

Sitting pretty

Create personalized style, size and comfort with a custom sofa

Shopping for a new sofa can be a joyless task.

Crowded furniture stores with a dizzying selection. Sofas nestled in a décor scheme not in keeping with your space. Nagging questions. Will it fit in the family room? Will it hurt Dad's back? Will the fabric stand up to the wear and tear of the kids and the dog?

Makes you want to go back 100 years and call the local furniture maker to put something together just for you. But that's not realistic and way too expensive in our modern world, right?

Not necessarily, according to Bill Rizk, owner of Markham Furniture. He's built a 16-year-old family business based on the made-to-order furniture model.

"We make [our furniture] from scratch, so you're picking the style you want and the fabric you want," says Mr. Rizk. "Along the way, if you want the sofa to be deeper, shallower, longer, higher, sit firm or sit soft, we customize it to exactly how you like it."

Mr. Rizk keeps a sizable selection of sofas, sectionals, benches, ottomans, sofa beds and chairs in his two showrooms (in Toronto and Markham). The classic bestsellers are usually available for immediate purchase or as models that customers can tweak. They also remake a number of trendier pieces inspired by some of the custom orders they get from designers.

"There are basic models that never go out of style, like the Lawson which has a rolled arm or the squarish tuxedo style," says Mr. Rizk.

"But as customers bring us new styles or as we see new styles in magazines, we try to adapt those styles to our line of sofas. It often happens that a designer orders an interesting chair or sofa and we also make it for our showroom."

Aside from a piece of furniture that suits your specifications to a tee, custom design also often means superior craftsmanship at a price that may not blow the lid off your budget, particularly when you consider the longevity of each piece.

Karen Sealy, owner of and principal designer at Sealy Design Inc., says it's worth investing in a piece that features Canadian hardwood and a good web and coil spring system so it stands up to years of use.

Mr. Rizk says the average sofa will run you about \$2,500-\$3,000 and are typically ready in 4-6 weeks.

A large sectional sofa (right) in durable leather is a good choice for family living. INTERIOR DESIGN BY SEALY DESIGN



CHOOSE DURABLE FABRIC, CLASSIC STYLE

According to interior designer Karen Sealy, there are a few key things to consider when investing in a custom-made piece of furniture.

Long-term plans: Where do you see your home in two, five or 20 years? If you're close to the downsizing years, a massive sectional may not be the best investment. Ms. Sealy says a mid-scale sofa is a good size for just about any space.

Fabric quality: If you've got a big family, love to entertain or have pets, outdoor fabric might be the best choice. "Nowadays you can get beautiful velvets, cottons and other fabric that feel great and stand the test of time," she says.

Neutral colours: A neutral grey palette is currently on-trend and it won't be wildly out of date in 10 years. Ms. Sealy recommends a speckled neutral that looks like a solid from afar, but up close, multi-coloured threads are visible and perfect for accessorizing purposes.

Classic frame: Unless you have a very specific taste, a square-cut sofa like the tuxedo-style has been in style since the 1920s and will be for the next century to come, predicts Ms. Sealy.

The popularity of the TV show *Mad Men* has spawned a '50s and '60s influence in design (left), reflected in this condo with sofa and seating custom-designed by Yasmine Goodwin of My Design Studio. The furniture's charcoal grey upholstery is enlivened with brightly coloured decorative pillows.



This sophisticated sectional custom-designed by Markham Furniture fits well with its contemporary setting and has a timeless design.