhelming.

“It’s one of the most confusing products to buy,” admits Debi Chewerda, owner of Good-night & Sweet Dreamzzz in Newmarket.

That’s because the consumer can’t compare products.

“A store might carry a brand like Sealy or Serta but the name of each particular bed, although it’s the same bed, will change from store to store, so you can’t comparison shop,” Chewerda explains. “We’re viewed as one step above used car salesmen in people’s minds.”

“It’s a begrudging purchase,” admits Brad Warner, managing director of sales for Marshall Mattress, the 112-year-old company that invented the individual pocket-coil spring mattress. “But it’s essential for a good night’s sleep.”

If you are waking up because your mattress is trapping your body heat or if there are pressure points that cut off circulation or if the mattress doesn’t offer proper support, forcing your muscles to contract in order to support you, you cannot relax.

“If you don’t get a decent sleep, you compromise the body’s ability to restore itself, both physically and mentally,” says Warner. “Your appetite gets out of whack and you tend to eat more because your body is trying to make up for lost revitalization. Your health suffers.”

“Sleep is what we’re selling,” says Nicholas Vardon, sleep consultant for Hästens’ Toronto store, in the Distillery District. “My job is to inform people about sleep, what it is and why we need it.”

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Photo courtesy of Neff Custom Cabinetry

Sleep rebuilds and renews. It benefits the immune system and the heart, improves memory and learning as well as overall well-being. Lack of sleep causes stress and diminishes concentration, performance, creativity, energy and mood. It can lead to diabetes and heart disease.

Ideally we should sleep for about eight hours. Over a lifetime that could add up to 25 to 30 years. So a mattress, according to Hästens's philosophy, is the kind of investment that “pays quiet, meaningful dividends year after year.”

“We like to buy wants, not needs,” adds Chewerda. “A mattress is not showy. People line up before dawn to buy the latest new cell phone model even though they have a perfectly good working one already. Yet those same folks, when it comes time to buy a mattress, something they use for eight hours a day and that affects their entire life, they expect to pay the same price as a cell phone.”

Much of the blame lies on the industry itself and its loss-leader advertising and ongoing half-price sales.

“There is no standard in the industry,” says Chewerda, “so any store can set their ‘regular’ price in any configuration they want. It’s arbitrary. The industry has led the consumer to believe that mattresses are always on sale so people have no idea what a mattress should cost.”

So where should a consumer start? The Better Sleep Council of Canada has some good basic advice, as do knowledgeable sales people.

“What is important is that you should never feel rushed, pressured or insulted,” says Chewerda. “If the first thing a sales person asks you is, ‘What is your price point?’ they do not have your best interest in mind.

“At our store we do most of the asking: How old is your mattress? Why are you looking for change? How do you sleep? Do you sleep with a partner? ☞”

Photo courtesy of Sweet Dreamzzz



Photo courtesy of Sweet Dreamzzz

*“We educate people to the Nth degree
– we call it ‘beducation.’”*



*Photo by Brandon Barré
Courtesy of Jane Lockhart Design
www.janelockhart.com*

“We educate people to the Nth degree – we call it ‘beducation.’ Product knowledge is a big part of our business. We go through the range of options and how they differ. We spend a lot of time with each customer whether they are looking for a lower-end mattress for the cottage or our top-of-the-line model.

“We carry everything from entry level to luxury,” says Chewerda. “But we make sure that our customers understand that at the lower end of the range they may not get an individual pocket coil mattress but a single continuous coil made from one long wire bent into coils, which is very bouncy, and they will feel the edge wire.”

Other factors that affect price are the types of materials used, whether natural or synthetic, and the quality of construction. A mattress is like a layer cake of materials, which range from varied combinations of foam-encased inner-springs to layers of polyurethane foam, memory foam, latex (natural, blended or synthetic), wool, cotton, bamboo and in the case of Hästens, flax and horsehair. Ultimately it’s about how the bed feels and how long you expect it to last. So allow time to test it out in the showroom. ☞



Photo courtesy of Resource Furniture



Photo courtesy of Sweet Dreamzzz



Photo courtesy of Hästens



Photo courtesy of Hästens

“Most beds at the lower-end price points don’t last longer than three to six years,” says Warner. “They’re designed to catch the first-time buyer. You have to consider quality and comfort over cost.”

“If you want a better sleep and a mattress that is going to last, you have to look within the \$1,500 to \$3,000 range, or \$2,500 to \$5,000 for one made of organic materials,” says Chewerda.

And if you want one that is going to be suitable for a tiny studio condo, you have to look to Resource Furniture where wall units, desks, tables and sofas morph into beds in ingenious ways. This is not the Murphy bed or pull-out sofa of old. In fact, Leonardo da Vinci himself would be impressed with the sleek Italian hydraulic engineering that lets you double your space without doubling your mortgage.



Photo courtesy of Sweet Dreamzzz

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It’s double- and triple-duty furniture that comes in countless customized configurations, finishes and fabrics.

“It’s a reinvention of space,” says owner Howard Klerer. “If you’re holding a dinner party in a 350-square-foot condo, you don’t want to be inviting people into your bedroom. Instead of using space in a prescribed way, it lets you determine how the space is to be used.”

But more than the increasingly tiny condos, the sleight-of-hand beds allow you to create an extra multi-functional room in any home instead of having to renovate the basement.

“It’s the furniture of the future,” says Klerer. ▶