BUYING a new sofa is one of the key purchases you are likely to make for your home. As with a good quality bed, it should not only be the right size and style but built to last, and above all, it should be comfortable. Compromising on durability and purchasing something because its appearance looks great on the outside, should never be the main consideration. The most important components are often under the covers.

It’s easy to be tempted by the multitude of cheaper options being offered on the market. However, much of this inexpensive furniture often fails to live up to expectations, breaks far more easily and deteriorates quickly within a short period of constant use.

To ensure you get full enjoyment from your sofa, there are a number of important aspects you may wish to think about to ensure you make the right decision. Establish the character of the room in which the furniture will be featured, and then devote time to analyse the kind of style and size you need.

For a clean modern and tailored look, the style will tend to be sleek with fewer seat cushions and straighter arms, whereas a traditional look will most likely have rolled arms, and more detailing such as buttoning. Other choices to be made will involve establishing the type of wood finishes and the leg style.

You should also think about location of the sofa in the room and its optimum dimensions. One of the biggest issues is often size. To ensure an efficient use of space and help you envisage proportion, it is a good idea to draw up a to-scale floor plan to illustrate the best size for all the furniture in the room, especially if you are planning on having a large piece or an L-shaped configuration.

It is important to ensure there remains adequate space to accommodate all the other vital elements in the room such as storage, television unit, occasional furniture (such as side and coffee tables), window treatments and so on. It is also advisable to check there is adequate access for delivering the sofa.

Some sofas can be constructed to be assembled on site, which is useful for furnishing upstairs rooms, or those accessible only via tight corners or narrow spaces.

Accommodating not only your own personal requirements, but those of all the members of the family, can be vital. Seat height and seat depth varies enormously, as does the height of the back and the armrest. Many manufacturers offer increasing flexibility producing sofas with adjustable seating positions which lengthen or shorten the seat with pull-forward capability, height adjustable backrest cushions.

Having decided upon the size and style, the frame of the sofa, its structure, its suspension system, its cushions, and the type of upholstery fabric you want to use are all major considerations to ensure you get the desired level of comfort. Never skimp when it comes to quality materials, first-class workmanship and design. The construction of the cushion and pillow filling is decisive for the quality of the seating and really important to the feel of the sofa. Upholstery foam comes in many different qualities, weights and thicknesses. High-resilient foam is more expensive, but more comfortable and long-lasting, maintaining its original volume even under prolonged stress.

For maximum comfort, it is said that, you should ‘sit in’ a sofa and not ‘on’ it. A soft ‘sit-in’ style should combine a pleasant level of comfort together with a good distribution of pressure. Many manufacturers offer a progressive seat

Choosing the right sofa is one of the most important decisions you will make. You might be relaxing on it for many years. Fiona Applegarth of Sable Interiors gives some vital advice before you buy.
structure. This is achieved using different types of foam combinations, with different specific gravity, ranging from cold form, soft and block foams. This makes for optimal sitting, with firmer support at the front edge for the knees and softer area in the centre to sink into.

One of the most popular and best quality cushion fillings option is foam-wrapped feather. These feather-filled ‘wraps’ or ‘feathered layers’ have inserts filled with feather, wrapped around the foam core. A layer of fleece, or light wrap on top of the cushion ensures even stretching of the fabric cover, and helps to prevent ‘creep’ or ‘sliding’ which eventually distorts the shape of the cushion.

For a loftier, traditional appearance, cushions filled with feather and down allow for deep, soft comfort especially when used as base cushions. Choosing the fabric to cover your sofa is extremely important. Not only should it complement your room scheme and feel great, it should be practical and hard-wearing.

Many of us are unaware that upholstery fabrics for the UK are subjected to, and have to pass, a high level Rub or Martindale Test that gauges its ability to withstand abrasion, and checks its durability and suitability for upholstery. The higher the number the stronger the fabric, and around 15,000 to 20,000 is ample for residential use. Woven fabrics tend to wear the best. Wool and linen are natural and resilient, and those with man-made elements such as polyester and viscose tend to be stronger and more dirt resistant. If you are worried about general wear and tear because you have children or pets, then choosing something in a practical colour is advisable. Light fastness of a fabric can also be important criteria. For example, no fabric is 100 per cent colourfast, so make the sofa is not exposed to direct sunlight, especially when choosing bright colours.

Caring for your sofa is essential to prolong its life. Sitting on the edges of cushions or on the arms can add excessive pressure on sears and cause distortion of the padding and fabric. Cushions require regular and on-going maintenance and should be plumped up daily. Their positions should be interchanged to maintain their appearance and to give the fillings a chance to recover so as to maintain their comfort level. Flipping them over will help, and vacuuming them weekly on low suction will remove any dust particles. Avoid leaving your furniture too close to radiators for prolonged periods of time, as this increases the risk of scorching damage or discolouration.

A new sofa can be a joy to behold. It can be the crowning glory in your room scheme, particularly when adorned with sumptuous scatter cushions and accessories. It should offer the correct support and comfort while you are relaxing, and, as the years pass, with a good quality investment piece, there is always the option to update it by re-covering it with a different fabric when you choose next time to revamp your room.

Never skimp when it comes to quality materials, first-class workmanship and design. The frame of a sound, solid and sturdy sofa is constructed from kiln-dried hardwoods, not inferior soft woods which warp.”