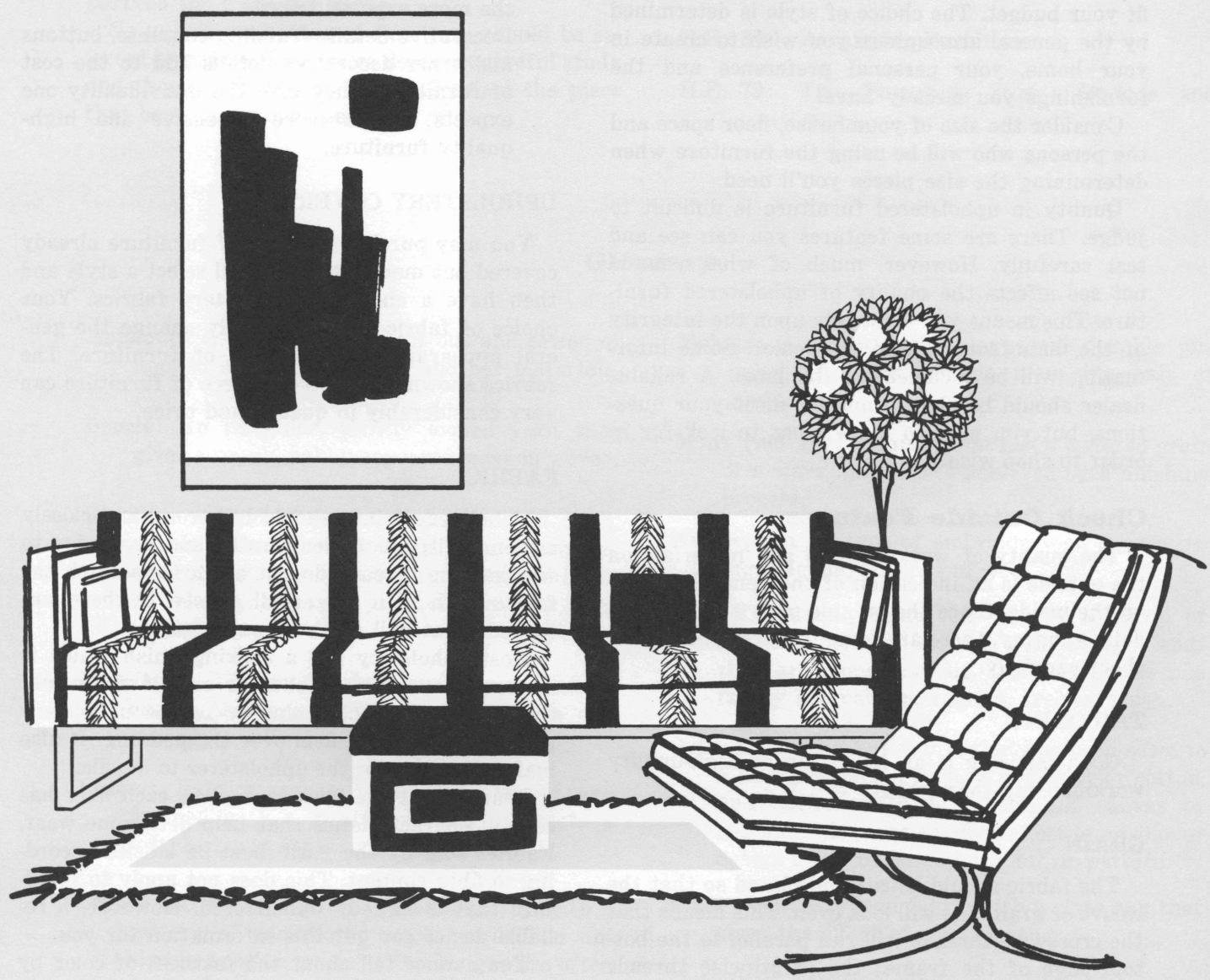


Rec'D 10,000- 9-22-69

L-845



furnishing your home

Buying Upholstered Furniture

TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY
TEXAS AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SERVICE
J. E. Hutchison, Director, College Station, Texas

Buying Upholstered Furniture

Today's upholstered furniture comes in a wide variety of styles, sizes, qualities and prices. When you get ready to select a chair or sofa, you must decide which piece will best serve your needs and fit your budget. The choice of style is determined by the general atmosphere you wish to create in your home, your personal preference and the furnishings you already have.

Consider the size of your house, floor space and the persons who will be using the furniture when determining the size pieces you'll need.

Quality in upholstered furniture is difficult to judge. There are some features you can see and test carefully. However, much of what you do not see affects the quality of upholstered furniture. This means you must rely upon the integrity of the manufacturer and the dealer. Some information will be included on the label. A reliable dealer should be able to answer most your questions, but you need to know what to look for in order to shop wisely.

Check Outside Features

The quality of workmanship and materials on the outside is an indication of the general quality on the inside. Since the outside part is exposed to daily scrutiny, there are some features you should check carefully.

TAILORING

Good tailoring is an indication of high-quality workmanship throughout.

GRAIN

The fabric should be cut and placed so that the weave or grain line will look even. This means that the crosswise threads will run parallel to the bottom edge of the frame; the lengthwise threads will be perpendicular to the base of the frame.

- Hems and pleats—Hems and pleats should be even and hang straight. Check grain line carefully.
- Pattern—Fabric patterns, whether large or small, should be centered and carefully placed. The placement of pattern, particularly bold patterns, on the back, cushion, front and arms should be placed to best advantage.
- Welting—The cording or welting should be smooth, straight and firmly stitched.
- Cushions—Cushions should fit snugly into seat corners and with adjoining cushions. Re-

versible cushions will help distribute wear.

- Use of fabric—In better quality furniture the areas under the cushions and across the back are of the same quality fabric as that used for the more exposed areas.
- Decorative detail—Tufting, trapunto, buttons and other decorative details add to the cost of furniture. They give the individuality one expects in the more expensive and high-quality furniture.

UPHOLSTERY COVERINGS

You may purchase a piece of furniture already covered but more often you will select a style and then have a choice of upholstery fabrics. Your choice of fabric may completely change the general appearance of the piece of furniture. The fabrics shown for the same piece of furniture can vary considerably in quality and price.

FABRIC

Upholstery fabric should be strong and closely woven. Pull it both lengthwise and crosswise to see that the threads do not shift. Or scratch the fabric with your fingernail to see if there are threads that will catch or pull easily.

Most upholstery has a backing finish which is rubber, a synthetic rubber or one of the newer foam products. This helps make the upholstery remain smooth and firm over the padding. It also makes it easier for the upholsterer to handle.

Learn about the fiber content as each fiber has certain characteristics that help determine wear. Fabrics sold by the yard must be labeled according to fiber content. This does not apply to furniture that is already upholstered. However, a reliable dealer can get this information for you.

You cannot tell about the fastness of color by appearance. This information also should be on a label. One of the most critical tests for upholstery is whether or not the fabric is color-fast to light.

Finishes are available to add spot- and stain-resistance to all fabrics regardless of fiber content. Some protect against water-borne stains; some protect against water and oily stains. They also give increased resistance to wear. If a fabric has been treated for spot- and stain-resistance, this information is usually included on the label. Permanent mothproofing prevents moth damage to wools and wool blends.

All of the classic types of fabric are being made and used—tapestry, damask, brocade, homespun, bouclé, frieze and plush as well as velvet, tweeds and chintz. See fabric glossary page 5. Each of these fabrics is made in a number of different fibers or combination of fibers. Many of the newer fabrics are described by textures, color combinations or the country of origin.

LEATHER

Leather is an excellent though expensive upholstery material. Improvements have made leather softer, thus making beautiful tailoring detail easier. Leathers are available in a lovely range of colors and textures.

VINYL PLASTICS

There are many qualities of vinyl plastics. Some look like leather; some like fabric. Some have a fabric backing; others do not.

Low-quality vinyl tears at the corners and splits at the seams. It also has low resistance to stains and fading.

Vinyl is easily cleaned. It is waterproof. Vinyl is difficult to repair once it breaks.

EXPOSED SURFACES

If a piece of furniture has legs or a frame that is not covered, examine the finish carefully. The wood should have an even color and rich texture. Any carving or ornamental detail should be refined and smooth. The upholstery should be fitted attractively and joined evenly to exposed wood surfaces.

Check Inside Features

The quality of features within the piece of furniture determines serviceability, durability and comfort. You need to know something about the way upholstered furniture is made in order to ask questions about the piece you are considering. You can learn much about quality from comparing upholstered pieces.

FRAMEWORK

The basic frame must be designed and constructed to withstand stress and strain over a long period of time. A hardwood that is free from imperfections and that has been kiln dried is most desirable. Hackberry, elm, gum, maple and oak

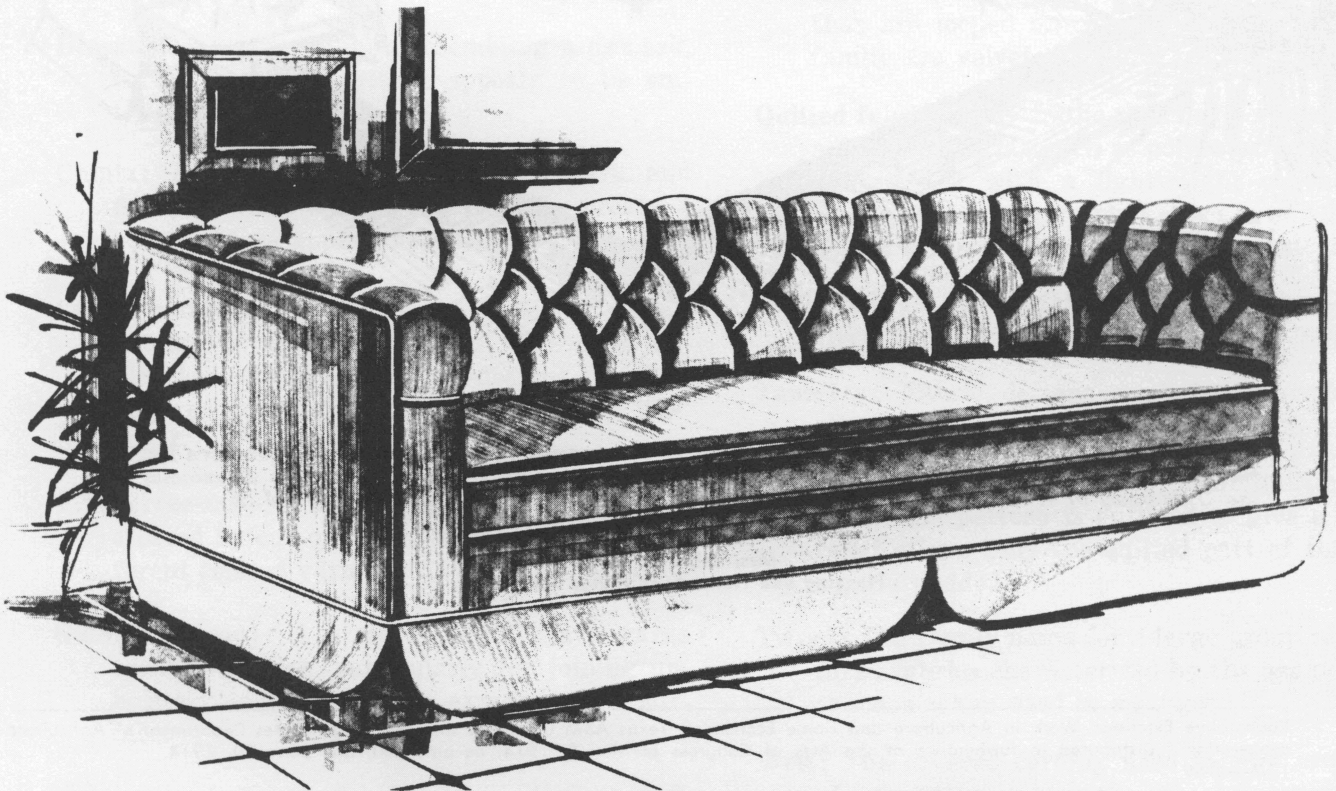


Figure 1. Good piece of furniture pointing out what to look for.

are most commonly used. The frame must hold screws and nails securely.

The joints of quality furniture are usually double dowel construction. Corners should be reinforced with triangular blocks carefully fitted and fastened with glue and screws. Metal plates are often used to strengthen corners.

In some of the newer furniture the complete framework is being made of metal.

THE SPRINGS

Bands of webbing are interlaced and tacked to the frame of most sofas and chairs. Woven jute is commonly used for webbing because it is strong, durable and resilient. Sometimes steel bands or rubber are used. Webbing is not needed for those springs attached directly to the frame.

Springs are used to add resilience to seating. For durability they should be made of tempered steel and placed close together. Better quality furniture may have twelve coils per seat, and no less than eight.

Springs are attached to the webbing or steel bands. Proper tying is important to keep the springs firmly in place and to provide proper resiliency. In the best quality furniture, springs are placed on jute or rubber webbing and tied eight times with flax twine. On steel webbing or bands they should be wire clipped. You can tell something about spring construction by the way the springs feel from underneath the dust cover.

A layer of burlap, cotton felt or rubberized sisal should be placed over the springs to separate them from the padding and to help support and keep filling materials in place. In some light scaled upholstered pieces, flat springs (zigzag or arch type) are used instead of coil springs. These springs do not need the support of webbing nor do they need to be tied.

PADDING AND FILLING

A quality piece of furniture has an ample amount of filling selected and applied so that the piece retains its shape for a long time. Inferior quality is evident when the filling shifts, mats, lumps or distorts the shape rather quickly.

Various fillings are available and are often used in combination. Many states require a label to identify the filling content. However, the label does not indicate the grade or quality of filling material and this can vary widely for each type.

Goose down is a favorite because of its luxurious softness. Goose down or a combination of down and goose feathers is found in many expensive upholstered pieces.

Rubberized or curled hair is used in medium- and low-cost furniture. It has a fair amount of resilience, is cool, nonabsorbent and odor-free.

Rubber foam is durable, comfortable and resilient. It is lightweight and retains its shape. Generally speaking, it is used in the medium- and higher-priced furniture.

Urethane foam is resilient, lightweight and does not absorb water, perspiration and cleaning fluids. It can be cut, sliced, stitched or glued and has high resistance to tearing.

Man-made fiberfills such as a Dacron polyester and Acrilan acrylic are used as complete filling or wrapping for other filling. They are resilient, and resist insects, mildew, drycleaning solvents and alcohol. If properly made, they need no fluffing.

Natural hair remains resilient over a long period of time. Horse hair is best but cattle and hog hairs are also used.

Moss, kapok and sisal have a relatively short life expectancy. They are used in the lower quality grades of furniture.

Cotton padding is often used in combination with other materials. It has little resiliency but it does provide a firm, smooth surface.

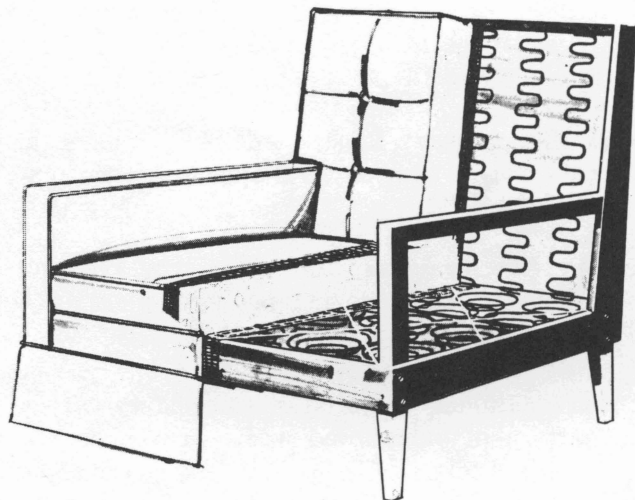


Figure 2. Cutaway of upholstered piece.

Comfort

You depend on upholstered furniture in your home for comfort in sitting and sometimes sleeping. Therefore, when selecting a piece of furniture you should consider the people who will be using it most often.

A seat that slants toward the back is usually most comfortable. It should be the right height so a person can rest his feet comfortably on the

floor and the right depth so he has good back support.

The height, width and slant of the seat and the back should be tested carefully. The height of the arms will also affect comfort. Try sitting in chairs and sofas of different heights, with and without arms. Then make your choice in terms of the purpose the piece will serve.

No upholstered piece of furniture should be selected hurriedly. Each piece deserves careful study and thought. That way you will select the piece that best suits your needs.

Additional references in Furnishing Your Home Series:

H.E. 75: Begin with a Plan

H.E. 78: Buying Case Goods

H.E. 80: Arranging Furniture

H.E. 79: The Furniture Story: Periods and Styles

Glossary

Appliqué: A pattern that is cut out and sewed or applied on the surface of another material.

Bouclé: An irregular, tightly looped yarn that gives a rough, nubby appearance when woven.

Brocade: A kind of weave, also a finished cloth, which, although made on a loom, resembles embroidery. It is woven on a Jacquard loom. A relief pattern is produced by the filler thread.

Brocatelle: A heavy fabric resembling a damask, except that the pattern appears to be embossed.

Chintz: Fabrics woven in a plain weave and finished with a glazing process to create a soft, lustrous appearance and hand.

Crewel embroidery: A kind of embroidery with a pattern of varicolored wools worked on unbleached cotton or linen. The designs are often inspired by the East Indian "tree of life" motif.

Frisé (iree-zay): A looped pile fabric with designs created by cut or uncut loops, by use of different colored yarns.

Guimpe (gämp): A braid made of heavy yarns used as a finish, particularly for joining upholstery to the frame or exposed wood surface.

Matelassé: A woven fabric with a distinct puff design that creates a cushion effect.

Mohair: A particularly heavy and durable pile upholstery fabric made from the hair of goats.

Moiré (mō' rā): A fabric that has a watered grain or a wavy appearance achieved by a finishing process.

Needlepoint: A type of embroidery on canvas using diagonal stitches of wool.

Pile: The family name for any of a group of fabrics having a surface with upright ends that are looped or cut. Included in the pile family are velvets, velours, freizes, plush.

Quilted fabrics: Any fabric that has been sewn to a filling material, such as polyester or cotton, and backed with a lightweight canvas or muslin. This gives a puffed effect in an all-over design or an outline of the fabric pattern.

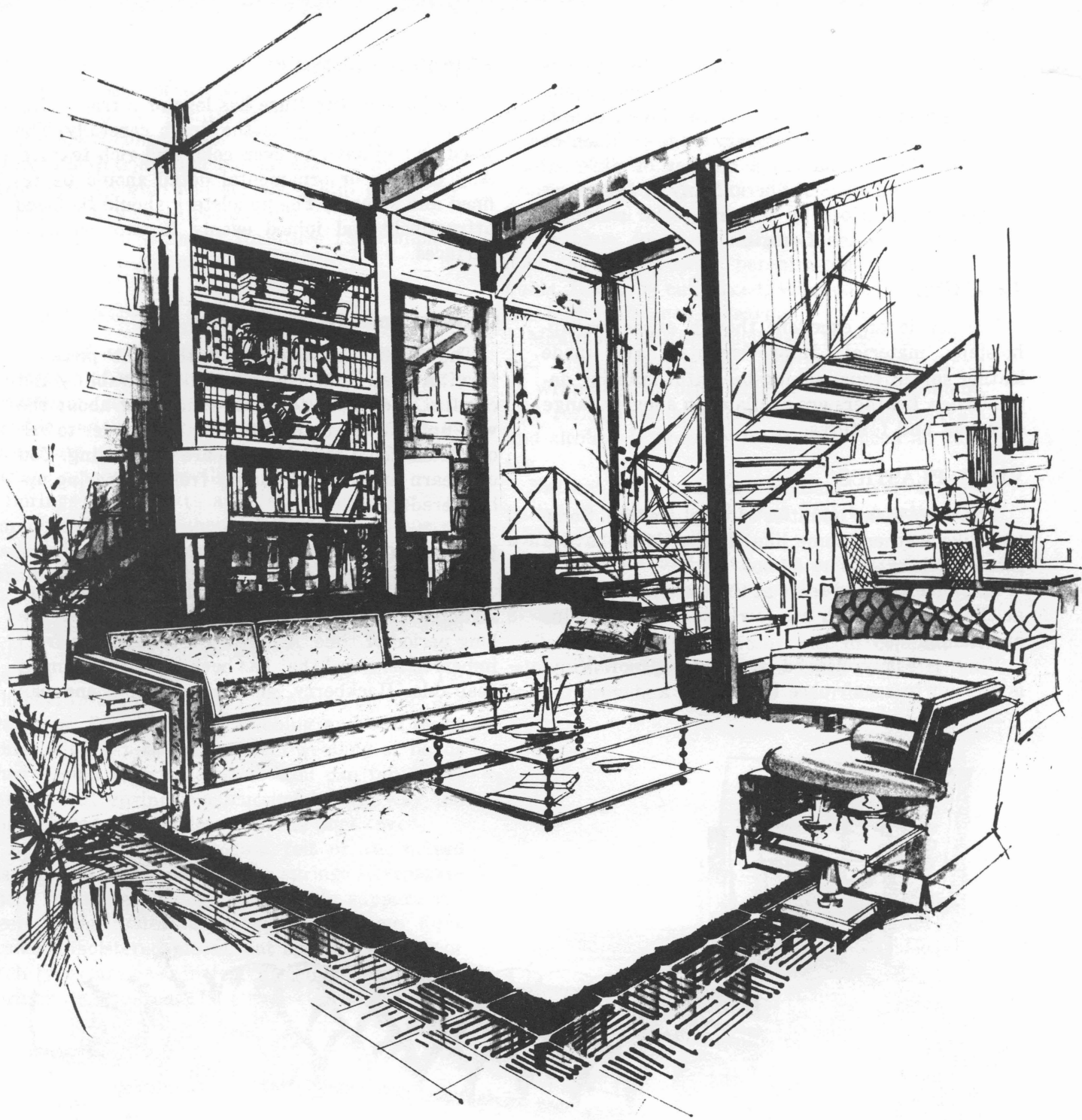
Suede cloth: A woven fabric with a close nap that gives the effect of suede leather.

Tapestry: Fabric designs depicting historic or other scenes woven on Jacquard loom.

Trapunto (tra-pōōn' to): A type of quilting in which the pattern is outlined to give a high relief effect. Only the quilted part of the design is padded.

Tweed: The family name for a large group of textured fabrics characterized by the use of two or more colors used in weaving.

Welt: The covered cording used to join sections of upholstery or to make a neat finish where upholstery joins exposed wood surfaces.



Grateful acknowledgement is given for critique of manuscript by panel members of Southern Furniture Manufacturers' Association and by Miss Elizabeth Hathaway, Professor of Home Economics of the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. The art work was provided by S. F. M. A.

**Prepared by:
Mrs. Lillie B. Little
Housing and Home Furnishings Specialist**