

Buying Furniture

You want your furniture to look right, fit right, sit right. You expect it to give you years of enjoyment. And you don't want to pay a fortune for it. To get such results, it's key to choose the right stores...and to be savvy about getting the best price and reliable service from any store you use. This article will help.

In that first apartment, when our furniture budget was approximately \$0, we thought nothing of sawing the legs off an old sofa, donated by supportive parents, in order to fit it through the front door. Having three types of chairs around the kitchen table and old boards and cinder blocks for shelves was just fine. But at some point, most of us come to want furniture that provides comfort, style, and a harmonious fit in our homes.

Still, you don't want to spend every weekend—and every spare dollar—shopping. By choosing the right store and the right products, and purchasing them at the best available price, you can get the quality furniture and service you want and often save hundreds of dollars.

Deciding What You Want

It makes sense to start the furniture-buying process by answering a few questions. Even the best price for a fine piece of furniture will not be a good deal if the piece doesn't fit your home or your budget or won't hold up under the use it will receive.

- *What is your budget?* Knowing what you have to spend will force some choices. Can you compromise on quality for some items that you'll probably want to replace in a few years anyway? Can you get along with something you already own for the time being? Should you focus on some rooms and leave other rooms for later? Should you buy a low-cost table and chairs for your kitchen with the idea that they can be used in the family room or on the patio in a few

Checklist

You can sink a lot of money into furniture. If you don't buy carefully, you risk spending too much, putting up with defective products or months-late deliveries, getting items you don't like, or getting furniture that doesn't hold up.

We found big service quality differences among stores. Some stores were rated "superior" for the advice their staff provides by more than 80 percent of surveyed customers; others by fewer than 40 percent. Some stores were rated "inferior" for reliability—standing behind products, delivering on time, etc.—by more than 20 percent of their surveyed customers—a big red flag about possible headaches ahead.

Comparing prices is difficult, since it's unusual to find the same item on the sales floor at more than one or two different retailers. But we give you various price-shopping strategies. One approach is to get a make and model/style number, call the manufacturer for a list of stores selling its products, then call each of those stores for a price quote, with the understanding that most stores will have to order the item for you.

In our shopping, we found sharp differences in prices. For example, for a Hooker entertainment center, model #866-55-220 with warm brown cherry finish, we found prices at local stores ranging from \$1,280 to \$1,947; for a Barcalounger "Villager" recliner, model #7-4008 with Grade 2/S leather upholstery, we found prices ranging from \$920 to \$1,833.

Wherever you buy, you will want to avoid problems with your purchase by tying down details on guarantee, delivery time, and return policy. On page 37, we give you language to have included on your sales receipt.

Before you even begin shopping, you will want to have a general plan—a rough drawing of your space showing what will fit and where items you already own will go, a rough budget, and an understanding of how the furniture will be used and how long you expect it to last.

You will also want to be able to make a general assessment of furniture quality. Beginning on page 42, we give you a list of quality signs to look for.

- *How long do you expect to keep the furniture?* Will you be moving to a larger or smaller home soon? Will you be having children? Will your children be going off to school?
 - *What existing pieces of furniture do you want to keep?* Are there some items you're fond of but could live without
- years when you are able to buy better furniture for your kitchen?
- *How will the furniture be used?* Do you want an elegant sofa for formal entertaining or something more casual for the family? Will pets and active children be around? Do you need a convertible sofa bed or just a couch?

and others you simply will not part with?

- Are there limits on what you can fit through doors and hallways or up staircases?

When you've answered these questions, it's a good idea to begin sketching. Draw up a floor plan of your home on $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch graph paper, showing exact measurements. Then cut out pieces of paper to represent furniture items you'd like to keep and items you might buy. Move these pieces around into different arrangements. This process may help you decide, for instance, that two chairs work better than a loveseat, that there's no room for an end table and lamp, or that the longest sofa you should consider is 80 inches. You can, if you wish, buy room-planning software or buy a room-planning kit with grids and magnetic pieces that you can move from place to place.

There is a lot that can go wrong in a furniture purchase. The items you receive may be defective, delivery may be delayed, or you may simply like your purchases less than expected when you see them in your home.

As you think about the types, sizes, and placement of furniture, you'll want also to begin thinking about color. You'll want colors that you like, that work together and with existing furnishings (and perhaps relate to furnishings in other rooms), that are practical, and that contribute to the mood you'd like the room to have (possibly bright, sunny colors, for example, to change the mood of a room that lacks natural light).

You'll also want to think about style. Do you prefer contemporary or traditional furniture? Do you like overstuffed, upholstered chairs or leaner



"I have a couple of other projects I'm really excited about."

© The New Yorker Collection and Mike Twohy from Cartoonbank.com.

lines? Do you prefer high-tech lacquer finishes, dark wood Victorian reproductions, or bright country styles? Do you want an elegant formal look or something that is more casual?

To help your planning, you'll probably want to see what others have done. One excellent source of ideas is the "shelter" magazines, including *Metropolitan Home*, *House Beautiful*, *Architectural Digest*, *Interior Design*, *Dwell*, and *Elle Decor*. There are also many useful books on home furnishings. You may want to look at furniture manufacturers' catalogs, which you can see at some furniture stores or can order from the manufacturers. You'll get a lot of ideas by going on showcase house tours, which are usually put on by local charities, or by just visiting open houses at for-sale houses in your neighborhood.

Finally, you can see a lot of furniture by visiting some furniture stores. The brief store write-ups beginning on page 48 will help you find stores that are likely to have styles that will fit your taste and needs. These briefs tell you the styles of furniture each store carries (for example, country or contemporary), a few examples of the makes it carries, and the price category of the store's furniture. The briefs are for individual stores or, for multi-store firms, for the chain. Also, Table 2 lists all the stores we evaluated. It tells you which types of furnishings the stores carry—upholstered pieces, case pieces (wood tables, chairs, cabinets, etc.), wall coverings, etc.

Though seeing and reading are very helpful, you may want a human being to turn to for suggestions and for answers to your questions. One possibility is an interior designer. See the box on the facing page for more on that option.

The least expensive source of advice is store salespeople. You might expect them to answer such questions as—

- What fabrics will stand the most wear and tear for a TV room couch?
- Which dining room table would fit in a small room and still accommodate several dinner guests?
- What furniture would be versatile for a combination study/guest room?

Finding a place where you will get good advice from salespeople can be a major consideration in choosing a store, as discussed below.

Getting Good Service

When you buy furniture, the quality of a store's customer service is critical. On the one hand, a store with a well-informed, helpful staff can make your shopping pleasant and can guide you to the right furniture choices. On the other hand, an unreliable store that doesn't stand behind its promises and products can stick you with months of trouble.

There is a lot that can go wrong in a furniture purchase. The items you receive may be defective, delivery may be delayed, or you may simply like your purchases less than expected when you see them in your home.

What Their Customers Say

To get a perspective on service quality, we gathered ratings of furniture stores by surveying area consumers (primarily *CHECKBOOK* and *Consumer Reports* subscribers, but also a sampling of other consumers). Customers rated their stores "inferior," "adequate," or "superior" on various aspects of service. Table 2 shows the percentage of each store's surveyed customers who rated it "superior" for "advice on choice and use

Using An Interior Designer

If the job of decorating your home—not only with furniture but with floor and wall coverings, artwork, and other elements—seems too big for your available time, know-how, or artistic talent; if you just want the benefit of someone else’s ideas; or if you want access to furniture choices available through wholesale showrooms not open to the public; you might consider hiring an interior designer.

You can hire a designer for the whole job, from developing a design concept to purchasing and supervising installation of the furnishings. Or you can hire one for a two- or three-hour consultation, just to give you some new ideas and perspectives. Even if you hire one for the full job, that doesn’t mean you won’t be involved. It’s important to meet with the designer regularly to review plans, fabric samples, proposed furniture pieces, and other ingredients.

The cost for redoing a living room, including furniture plus design fee, when a fully trained designer carries the project through is typically more than \$20,000. You could spend considerably more or less depending on room size, the quantity and quality of items to be purchased, and other factors. But if you aren’t prepared to spend in this range, some designers won’t take you on as a client. On the other hand, some are willing to work with much more limited budgets and most understand that you might want a *plan* now while expecting to spread out actual purchases over many months.

You can use a designer employed by a store or you can hire an independent designer—either one working alone or a member of a design firm.

Although some store-based designers offer a limited service, some provide fairly extensive service, including drawing floor plans, advising on color, and ordering furniture. Different stores’ design departments use different payment formulas. At some stores, you pay a small design fee, which is returned in full if your furniture purchases exceed a certain dollar amount. Your purchases through the designer at the store are at current prices on the store’s sales floor, including sale prices. At other stores, design departments may charge on a per-hour basis—or charge a flat fee for a consultation and additional hourly fees for other tasks, such as writing up purchase specifications. Stores may waive the fee if your purchase is large enough. Since the arrangements vary so widely, you’ll have to check with stores you are interested in to find what services they offer and how they charge.

Code “g” in the “features” column on Table 2 indicates which stores offer design services.

Independent designers also charge according to a variety of different formulas. A few may charge no explicit fee but keep the difference between the discounted price they pay for your furnishings and the “retail” price. The “retail” price is typically about 100 percent above what the designer pays. A more common approach is for the designer to charge a flat fee or an hourly fee and possibly also to collect a markup above what the designer has to pay for the items purchased.

Clearly, the client has to pay one way or another, so we favor an arrangement in which all or most of the designer’s compensation is based on a flat fee or hourly fee. Such an arrangement makes the cost explicit, avoids creating incentives for the designer to encourage you to spend more than necessary, and avoids the tension that might arise if you spend less than initially anticipated.

Despite the discounts designers can get, buying through a designer will probably mean that you will spend more than you would pay to buy the same products on your own at one of the area’s best priced stores—even if the designer charges you on a fee basis and passes along his or her discount.

To get the most for your money from a designer, you’ll want to choose the person carefully. You can start by getting recommendations from friends whose taste you admire or from owners of homes you like when you take house

tours. You can also call the American Society of Interior Designers (ASID) at 202-546-3480 for referrals. ASID membership is a meaningful credential. Full “Professional Members” must complete an exam that lasts more than 10 hours and includes both written and practical components. Before taking the exam, a designer must have met specified standards. For example, one basis for eligibility is completion of a four- or five-year college degree program with a major in interior design and two years of experience.

Meet with any designer you are considering. Talk about your lifestyle, needs, and tastes. If you don’t feel comfortable with the designer and don’t feel you’d be able to talk comfortably about budget limitations and sometimes reject his or her suggestions, then this is not the person for you. Ask to see samples of the designer’s work—either photographs or, better still, the homes themselves.

Be specific about your total budget and discuss the designer’s fees. It’s reasonable to negotiate fees.

Finally, you should have a letter of agreement spelling out your understanding of the specific services the designer will perform (which rooms are included, whether shopping is included, and whether tradespeople will be supervised).

Buying through a designer will probably mean that you will spend more than you would pay to buy the same products on your own—even if the designer charges you on a fee basis and passes along his or her full product discount.

of products” and for “staff attitudes/atmosphere.” Top-rated stores are places where you might expect to get good interior design suggestions and prompt and full answers to your questions without over-heavy sales pressure. Table 2 also shows how customers we surveyed rated the stores for “ease of looking at/testing products.” A well-designed showroom can enhance the value of a good sales staff.

In addition, Table 2 shows customer survey ratings on “reliability (standing behind products, delivering on time, etc.)” and on “promptness of service.” For these questions, which could relate to serious inconvenience or other problems, we report the percentage of customers who rated each store either “adequate” or “superior,” as opposed to “inferior.” About one-half of the stores were rated either “adequate” or “superior” for “reliability” by at least 90 percent of their surveyed customers. But four stores were rated “inferior” by 20 percent or more of their surveyed customers.

Consumer Complaints

In addition to customer survey results, Table 2 shows tallies of complaints we gathered from the Consumer Protection Division of the Washington Office of the Attorney General for a recent three-year period. The complaint counts we report are simply the total numbers of complaints on file for each firm; these complaints might be related to disputes that arose from firms’ activities other than furniture sales.

When using the complaint information, keep in mind that complaints are not always justified; sometimes the customer is unreasonable. Remember that we didn’t have a measure of business volume; large firms are more likely to incur complaints simply because they serve more customers. Also be aware that some firms may be at greater risk than others of incurring complaints because of the specific types of business they do.

The complaint information is a valuable resource for consumers and we applaud the Office of the Attorney General

for making this important information available. By providing this information, the Office of the Attorney General is, in our view, showing a strong commitment to consumers.

You can check current complaint information on any firm by contacting the Attorney General’s Consumer Resource Center for the area where the firm is located. (See the box on page 38 for phone numbers.)

Table 2 also indicates whether firms were Better Business Bureau



“No, lad, we aren’t movers. We’re just Shakers.”

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members at the time we checked. BBB members cannot be the subject of adverse actions in BBB files (including local, state, or federal government actions involving business practices), must respond to complaints brought to their attention by the BBB, must take corrective actions deemed appropriate by the BBB, and must adhere to the BBB code of advertising. Members that participate in the BBB’s “Membership Identification Program,” which allows them to use the BBB logo in advertising, must agree to submit to arbitration if a dispute cannot otherwise be resolved.

In addition, Table 2 indicates whether firms had a “satisfactory” record (“Sat.”), “unsatisfactory” record (“Unsat.”), neutral record (“Neutral”), or no record (“No record”) with the BBB when we checked.

You can check current BBB information by contacting the BBB at the phone number or website listed on page 38.

Avoiding Problems with Faulty Goods

One major category of furniture-related consumer complaints concerns damaged or defective goods. To avoid such problems, you’ll want not only to choose high-rated stores but also to deal with them in a businesslike fashion.

Some product faults are apparent immediately—scratched tables, poorly matched upholstery, improperly shaped cushions. Others, like fading upholstery or poorly glued chair legs, may take time to become apparent.

Except for makers of recliners, sofa beds, and other items that have mechanical parts, most manufacturers of furniture do not offer warranties directly to the consumer. You don’t get a warranty statement like that packed in with your TV set or refrigerator. Manufacturers do often make expressed and implied promises, or warranties, to their authorized retailers, but even these are not generally in writing.

Manufacturers typically expect their retailers to be the point of contact with the consumer. The retailer is expected to inspect the item and arrange for repairs. In many cases, the repairs can be made locally by a retailer’s own service department or by an independent furniture repair shop working for the retailer. Then the retailer bills the manufacturer for repair costs. Local service obviously is quickest and easiest for everyone. But some items have to be returned to the factory for repair or simply have to be replaced. Many manufacturers have local representatives who are called in by retailers to authorize repair or replacement in questionable cases.

If your retailer goes out of business, the more responsible manufacturers will usually step in to back their furniture—possibly arranging for another retailer or an independent repair shop to make repairs. If your retailer is still in business but is simply unresponsive, the manufacturer, in an effort to maintain its own reputation, might help you apply pressure on the retailer or might agree to help you directly, but the manufacturer is under no legal obligation to do so.

Most retailers offer a standard warranty of their own above and beyond any warranty offered by the manufacturer. But in our experience, most do not put this warranty in writing.

Since in most cases you have no legal rights against the manufacturer, you need a retailer's warranty in order to have a legal leg to stand on. Even if your retailer can recover repair or replacement costs from the manufacturer, the retailer may be more interested in selling furniture than in following through with needed service. You'll be more comfortable if you know you have a legal basis for forcing action. Furthermore, not all manufacturers are equal and you may not know much about the reliability of the makers of pieces you like. So you want a retailer that will come through even if it can't recover from the manufacturer.

It's very likely you can claim an *implied* warranty of merchantability or possibly even an *expressed* warranty based on something the retailer has told you in person or in its advertising or based on the floor sample you've been shown. But life will be simpler in the event of a dispute if you've received a written warranty.

If your retailer does not offer a standard written warranty, you can ask the salesperson to write onto your sales ticket warranty language like that we give you in the box to the right. Or you might bring a copy of that statement with you and ask the salesperson to sign it. If you are special-ordering upholstered furniture, you might inquire whether the manufacturer guarantees that the fabric pattern will match from base to seat to back (a point where manufacturers often come up short). If so, note this on the sales slip.

If your retailer does not offer a standard written warranty, you can ask the salesperson to write onto your sales ticket warranty language like that we give you in the box above.

Addendum to Sales Agreement Between

_____ (customer) and _____ (store)
as of _____ (date)

[Inapplicable paragraphs should be crossed out.]

Warranty:

Store agrees to repair or replace any item that proves to be defective within one year of the date of sale.

Signed for store:

For items that will be special ordered:

Store estimates that delivery of customer's order will be by _____
Store will order promptly and request a delivery date from the manufacturer and notify customer if the date quoted by the manufacturer is later than store's estimated delivery date. In the event such a notification is needed, customer has the right to cancel the order promptly and have any deposit returned in full at the time of notification.

Signed for store:

For items ordered out of current stock:

If customer is not satisfied with any item for any reason, customer may return the item in its original condition within _____ days. Customer will/will not have to pay a restocking charge equal to _____. Customer will/will not have to pay costs for return shipping.

Signed for store:

Although we recommend getting your rights in writing, we don't feel so strongly about your getting written language on warranties as we do about your getting other types of language discussed below—because your legal rights are not usually the main issue in connection with furniture defects. In consumer complaints concerning such defects, generally the retailer acknowledges an obligation to provide defect-free goods. The conflict usually concerns whether the defect is material, whether it was caused by the customer, and how quickly the retailer should act on it.

There are several steps you can take to minimize problems:

- Inspect furniture when it's delivered. If it is defective, you may be

wise to reject it, but if the defect is minor you may be better off to call the store to discuss it; to note the defect on the delivery slip; and then, with the store's approval, to keep the item until a replacement is provided.

- If you discover a defect after delivery, notify the retailer at once. The longer you delay, the more strongly the retailer may suspect that you caused the damage.
- Communicate your complaints to the retailer in writing. If the retailer is slow, you'll have a record of how long you've been trying.
- If a piece is defective but usable, and your retailer agrees to let you keep it until a new piece arrives, be sure the retailer agrees in writing to provide the replacement.

Avoiding Problems with Delays

You'll want to take at least as great care to avoid the second major category of furniture-buying problems: delays in delivery.

Delay problems occur most often when the furniture you want is not in stock and has to be special ordered. When a special order is placed, the manufacturer frequently does not have the item in stock and can't ship until it makes its next production run of the item. This is described as the next "cutting." For upholstered furniture, you not only may have to wait for the item to be made; you also have to wait for the upholstering to be done and may suffer additional delays while the manufacturer awaits fabric from the fabric maker.

Although these delays are annoying, furniture manufacturers point out that their product would have to cost more if

they maintained large inventories of scores of different models or if they kept machines ready to make all models as orders came in. Regardless, you're not going to change the business (although some changes are currently taking place). You simply have to decide whether you want an item enough to wait or whether you're willing to accept what the retailer has in stock.

If you do special order, you want to be sure you won't be left with a vacant spot in your room—and have your money tied up—while the retailer sits on your order. Also, if you've been promised delivery in three months but in fact the wait will be twice that long, you want to know as soon as possible, not just at the end of three months when the item doesn't arrive. Most manufacturers send retailers order acknowledgments stating estimated delivery dates within three weeks or so of receiving a retailer's order; you want the retailer to tell you if the manufacturer has promised a later date than you initially were told. Moreover, you want to be able to cancel and order something you can get sooner if the delay will be substantially longer than the initial estimate. In short, you want a retailer that—

- Gives you a realistic estimate of delivery time before you place your order,
- Orders promptly and requests a delivery date from the manufacturer,
- Lets you know as soon as it knows that delivery will be later than initially estimated, and
- Lets you cancel if you wish at the time the longer-than-estimated delivery delay is discovered.

Most retailers say they follow these steps routinely, and no doubt many do, but the complaint files at consumer agencies amply demonstrate that some don't.

To minimize delivery problems, we recommend that you get your retailer to sign a copy of the second paragraph in the box on page 37. It simply imposes on the retailer and you a legal obligation to follow a reasonable set of steps to improve communication. Your retailer may react with surprise at such a request—or perhaps with suspicion that you're some kind of troublemaker. Don't worry; just press for a signature. If

Make as small a downpayment as possible. The less you pay up front, the more eager the retailer is likely to be to complete the transaction.

you feel awkward doing so, blame *CHECKBOOK*. Say we made you do it.

Of course, large department and chain stores may be so bureaucratic that a salesperson will be afraid to sign such a statement. If so, you'll have to decide whether to rely on the store's concern for its good will.

Naturally, a retailer's promise won't make good service happen. A few other steps on your part will help.

First, make as small a downpayment as possible. As codes "i," "j," and "k" in the "special features" column on Table 2 indicate, some retailers expect you to pay in full on a special order when you place the order, and most expect a partial payment in advance—usually between 20 percent and 50 percent. The less you pay up front, the more eager the retailer is likely to be to complete the transaction.

Second, three or four weeks after ordering, if you haven't heard from the retailer, call and ask whether the manufacturer's acknowledgment has come in and whether the initially estimated delivery date is still good.

Third, if you are told of an unexpected delay and decide to cancel, notify the retailer quickly so it can cancel the order. Once a manufacturer cuts fabric or ships case goods, the retailer is obligated to pay for your merchandise. If the retailer is on the line, it is likely to resist your efforts to cancel and get your deposit back—especially if it is evident that this trouble could have been avoided by your promptly communicating your desire to cancel.

Getting Flexibility for Returns

No matter how well a retailer and manufacturer do their part, you may still get your furniture and not like it. This is a particular problem for special-ordered merchandise. Although some

Where to Complain

Office of the Attorney General Consumer Resource Centers

*Clallam, Jefferson,
King, and Snohomish Counties*
900 Fourth Avenue, Suite 2000
Seattle, WA 98164
206-464-6684

*Grays Harbor, Kitsap,
Mason, and Pierce Counties*
1019 Pacific Avenue South, 3rd Floor
Tacoma, WA 98402
253-593-2904

*Island, San Juan, Skagit,
and Whatcom Counties*
103 East Holly, Suite 308
Bellingham, WA 98225
360-738-6185

Better Business Bureau of Oregon and Western Washington

1000 Station Drive, Suite 222
P.O. Box 100
DuPont, WA 98327
206-431-2222
www.thebbb.org

retailers will sometimes take special-ordered items back and sell them as regular stock or as clearance merchandise, this sticks the retailer with stock that it doesn't want and that it may have no room to display. If an item is upholstered, there's the added problem that it may be ugly. So don't expect to get any retailer to agree in writing to accept the return of special-ordered items.

For items that you buy out of current stock, returns should not cause a retailer such difficulty. Codes "m" through "v" on Table 2 show which retailers told us they accept returns of regularly stocked furniture in original condition—but some charge a restocking fee and most limit the return privilege to a few days or weeks. If a retailer promises that you'll be able to return an item, get the promise in writing. You can ask the retailer to write on your sales slip language like that in the third paragraph in the box on page 37, or you can bring with you a copy of that paragraph and ask the salesperson to sign.

Ways to Pay

Some stores are more flexible than others on payment arrangements. Almost all stores accept major credit cards and some offer their own charge accounts (open-end, revolving credit). Such credit arrangements not only give you flexibility on timing your payments; they also allow you, under the Fair Credit Billing Act, in many cases to refuse payment if a product from a local retailer is unsatisfactory or is not delivered. Some stores also offer financing through installment loans, some promote special financing terms under which interest is not calculated for a certain period or payments are delayed, and some have layaway plans. Unfortunately, store-sponsored financing arrangements often have very high interest rates.

Convenience Services

A final service consideration in selecting a furniture store is the convenience services the store offers. Table 2 shows which stores offer repair services, which allow customers to special order from catalogs and to select from a variety of upholstery fabrics, which offer soil and stain treatment for upholstered furniture, and which offer

interior design services in the customer's home.

Finding a Good Price

Among the stores that offer the selection and service you want, you'll want to try to take your business to those that will also offer you the best prices.

In the furniture marketplace, price comparisons are extraordinarily difficult. Although there are a few dozen major manufacturers of furniture that appear at a number of stores, it's unusual to find exactly the same model at any two stores. At first glance, stores' advertisements and price tags may appear to provide a basis for comparison. The stores often list a "regular" price, "ticket" price, or some similarly denoted price and then a "sale" or "discounted" price. You might hope to compare each store's high and low prices to determine stores' discounting policies. But this comparison is meaningless because the concept of full price or "regular" price means different things in different stores. For many items, manufacturers don't state a "list" price and even when one is stated, few stores sell at that price. What follows may help you get a better handle on stores' relative prices.

Our Price Comparisons

On Table 2, we have, where we were able to, calculated a price index score for each of the firms that sells makes of furniture that are also sold by other area firms. Our researchers (without revealing their affiliation with *CHECKBOOK*) called each of the stores on Table 2 and asked them for their prices for 21 different furniture items. The stores didn't necessarily have the items in stock but said they could get them. Except where noted, we collected price quotes on at least three items from each store. The price index scores on Table 2 show how each firm compared to the *average* firm that quoted on the same items. For instance, if two firms quoted on the same items and one firm has a price index score of \$105, while a second firm has a price index score of \$100, this indicates that the first firm's quotes were five percent higher than the second firm's. Unfortunately, there were quite a few firms for which we could not get a sufficient number of price quotes to calculate a price index score.

As you can see, the variation in price index scores was generally rather modest. Table 1 shows examples of price differences we found for a few specific items. In many cases, the price differences for specific items were more

Table 1

Illustrative Low, Average, and High Prices for Furniture				
Item	Lowest price at local stores	Average price at local stores	Highest price at local stores	Range of mail-order prices (including shipping)
Hooker entertainment center, model #866-55-220 with warm brown cherry finish	\$1,280	\$1,426	\$1,947	\$1,042 to \$1,197
Barcalounger "Villager" recliner, model #7-4008 with Grade 2/S leather upholstery	\$920	\$1,252	\$1,833	\$992 to \$1,165
Broyhill desk, model #3150-20 with cherry finish	\$459	\$519	\$570	\$461 to \$601
Charleston Forge "Providence" pub table, model #T-394 with cherry finish	\$563	\$708	\$799	\$514 to \$676
Charleston Forge "Etrusche" barstool, high-arm, w/cushion, model #C482-70	\$338	\$410	\$469	\$290 to \$448

dramatic than the average differences reflected in the price index scores. For instance, we found prices ranging from \$1,280 to \$1,947 for a Hooker entertainment center, model #866-55-220 with warm brown cherry finish.

The price index scores are at best a starting point for your own shopping efforts. The selection of items we used may not reflect the types of items you will want. Stores that had relatively high average prices in our survey might have a good deal for you on the particular items you want. Some stores may have been having sales during our survey period, and such sales may have distorted our survey results (although some of these stores have sales much of the time). Stores with higher price indexes might turn out to be having sales at the time when you are ready to buy. Finally, since salespersons at many stores are willing to negotiate, you might be able to get a better price in person than we got over the phone.

Subjective Judgments

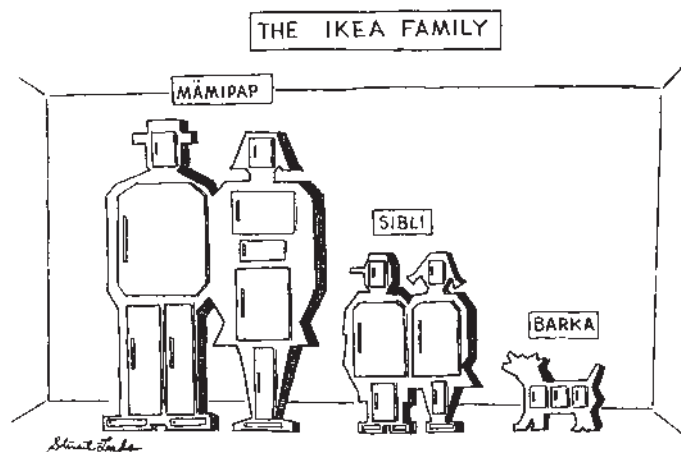
One way to choose a store that offers you good value for the money is simply to become a good judge of furniture quality, looking for the kinds of quality features discussed later in this article, and then to make subjective judgments as to whether the prices different stores charge correspond to the quality of the products they sell.

The customer survey ratings for “prices,” shown on Table 2, are a

Mail-order prices are generally very good—though not always better than the best prices from local stores—before you account for shipping costs. But after you pay for shipping, the mail-order outlets usually don’t save you much.

compilation of subjective judgments by consumers. Many of our customer survey raters presumably have little or no expertise regarding product quality and prices. But some no doubt do have a degree of expertise and a lot of experience in the market.

Several stores were rated “superior” for their prices by 50 percent or more of their surveyed customers. Even for the stores that sell mostly moderate to high-priced furniture, our raters may have considered the prices justified by the quality of the products sold.



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Competitive Bidding

Another approach for checking out a store’s prices is to conduct a competitive bidding process. While there may be no other local stores that have the exact item you want in stock, many stores may be able to order it and sell it to you. Use the following steps.

First, get the make, model/style number, and fabric grade or number (if it’s an upholstered piece) from the store where you first see the item. Some stores try to mask the needed information; the price ticket contains a hodgepodge of numbers and only includes a code number to identify the manufacturer’s name. These stores apparently want to make comparison shopping difficult. But you can usually identify an item’s manufacturer. On upholstered pieces, look for a tag under the seat cushion. On desks, dressers, and other nonupholstered items, the factory’s name is often shown inside one of the drawers. If you can’t easily figure out the information you need, ask a clerk. It is certainly reasonable for you to want to know the maker of a piece of

furniture you are considering. If you wish, you can simply explain that you want the make and model/style number information so you can check comparative prices. Would you want to buy from a store that is afraid of such comparisons? While getting the style number, also find out the location of the home office of the manufacturer. It is often possible to go to a manufacturer’s website and find a picture and other details for the model/style you are considering.

As a second step, call the manufacturer or check its website to confirm that it is still making the model/style you want. Then ask the manufacturer or check its website for names of retailers selling its products within 50 or 100 miles of your home.

Third, call each of these retailers and explain to them that you are conducting a competitive bidding process to get the best possible price on the item. Invite each retailer to quote you a price. Be sure to find out about any delivery costs.

If the prices you get from other retailers are higher than the price at the store where you started, you can be comfortable that the initial price was good. If not, you can either buy from one of the other retailers or use their prices to negotiate with the first store.

Unfortunately, this competitive bidding process may work only on moderate-priced to high-priced items. Our experience has been that stores that sell budget or low-priced items generally decline to bid.

When comparing local stores’ prices, be sure to take into account their delivery charges. Different stores have different ways of calculating their delivery charges. For example, some charge a flat fee regardless of the number or size of the items included in a delivery; some charge per piece, per pound, or per hour; and some waive delivery charges for large orders.

Other Price Strategies

Although the easiest way to get good prices is to go to a competitively priced store, other strategies can also help.

Buying Mail Order

A number of retailers sell furniture by mail order. Most of this business is based in North Carolina, where much of the furniture industry is headquartered. The existence of these mail-order outlets benefits you by putting pressure on local retailers to keep prices down.

But do you want to buy via mail order? The main reason to buy through mail order is price. But as Table 1 shows, the lowest priced local retailers often offer roughly equivalent prices—when you allow for delivery costs, which are often \$150 to \$200 for large pieces via mail order but generally less than half that, and sometimes nothing, when buying from local stores.

Against the mail-order firms' modest price advantage, several possible disadvantages must be weighed—

- There will always be a delay. Not only will it take time for your payment to reach the mail-order seller, for its confirming documents to reach you, and for the shipping itself; there also will almost always be a delay while the seller special orders the items you want. There's also a delay, of course, on purchases from local retailers if special ordering is required, but many local retailers have in stock substantial quantities of merchandise that can be delivered in a week or less.
- If a product you receive is defective, it may be difficult to prove this to the mail-order firm and even more difficult to force a remedy. One problem is that the firm may have no one in the area to inspect the furniture (you can, of course, send pictures or perhaps call in an independent appraiser). Another problem is that most mail-order firms do not have repair capabilities in the area, meaning that it may be necessary to incur the cost of shipping and may be necessary for you to lose use and control of the piece in order to have repairs made (most mail-order firms will allow you to find your own local repair service and bill the seller at least for minor repairs). A third problem is that, if you must go to court, you'll probably have to travel to where the mail-order firm is located.
- If an item is damaged and an independent van line or freight carrier has been used for shipment, you won't be able to prove whether the damage was done by the carrier or was present before the carrier received the item. Since most carriers require full payment before delivery, the whole purchase price will be at stake if a dispute arises.
- If there are long delivery delays and the seller won't give you your deposit back, you might have to go to where the mail-order firm is located to sue.
- If a freight carrier rather than a van line is used for shipping, the goods might be deposited in cartons in your front yard, leaving you to unpack them and put them where you want them in your home.

If you decide, despite these possible disadvantages, to go ahead and order from a mail-order retailer, here are a few suggestions—

- Have your furniture shipped by a van line that will pack it blanket-wrapped after the seller has inspected it and that will put it where you want it in your home. This way you'll be able to inspect it before you decide whether to accept it.
- Order from a firm that lets you make a deposit of 30 percent of the purchase price or less when you place your order and pay no more until the firm claims it has the item ready to ship. The smaller the deposit the better your leverage for prompt service and the less your risk if any type of dispute arises or if the firm goes bankrupt.
- Before sending your deposit, send the seller a sheet of paper including the first two clauses in the box on page 37 (regarding warranty coverage and promptness of delivery) and require the seller to sign both clauses and return the paper to you.
- Pay by credit card. If there is a problem, you'll have the option of disputing the transaction with your credit card issuer.

- Wait for sales. Most stores run sales at least twice a year. Some, such as the big department stores, run them much more often. If you see something you like and it is not on sale, you can often have the salesperson hold it for you; then close the deal at the time of the next sale.
- Look for items on clearance. Sometimes the prices are terrific—well below mail-order prices. Be aware that clearance items are often sold on an “as is” basis, so you must inspect them closely for defects.

- Try to negotiate prices. This may be difficult (though it is sometimes possible) at department stores or chains, but independent furniture stores are often responsive, especially if you agree to buy a number of different items.
- Consider buying through an interior designer. Although this won't usually get you especially low prices, sometimes it might—particularly if you can find a designer who for a very modest service charge will order for you and pass along his or her discount. (See a

discussion of designers in the box on page 35.)

We also assessed the option of buying through a mail-order outlet. There are many such outlets in North Carolina, where much of the U.S. furniture industry is based. As Table 1 reveals, mail-order prices are generally good but not always better than the best prices from local stores after you account for shipping costs. And mail-order purchasing introduces special risks of problems with delays, or having to

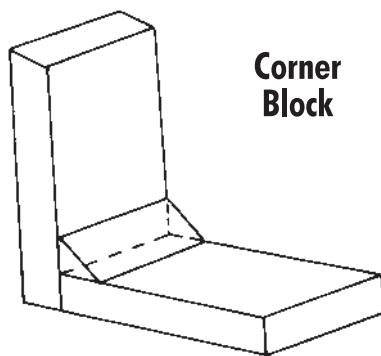
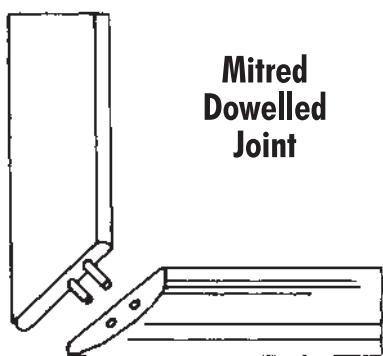
deal with product defects from a distance.

By taking the mail-order approach, you can avoid having to find local stores that sell the pieces you want so that you can compare the local stores' prices. But you still have to identify the exact make and model number you want and you will have to put in the work of calling several mail-order outlets in order to get the best *mail-order* price. We found many instances of differences in price of \$100 or \$200 for the same piece among different mail-order outlets. The mail-order option is discussed more fully in the box on page 41.

Judging Quality

Whatever styles you want and whatever prices you find, you will want to be sure you get the quality you expect. By choosing a store that is rated high for advice and reliability and has few or no complaints with consumer agencies, you improve your chances that store personnel will give you honest assessments of the quality and durability of pieces you are considering. But you will benefit by knowing enough to make some assessments of your own.

Unfortunately, *Consumer Reports* does not (and could not possibly) rate the quality of the many thousands of furniture items found in stores. So you have to do your own product inspection and testing on the spot in each store. Though you may not be able to afford the highest quality furniture, you'll need to know when you're getting less so that you can be sure it is priced accordingly. The signs of quality we'll describe here may sound a little abstract at first, but as



you visit a number of stores and look at many pieces of furniture, you'll get a feel for quality. There are two broad categories of furniture: upholstered goods and "case" goods. The latter includes tables, desks, dressers, cabinets, and other items that are not upholstered. Each category has its own indicators of quality.

Upholstered Furniture

Many of the signs of quality in upholstered furniture are easily observable. Indeed, the most important indicator is your own comfort—which you can test by sitting on a piece for a few minutes. But to check some aspects of an item's underlying construction you'll have to ask your retailer for a manufacturer's catalog or other materials that describe or show what's inside (possibly a cut-away model of a particular sofa or mattress).

Frame

- Arms should not wobble when you shake them.
- The frame of a sofa or loveseat should be rigid and should not creak or sag when you lift one corner off the floor.
- The best frame construction is with solid pieces of kiln-dried hardwoods.
- The pieces of wood making up the frame should be joined together with "dowels"—wooden pegs that run between the two pieces, inserted into holes drilled in the end of each piece.
- Corners of the frame should be reinforced with corner blocks that are glued and screwed into place.

Springs and Padding

- The entire frame should be covered with padding so that you don't feel hard corners on the arms, seat back,

or the front edge of the area under the seat cushion. This padding not only contributes to comfort and appearance; it also greatly reduces fabric wear.

- There should not be lumps or uneven places in the padding.
- An excellent construction for the seat beneath the cushions is "hand-tied" coiled springs. For the most firm and even response when you sit down, springs should be tied to each other eight ways—that is, with twine tying each spring to other springs or the frame in eight directions. Although such construction is a sure sign of quality, there are other high-quality constructions.
- Springs should not compress so much that you feel the hard surface of the frame when you sit.
- On the "deck" (the area beneath the seat cushions), the springs should be covered by a layer of padding.

Cushions

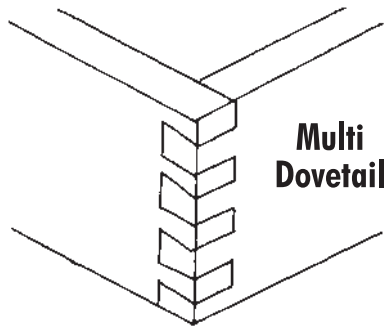
- Reversible cushions—cushions you can remove and turn over—are best. They allow you a second surface if the first becomes dirty or worn.
- The most common filler for cushions in high-quality furniture is solid pieces of high-density (at least 1.8 pounds per cubic foot) foam. Springs, down, and synthetic down-like materials also are sometimes used in high-quality pieces. Cushions filled with shredded foam will not maintain their shape as well and will allow upholstery seams to shift.
- The foam or spring core should be wrapped with a layer of polyester fiberfill or similar product to soften edges and improve wear.
- Beneath the upholstery, each cushion should be covered with a fabric liner, or ticking.
- Cushions should fit snugly side-by-side and within the frame.

Fabric

- The best fabric is tightly woven—the more threads per square inch the better. Threads shouldn't slip or separate under pressure and backing shouldn't show through.
- Patterns that are woven-in are generally preferable to patterns that are printed only on one side. Printed

fabric is unacceptable if the print comes off when you rub two printed surfaces together.

- Fabric pilling may be a problem if bits of fabric come loose when you rub a piece of upholstery with the eraser of a pencil.
- Treatment with Scotchgard, Teflon, or similar protectors helps fabrics resist soiling.



- Be sure to look for upholstered goods with the “UFAC” tag, indicating that the construction and fabric meet the voluntary fire resistance standards established by the Upholstered Furniture Action Council. (While the UFAC standards are designed to reduce the risk of cigarette ignition, the risk is not eliminated.)

Trim

- Fabric should fit tightly around the underlying frame and padding.
- Seams and “welting” (round trim composed of fabric-covered cord) should be straight and cleanly finished, with no loose threads or irregularities.
- Buttons should be securely sewn into place.
- Better-quality cushions are zippered at the back (but you should not remove the covers; this will ruin them).
- Patterns and stripes should be centered and should match at seams.
- Patterns and stripes should line up from skirt to base to cushion to seat back. If you are ordering custom upholstery, you must find out whether

the manufacturer guarantees such alignment; many middle- and low-end manufacturers do not.

- Matching arm covers will add to the life of a piece.

Case Goods

It is somewhat easier to judge quality in case goods than in upholstered items because it’s easier to see how the items are made.

Drawers

- Drawers should fit snugly and open and close effortlessly—even when you push or pull from the right or left end of the drawer. Good-quality drawers have glides either underneath in the center or on both sides.
- In high-quality drawers, the sides are joined to the front and back with dovetail joints (one piece fits into a series of flared slots on the other piece). Avoid drawers in which the side pieces are just butted up against the front and back with no notching or grooving.
- Side and back panels of drawers should be one-half-inch or thicker wood.
- Drawer bottoms should be slipped into grooves in the drawers’ sides. The bottoms should be strong enough that they don’t give significantly when pushed down.
- The insides of drawers should be smooth, with nothing to snag fabrics.
- A sign of high-quality is dust panels between drawers, although many quality pieces lack this feature. The dust panels add strength to the furniture and keep clothes from getting caught.
- Furniture should be constructed with stops to prevent drawers from being accidentally pulled out too far.
- Test drawers to be sure they are real, not just false fronts.

Doors, Top Lids, and Flip Tops

- Doors and other hinged pieces should swing smoothly and quietly, close easily, and latch snugly.

- Insides of doors should be finished.
- Inset glass panels should fit tightly so they don’t rattle.
- Long cabinet doors should be hung on piano hinges that run the full length, or nearly the full length, of the door.

Legs

- Furniture should not wobble or rock.
- Legs are usually stronger if built into the frame, not just attached to it.
- An indication of quality in chairs is construction in which the arm and leg or back and leg are made out of a continuous piece of wood (though this isn’t possible with some styles).
- Stretchers (pieces of wood connecting two legs near the floor) add strength.

Finish

- The finish of a piece of furniture should feel smooth to the touch and should contain no cracks or bubbles.
- There should be no deposits of excess glue and no streaks or areas in which excess finish material has collected.
- Grain patterns and coloration should be similar on all drawers and doors and should blend with other areas.
- Joints should be tight, with no visible space or filler material.

Other

- Hardware should be substantial, should have no rough or jagged spots, and should be firmly bolted from the inside.
- In better cabinets, desks, and chests, the back panel is inset and screwed into place, not just nailed or tacked on the back.
- Joints that receive stress should be strengthened with corner blocks that are glued and screwed into place.
- Dining room table leaves should be easy to insert, fit flush, and match the tabletop. They should be made with aprons if the table has an apron.
- Large pieces should be fitted with leveling devices.

Table 2

Furniture Stores ¹		Percent of customers rating store "superior" on our survey for...					% of customers rating store "adequate" or "superior" for...		Number of complaints on file at Attorney General's Office	Is firm a member of the BBB?/ Firm's record with BBB ²	Types of furniture & merchandise sold*	Special features**	CHECKBOOK's price index score ³ (best scores in bold italics)	CHECKBOOK's top rating for quality (✓)
		Overall quality & (number of ratings)	Advice on choice & use of products	Staff attitudes/ atmosphere	Ease of looking at/ testing products	Prices	Promptness of service	Reliability						
All-Store Averages		63%	58%	66%	67%	39%	91%	93%					\$100	
Allen's Furniture	360-825-5016	79% (19)	63%	94%	84%	58%	100%	100%	0	No/ No record	ABDEHI JKLMNOQ	abce fgjs	\$98	✓
Allen's Furniture	425-392-6767	56% (18)	41%	56%	53%	47%	100%	94%	3	No/ Neutral	ABDEHI JKLMNOQ	abce fgjs	\$98	
Anna's Home Furnishings	425-771-0857	72% (18)	56%	78%	67%	50%	100%	100%	15	No/ Unsat.	ABCDEHI JKLMNOQ	abc ejn	\$98	
Arnold's Home Furnishings	360-377-5582	85% (35)	82%	80%	74%	49%	97%	94%	0	No/ Neutral	ABDEFGHI JKLMNOQ	abcd efgijp	\$105	✓
Auburn Way Furniture & Sleep Ctr	253-833-1700	81% (16)	81%	75%	75%	56%	100%	100%	0	No/ Neutral	EHI JKM	— ⁴	\$102	✓
Behar's Furniture & Carpets	425-259-7149	66% (32)	56%	69%	68%	47%	91%	97%	0	Yes/ Sat.	ABDEHIJ KLMNOQR	ace gip	\$102	
Better Bilt	206-282-3763	100% (13)	100%	85%	46%	100%	100%	100%	0	No/ No record	ABDEHI JKLMNOQ	abcde fghijs	\$88	✓
Bon-Macy's ⁵	All locations combined	53% (371)	43%	57%	65%	36%	92%	94%	— ⁴	Yes/ Sat.	ABDEHI JKLMNQR	— ⁴	\$105	
Bon-Macy's ⁵	425-712-6850	42% (38)	42%	58%	55%	27%	84%	89%	2	Yes/ Sat.	ABDEHI JKLMNQR	abc eip	\$105	
Bon-Macy's ⁵	425-688-6850	56% (64)	41%	59%	64%	35%	92%	94%	11	Yes/ Sat.	ABDEHI JKLMNQR	abc eip	\$105	
Bon-Macy's ⁵	206-440-6671	68% (22)	52%	64%	68%	45%	91%	90%	1	Yes/ Sat.	ABDEHI JKLMNQR	abc eip	\$105	
Bon-Macy's ⁵	206-506-6000	41% (29)	31%	45%	52%	31%	82%	85%	8	Yes/ Sat.	ABDEHI JKLMNQ	bce gip	\$105	
Bon-Macy's ⁵	425-656-6850	61% (62)	39%	60%	79%	44%	95%	97%	11	Yes/ Sat.	ABDEHI JKLMNQR	abc eip	\$105	
Bon-Macy's ⁵	360-613-6850	58% (27)	69%	70%	63%	33%	93%	96%	0	Yes/ Sat.	ABDEHI JKLMNQR	abc eip	\$105	
Bon-Macy's ⁵	253-471-6800	61% (24)	50%	63%	67%	46%	92%	92%	3	Yes/ Sat.	ABDEHI JKLMNQR	abc eip	\$105	
Bothell Furniture ⁶	425-486-5833	86% (39)	87%	82%	79%	51%	100%	100%	0	Yes/ Sat.	— ⁴	— ⁴	\$93 ⁷	✓
Dania Home & Office Interiors	All locations combined	52% (153)	38%	47%	72%	40%	89%	92%	— ⁴	— ⁴	ABDEHI JKLMNOQ	— ⁴	— ⁴	
Dania Home & Office Interiors	425-823-9160	56% (39)	41%	50%	71%	45%	90%	87%	0	— ⁴	ABDEHI JKLMNOQ	abc efjr	— ⁴	
Dania Home & Office Interiors	425-673-1588	50% (18)	33%	56%	78%	24%	94%	93%	0	— ⁴	ABDEHI JKLMNOQ	abc efjr	— ⁴	
Dania Home & Office Interiors	206-524-9611	55% (40)	28%	43%	70%	44%	90%	97%	0	— ⁴	ABDEHIJ KLMNOQR	abc efjr	— ⁴	
Dania Home & Office Interiors	206-575-1918	48% (42)	44%	45%	76%	43%	86%	93%	3	— ⁴	ABDEHI JKLMNOQ	abc efjr	— ⁴	

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	Overall quality & (number of ratings)	Advice on choice & use of products	Staff attitudes/ atmosphere	Ease of looking at/ testing products	Prices	Promptness of service	Reliability						
All-Store Averages	63%	58%	66%	67%	39%	91%	93%					\$100	
Danish & International Furniture 206-575-3730 16705 Southcenter Pkwy, Seattle	89% (19)	100%	89%	95%	47%	95%	100%	0	No/ No record	— ⁴	— ⁴	— ⁴	✓
Del-Teet Furniture 425-462-5400 10308 NE 10th St, Bellevue	63% (16)	75%	69%	71%	25%	93%	85%	0	No/ Neutral	ABDEFG HIJKLMR	bcde fgjp	\$122	
Don Willis Furniture 206-524-9944 10516 Lake City Way NE, Seattle	48% (24)	58%	63%	48%	38%	88%	91%	0	No/ Neutral	ABCEHIJ KLMNOPQR	abc efjs	— ⁴	
Erickson Furniture 425-259-3876 2015 Broadway, Everett	90% (31)	81%	87%	93%	50%	100%	100%	0	No/ Sat.	ABDEHI JKLMNOQ	abc ehjp	\$98	✓
Ethan Allen Galleries All locations combined	55% (88)	60%	66%	58%	8%	83%	85%	— ⁴	Yes/ Sat.	ABDEFGHI JKLMNPOQR	— ⁴	— ⁴	
Ethan Allen Galleries 425-775-1901 4029 Alderwood Mall Blvd, Lynnwood	48% (21)	53%	62%	55%	5%	86%	90%	4	Yes/ Sat.	ABDEFGHI JKLMNPOQR	acd egjn	— ⁴	
Ethan Allen Galleries 425-641-3133 2209 NE Bel Red Rd, Redmond	32% (25)	46%	48%	54%	4%	68%	71%	6	Yes/ Sat.	ABDEFGHI JKLMNPOQR	acd egjn	— ⁴	
Ethan Allen Galleries 206-575-4366 17333 Southcenter Pkwy, Seattle	73% (33)	79%	82%	60%	9%	94%	90%	8	Yes/ Sat.	ABDEFGHI JKLMNPOQR	acde ghjn	— ⁴	
Gallery Furniture & Design Center 253-852-0300 921 Central Ave N, Kent	75% (25)	68%	80%	72%	56%	96%	96%	0	No/ No record	ABDEHIJ KLMNOPQ	ace fgjs	\$94	✓
Greenbaum Home Furnishings 425-454-2474 929 118th Ave SE, Bellevue	75% (81)	69%	78%	74%	38%	91%	95%	0	No/ Sat.	ABDEFGHI JKLMNPOQR	abcd efgjs	\$97	✓
Harkness Furniture 253-473-1234 6612 S Tacoma Way, Tacoma	80% (47)	66%	89%	81%	53%	96%	95%	0	No/ Neutral	ABDEHI JKLMNOQ	abcd efgjp	\$103	✓
Home Furniture⁸ 425-776-0566 133 128th St SW, Everett	38% (16)	38%	63%	47%	25%	88%	94%	0	No/ Neutral	ABDEHIJ KLMNOPQ	abc ejn	— ⁴	
Home Furniture⁸ 425-251-9345 17600 W Valley Hwy, Seattle	46% (28)	43%	50%	59%	37%	100%	100%	0	No/ Neutral	ABDEHIJ KLMNOPQ	abc ejn	— ⁴	
Home Furniture⁸ 253-588-5300 10222 S Tacoma Way, Tacoma	57% (31)	47%	52%	53%	32%	97%	93%	2	No/ Neutral	ABDEHIJ KLMNOPQ	— ⁴	— ⁴	
IKEA 425-656-2980 600 SW 43rd St, Renton	61% (272)	29%	53%	79%	83%	90%	96%	5	No/ Sat.	ABCDEGHI JKLMNPOQR	ab kt	— ⁴	
J C Penney All locations combined	49% (74)	44%	53%	45%	42%	85%	86%	— ⁴	No/ Sat.	ABCDEGHI JKLMNPOQ	— ⁴	— ⁴	
J C Penney 425-771-9555 Alderwood Mall, Lynnwood	50% (10)	30%	20%	40%	50%	90%	100%	— ⁴	No/ Sat.	ABCDEGHI JKLMNPOQ	abc djp	— ⁴	

FOOTNOTES ON PAGE 47.

***TYPES OF FURNITURE AND MERCHANDISE SOLD:** A=Upholstered furniture; B=Case pieces; C=Unfinished furniture; D=Rugs/carpets; E=Bedding/mattresses; F=Wall coverings; G=Window coverings; H=Decorative accessories; I=Living room; J=Den/family room; K=Dining room; L=Kitchen; M=Bedroom; N=Home theater; O=Youth; P=Infant's; Q=Study/office; R=Patio/outdoors.

****SPECIAL FEATURES:** a=Catalogs available for customers to special-order furniture; b=Orders for furniture in showroom can usually be fulfilled within two weeks; c=Choice of upholstery fabrics for most sofas; d=Custom upholstery services; e=Soil and stain treatment for upholstered furniture upon request; f=In-house repair services for case pieces and/or upholstered furniture; g=In-home interior design services available; h=Store offers free local delivery; *Firm's payment policy for furniture that is special-ordered:* i=No payment required until furniture arrives; j=Downpayment required; k=Full payment required at the time of purchase; l=Not applicable (cash and carry only); *Firm's returns policy for regularly stocked furniture (not including special orders or sale items) in original condition:* m=No returns; n=Returns accepted within three days of purchase; o=Returns accepted within five days of purchase; p=Returns accepted within one week of purchase; q=Returns accepted within 10 days of purchase; r=Returns accepted within two weeks of purchase; s=Returns accepted within one month of purchase; t=Returns accepted within 45 days of purchase; u=Returns accepted within two months of purchase; v=Returns accepted, but time period varies by item.

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All-Store Averages		63%	58%	66%	67%	39%	91%	93%					\$100	
J C Penney 1200 Southcenter Mall, Seattle	206-246-0850	67% (15)	69%	80%	73%	73%	87%	93%	— ⁴	No/ Sat.	ABDEGHI JKLMNOPQ	abc djp	— ⁴	
J C Penney Kitsap Mall, Silverdale	360-692-1222	56% (16)	67%	53%	60%	38%	81%	88%	— ⁴	No/ Sat.	ABCDEGHI JKLMNOPQ	— ⁴	— ⁴	
J C Penney 4502 S Steele St, Tacoma	253-475-4510	67% (12)	33%	75%	50%	33%	100%	100%	— ⁴	No/ Sat.	ABCDEGHI JKLMNOPQ	abc djp	— ⁴	
Kasala Furniture 1014 116th Ave NE, Bellevue	425-453-2823	85% (13)	92%	92%	77%	33%	92%	92%	0	No/ Neutral	ABDEHI JKLMNQ	ce js	— ⁴	✓
La-Z-Boy Furniture Galleries 3520 Kitsap Way, Bremerton	360-377-0992	67% (25)	64%	72%	80%	40%	96%	96%	0	— ⁴	ABDH IJNQ	abce fgjp	\$107 ⁷	
La-Z-Boy Furniture Galleries 20423 Hwy 99, Lynnwood	425-778-4644	51% (54)	50%	63%	60%	34%	87%	88%	2	— ⁴	ABDH IJNQ	abce fgjo	\$107 ⁷	
La-Z-Boy Furniture Galleries 6610 Tacoma Mall Blvd, Tacoma	253-472-8488	66% (39)	58%	77%	74%	30%	95%	100%	0	— ⁴	ABDH IJNQ	bcf giq	\$107 ⁷	
La-Z-Boy Furniture Galleries 16875 Southcenter Pkwy, Tukwila	206-575-1766	55% (34)	41%	59%	68%	35%	91%	94%	0	— ⁴	ABDH IJNQ	abce fgjq	\$107 ⁷	
Levitz Furniture 20111 46th Ave W, Lynnwood	425-771-2123	23% (35)	21%	31%	49%	29%	82%	85%	19	— ⁴	ABDEHI JKLMNOQ	be km	— ⁴	
Levitz Furniture 2402 84th St S, Tacoma	253-582-2199	29% (42)	40%	36%	57%	24%	71%	75%	14	— ⁴	ABDEHI JKLMNOQ	be km	— ⁴	
Levitz Furniture 17601 Southcenter Pkwy, Tukwila	206-575-0510	33% (42)	29%	38%	55%	31%	69%	79%	38	— ⁴	ABDEHI JKLMNOQ	be km	— ⁴	
Masins Furniture 10777 Main St, Bellevue	425-450-9999	85% (20)	89%	80%	75%	28%	90%	94%	0	No/ No record	ABDEFGH IJKLMNOPQ	acde fgjp	\$107	✓
Masins Furniture 220 2nd Ave S, Seattle	206-622-5606	81% (26)	77%	77%	84%	36%	92%	96%	0	No/ No record	ABDEFGHI JKLMNOQR	acde fgjp	\$107	✓
McDonald's Furniture Liquidators 4520 200th St SW #107, Lynnwood	425-775-3315	42% (12)	50%	33%	55%	58%	83%	67%	0	No/ Unsat.	ABEHI JKLMNQ	— ⁴	\$98	
McKinnon Furniture 1015 Western Ave, Seattle	206-622-6474	90% (21)	76%	95%	81%	19%	100%	100%	0	No/ No record	ABCDEFG HIJKMNQ	— ⁴	— ⁴	✓
Miller-Pollard Interiors 2575 NE University Village Mall, Seattle	206-527-8478	85% (14)	77%	93%	71%	25%	92%	100%	0	No/ No record	ABDEFGH IJKLMQR	cdef ghjs	\$101 ⁷	✓
Newell Hunt Furniture ⁹ 113 W Stewart Ave, Puyallup	253-845-1735	100% (17)	100%	94%	94%	35%	100%	100%	0	No/ Neutral	ABDEGHI JKLMNOQ	ace gio	\$101	✓
Old Cannery Furniture Warehouse 13608 Valley Ave E #A, Sumner	253-863-0422	78% (162)	53%	75%	81%	69%	95%	97%	0	Yes/ Sat.	ABDEHIJ KLMNOPQR	abc ejs	\$84⁷	✓
Olsen Furniture 5354 Ballard Ave NW, Seattle	206-782-6020	84% (32)	81%	84%	84%	47%	100%	100%	0	No/ Neutral	ABDEHI JKLMNOQ	ac eij	\$100	✓
Pennsylvania Woodworks 17705 140th Ave NE, Woodinville	425-486-9541	86% (14)	71%	86%	64%	14%	93%	100%	0	No/ Neutral	ABDEGHI JKLMNOQ	ace gjs	— ⁴	✓
Redinerland 2802 84th St S #10, Lakewood	253-582-8749	33% (13)	46%	31%	58%	31%	77%	91%	0	No/ Unsat.	H IJ	cd jn	\$98	

Table 2

Furniture Stores ¹		Percent of customers rating store "superior" on our survey for...					% of customers rating store "adequate" or "superior" for...		Number of complaints on file at Attorney General's Office	Is firm a member of the BBB? ² Firm's record with BBB ²	Types of furniture & merchandise sold*	Special features**	CHECKBOOK's price index score ³ (best scores in bold italics)	CHECKBOOK's top rating for quality (✓)
		Overall quality & (number of ratings)	Advice on choice & use of products	Staff attitudes/atmosphere	Ease of looking at/testing products	Prices	Promptness of service	Reliability						
All-Store Averages		63%	58%	66%	67%	39%	91%	93%					\$100	
Scan/Design Furniture 10515 NE 6th St, Bellevue	425-454-7200	65% (23)	57%	57%	65%	36%	87%	100%	2	Yes/ Sat.	ABDEHI JKLMNOQ	bcf gjo	— ⁴	
Scan/Design Furniture 19320 33rd Ave W, Lynnwood	425-771-7226	68% (20)	63%	68%	80%	30%	100%	100%	0	No/ No record	ABDEHI JKLMNOQ	bcf gjo	— ⁴	✓
Schoenfeld Interiors 1014 116th Ave NE, Bellevue	425-451-2952	94% (16)	75%	88%	75%	31%	93%	93%	0	Yes/ Sat.	ABDEGHI JKLMNOQ	— ⁴	\$111 ⁷	✓
Sears All locations combined		39% (49)	30%	42%	50%	35%	77%	83%	— ⁴	— ⁴	ABDEFGH KLMNOPQR	ae ku	— ⁴	
Selden's-Thomasville Home 1802 62nd Ave E, Tacoma	253-922-5700	70% (74)	70%	79%	71%	21%	90%	93%	2	Yes/ Sat.	ABCDEFGH HIJKLMNQ	ace gjn	\$98	
Thomasville Home Furnishings 5951 S 180th St #101, Tukwila	206-575-8666	62% (21)	68%	75%	40%	15%	100%	87%	3	Yes/ Sat.	ABDEHIJ KLMNOQR	acde fgjm	— ⁴	
Underhill's Fine Wood Furniture 12510 120th Ave NE, Kirkland	425-821-5992	48% (23)	43%	48%	73%	52%	87%	91%	0	No/ No record	ABCDEHI JKLMNOQR	ace fjs	— ⁴	
Underhill's Fine Wood Furniture 16389 Redmond Way, Redmond	425-882-2575	69% (16)	67%	75%	75%	50%	94%	93%	3	No/ No status	ABCDEHI JKLMNOQR	ace fjs	— ⁴	

***TYPES OF FURNITURE AND MERCHANDISE SOLD:** A=Upholstered furniture; B=Case pieces; C=Unfinished furniture; D=Rugs/carpets; E=Bedding/mattresses; F=Wall coverings; G=Window coverings; H=Decorative accessories; I=Living room; J=Den/family room; K=Dining room; L=Kitchen; M=Bedroom; N=Home theater; O=Youth; P=Infant's; Q=Study/office; R=Patio/outdoors.

****SPECIAL FEATURES:** a=Catalogs available for customers to special-order furniture; b=Orders for furniture in showroom can usually be fulfilled within two weeks; c=Choice of upholstery fabrics for most sofas; d=Custom upholstery services; e=Soil and stain treatment for upholstered furniture upon request; f=In-house repair services for case pieces and/or upholstered furniture; g=In-home interior design services available; h=Store offers free local delivery; *Firm's payment policy for furniture that is special-ordered:* i=No payment required until furniture arrives; j=Downpayment required; k=Full payment required at the time of purchase; l=Not applicable (cash and carry only); *Firm's returns policy for regularly stocked furniture (not including special orders or sale items) in original condition:* m=No returns; n=Returns accepted within three days of purchase; o=Returns accepted within five days of purchase; p=Returns accepted within one week of purchase; q=Returns accepted within 10 days of purchase; r=Returns accepted within two weeks of purchase; s=Returns accepted within one month of purchase; t=Returns accepted within 45 days of purchase; u=Returns accepted within two months of purchase; v=Returns accepted, but time period varies by item.

FOOTNOTES:

¹ See text and page 112 for description of research methods, dates, and limitations. We've included all firms for which we received at least 10 ratings on our customer survey. If a firm is not listed here, it simply means that we did not have at least 10 ratings for it; that fact has no negative or positive implications.

² We report here whether firms had a "satisfactory" record ("Sat."), "unsatisfactory" record ("Unsat."), neutral record ("Neutral"), or no record ("No record") with the BBB when we checked. A satisfactory record means that the firm has responded to any complaints processed by the Bureau in its three-year reporting period, and that the number or types of complaints are not

unusual. An unsatisfactory record means that the firm has not responded to one or more complaints, has had an unusually high number of complaints or an unusual pattern of complaints filed against it, or has had unusual types of complaints or is unsatisfactory for some other factual reason. Firms with "neutral" records were in the BBB's database when we checked, but the BBB had not yet commented on the firm's performance. Firms with "No record" were not in the BBB's database when we checked.

³ For each firm, our price index score is intended to suggest the price a customer might expect to pay for furniture that would cost \$100 at the "average" firm. The price index scores are based on prices quoted to CHECKBOOK researchers who shopped for 21

specific items; unless otherwise noted, scores are based on at least three price quotes.

⁴ Insufficient data.

⁵ Formerly Bon Marche.

⁶ Firm did not respond to our repeated requests for information. We were unable to confirm whether or not the firm changed names and/or ownership during our customer survey period.

⁷ Price index score is based on two price quotes.

⁸ Formerly Oak Barn.

⁹ Firm changed ownership during customer survey period; management policies may have changed.

Furniture Store Write-ups

The following brief write-ups will give you some sense of the types of furniture you can expect to find in surveyed stores. But first a few definitions.

Styles of furniture are broken into several categories. “Traditional/classic” refers to authentic reproductions or modern interpretations of such classic formal styles as Federalist, Chippendale, Queen Anne, and Louis XV. “Country” styles may also be traditional but they are less formal, like country French and English, early American, and golden oak. “Contemporary” refers to straightforward, functional furniture that does not have the decorative embellishments of older designs. When the word “transitional” is used, it refers to furniture styles that are neither highly traditional nor contemporary but bridge the gap between the two. We also indicate whether stores offer antiques and/or antique reproductions.

We asked each store to describe its offerings using three price categories: budget, moderate, and/or high-end. The price category the store has used to describe its furniture says nothing about whether the store offers low or high prices compared to other stores for comparable items—that is, about whether it is a discount store. A store may sell budget-priced furniture at a big markup or high-end furniture at deep discounts.

Allen’s Furniture

Sells a mix of traditional/classic, country, contemporary, and transitional styles. Offers a limited selection of leather-upholstered items. Store categorizes its offerings as moderate-priced. Brands include La-Z-Boy, Lane, Flexsteel, Hooker, Broyhill, and Bassett.

Anna’s Home Furnishings

Sells mostly traditional/classic and some transitional styles. Offers mostly leather-upholstered items and a limited selection of antique reproductions. Store categorizes its offerings as moderate-priced to high-end. Brands include Hooker, Lexington, Barcalounger, and Stanley.

Arnold’s Home Furnishings

Sells some traditional/classic, contemporary, and transitional styles and a limited selection of country styles. Store categorizes its offerings as moderate-priced. Brands include Flexsteel, Broyhill, Huntington House, Bradington-Young, Natuzzi, and Universal.

Auburn Way Furniture & Sleep Ctr

Sells mostly traditional/classic and some country, contemporary, and transitional styles. Offers some leather-upholstered items. Brands include Broyhill, La-Z-Boy, Stanley, Flexsteel, Ashley, Lane, Lexington, and Peter Revington.

Behar’s Furniture & Carpets

Sells some traditional/classic, contemporary, and transitional styles and a limited selection of country styles. Offers a limited selection of antique reproductions and leather-upholstered items. Store categorizes its offerings as moderate-priced. Brands include Ashley, Fairmont, Guildcraft, Howard Miller, Huntington, LaCrosse, Lane, Lea, Natuzzi, Omnia, Palliser, Perdue, Rowe, Stanton, and Zocalo.

Better Bill

Sells mostly traditional/classic, some transitional, and a limited selection of country and contemporary styles. Offers a limited selection of antique reproductions and leather-upholstered items. Store categorizes its offerings as moderate-priced to high-end.

Bon-Macy’s

Sells mostly contemporary and transitional styles and some traditional/classic styles. Offers some leather-upholstered items and a limited selection of antique reproductions. Store categorizes its offerings as moderate-priced to high-end. Brands include Alan White, Barcalounger, Bauhaus, Berkline, Bernhardt, Hooker, Jonathan Lewis, Lane, and Natuzzi.

Bothell Furniture

Sells some country and a limited selection of contemporary and transitional styles. Offers some antique reproductions and leather-upholstered items.

Dania Home & Office Interiors

Sells mostly contemporary and some transitional styles. Offers some leather-upholstered items. Store categorizes its offerings as inexpensive/budget to high-end. Brands include Cascadia, Hotel, Seabourne, Sterling, Whidbey, and Valenza Ottoman.

Danish & International Furniture

Sells mostly contemporary and a limited selection of transitional styles. Offers some leather-upholstered items.

Del-Teet Furniture

Sells mostly contemporary styles. Offers a limited selection of Japanese antique and leather-upholstered items. Store categorizes its offerings as moderate-priced to high-end.

Don Willis Furniture

Sells a mix of traditional/classic, country, contemporary, and transitional styles. Offers a limited selection of antique reproductions. Store categorizes its offerings as inexpensive/budget to high-end. Brands include local craftsmen.

Erickson Furniture

Sells mostly traditional/classic and a limited selection of country, contemporary, and transitional styles. Offers a limited selection of leather-upholstered items. Store categorizes its offerings as moderate-priced. Brands include Broyhill, Ekornes, Flexsteel, Hammary, Hooker, Keller, La-Z-Boy, and Richardson.

Ethan Allen Galleries

Sells some traditional/classic, country, and contemporary styles, and a limited selection of transitional styles. Offers some antique reproductions and leather-upholstered items. Store categorizes its offerings as high-end. Brands include Ethan Allen.

Gallery Furniture & Design Center

Sells a mix of traditional/classic, country, contemporary, and transitional styles. Offers some leather-upholstered items and a limited selection of antique reproductions. Store categorizes its offerings as moderate-priced to high-end. Brands include Ashley, Broyhill, Canadel, Durham, Flexsteel, Hammary, La-Z-Boy, Lane, Lexington, Serta, Tempur-Pedic, and Wesley Allen.

Greenbaum Home Furnishings

Sells mostly traditional/classic and a limited selection of country, contemporary, and transitional styles. Offers some antique reproductions and leather-upholstered items. Store categorizes its offerings as moderate-

priced to high-end. Brands include Barcalounger, Bernhardt, Bradington Young, Century, Drexel, Hammary, Hooker, Howard Miller, La-Z-Boy, Lane, Lexington, Natuzzi, and Pennsylvania House.

Harkness Furniture

Sells mostly traditional/classic, some transitional, and a limited selection of country and contemporary styles. Offers some leather-upholstered items. Store categorizes its offerings as moderate-priced. Brands include Broyhill, Guildcraft, Natuzzi, and Rowe.

Home Furniture

Sells some traditional/classic and contemporary styles and a limited selection of country and transitional styles. Offers mostly leather-upholstered items. Store categorizes its offerings as moderate-priced. Brands include A-America, Black Hawk, DeCoro, Golden Oak, Pacific, Palliser, Powell, Preston Hill, and Ther-A-Pedic.

IKEA

Sells mostly contemporary styles and some traditional/classic, country, and transitional styles. Offers a limited selection of leather-upholstered items. Store categorizes its offerings as inexpensive/budget. Brands include IKEA.

J C Penney

Sells mostly traditional/classic styles, some country styles and a limited selection of contemporary and transitional styles. Offers some leather-upholstered items and a limited selection of antique reproductions. Store categorizes its offerings as moderate-priced. Brands include Bassett, Berkline, Broyhill, Lane, Palliser, Riverside, Sealy, Serta, and Spring Air.

Kasala Furniture

Sells mostly contemporary styles. Offers mostly leather-upholstered items. Store categorizes its offerings as moderate-priced. Brands include Alessi, Artemide, Baronet, BDI, Cattelan, Della Robbia, Flos, Jonathan Alder, Leolux, Natuzzi, and Naza.

La-Z-Boy Furniture Galleries

Sells a mix of traditional/classic, country, contemporary, and transitional styles. Offers some leather-upholstered items. Store categorizes its offerings as moderate-priced. Brands include La-Z-Boy.

Levitz Furniture

Sells mostly contemporary, some traditional/classic, and a limited selection of country and transitional styles. Offers a limited selection of leather-upholstered items. Store categorizes its offerings as moderate-priced. Brands include Brookwood and Callister.

Masins Furniture

Sells mostly traditional/classic and transitional styles and some contemporary styles. Offers some antique reproductions and a limited selection of antique and leather-upholstered items. Store categorizes its offerings as moderate-priced to high-end. Brands include Baker, Century, Coach, EJ Victor, Ferguson Copeland, Guy Chaddock, Hancock & Moore, Henkel-Harris, Henkel-Moore, Henredon, John Widdicomb, and Karges.

McDonald's Fine Furniture

Sells a mix of traditional/classic, country, contemporary, and transitional styles. Offers some leather-upholstered items and a limited selection of antique reproductions. Store categorizes its offerings as moderate-priced. Brands include Alan White, Alexander Julian, Barcalounger, Berkline, Eddie Bauer, Klaussner, Lane, Sealy, and Stanton.

McKinnon Furniture

Sells mostly contemporary and transitional styles. Offer some leather-upholstered items. Store categorizes its offerings as moderate-priced. Brands include Carriole, Four Poster, Mission, Prairie, and Shito.

Miller-Pollard Interiors

Sells mostly traditional/classic and transitional styles. Offer some leather-upholstered items. Store categorizes its offerings as moderate-priced. Brands include Aireloom, Brown Street, Burton James, Cherry Pond, Hickory Chair, Lee, and Nichols & Stone.

Newell Hunt Furniture

Sells mostly transitional styles and some traditional/classic and contemporary styles. Offers some leather-upholstered items. Store categorizes its offerings as moderate-priced to high-end. Brands include Broyhill, Christopher Lowell, Ekornes, Flexsteel, and Simmons.

Old Cannery Furniture Warehouse

Sells mostly traditional/classic and contemporary styles, and some country and transitional styles. Store categorizes its offerings as moderate-priced. Brands include A-America, Lane, and Spring Air.

Olsen Furniture

Sells mostly traditional/classic, some country, and a limited selection of contemporary styles. Offers mostly leather-upholstered items. Store categorizes its offerings as moderate-priced. Brands include Athol, Barcalounger, Broyhill, Classic Leather, Flexsteel, La-Z-Boy, Lane, Hooker, and Pennsylvania House.

Pennsylvania Woodworks

Sells mostly traditional/classic styles. Offers mostly antique reproductions and a limited selection of leather-upholstered items. Store categorizes its offerings as moderate-priced to high-end. Brands include Amish Heritage, Ottoman, Shaker, and Tom Seely.

Reclinerland

Sells mostly contemporary styles. Offers some leather-upholstered items. Store categorizes its offerings as inexpensive/budget to moderate-priced. Brands include Allerton, Carolina, Clarion, Dundee, Hampton, Malibu, Palmetto, Sydney, and Trader.

Scan/Design Furniture

Sells mostly contemporary styles. Offers mostly leather-upholstered items. Store categorizes its offerings as moderate-priced. Brands include Benny Lyden, Fattori, Giorgio, Natuzzi, and Presetto.

Schoenfeld Interiors

Sells mostly transitional styles and some traditional/classic and contemporary styles. Offers mostly leather-upholstered items. Store categorizes its offerings as moderate-priced to high-end. Brands include Century, Bernhardt, and Stanley.

Selden's-Thomasville Home Furnishings

Sells mostly traditional/classic styles and a limited selection of country, contemporary, and transitional styles. Offers some antique reproductions and leather-upholstered items. Store categorizes its offerings as inexpensive/budget to high-end. Brands include Bassett, Bernhardt, Century, Charleston Forge, Drexel, Flexsteel, Hammary, Heritage, Hooker, Jessica Charles, Pennsylvania House, and Thomasville.

Thomasville Home Furnishings

Sells mostly traditional/classic, some country, and a limited selection of contemporary and transitional styles. Offers some leather-upholstered items. Store categorizes its offerings as moderate-priced. Brands include Thomasville.

Underhill's Fine Wood Furniture

Sells a mix of traditional/classic, country, contemporary, and transitional styles. Offers a limited selection of leather-upholstered items. Store categorizes its offerings as moderate-priced. Brands include Bali, Brown Wood, Copper River, Creative Ideas, Dick Idol, Klaussner, Louis Philippe, Mission, Nostalgic, Ottoman, Seacoast, and Sunriver.

Top Ratings

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 \$ \$ \$ \$ \$

A Rough Guide for Deciding Whether the Difference Between Two Percentages is Important	If one firm had this number of ratings:	And a second firm had this number of ratings:	Do not give much importance to the difference between the frequency with which the two firms experience a particular rating or result unless the difference is at least this many percentage points:
Assuming the average of the two firms' percentages is 50 percent	10	10	45
	30	30	26
	60	60	18
	120	120	13
Assuming the average of the two firms' percentages is 80 percent	10	10	36
	30	30	21
	60	60	15
	120	120	10