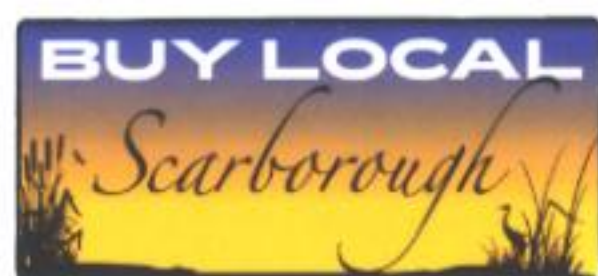


Spring home improvement projects that also improve the local economy



When it comes to home improvements, for value and quality, shop smart, shop local.

Shopping for a sofa, chair or sectional during this Great Recession has more than its share of challenges. Fewer stores exist, and risk-averse product managers put out fewer selections for you to actually sit in before you order. Many stores' sales staffs are underqualified, or insufficiently knowledgeable to help you identify comparable offerings.

Under these circumstances, it is not always justifiable, but it is understandable, that consumers express concerns that a retail store may not be around to service things that could go wrong, or that the factory making the furniture might not be in business to honor a warranty. In some cases, that might be true, but one thing is clear: value and quality are not easy to spot, much less to compare between brands, because there is not one way to make a sofa, and many companies were cut-

ting quality features to maximize profitability long before this recession came along: You would not buy gold-plate paper plates for your 50th anniversary party, nor put thousands of dollars of new appliances into a kitchen without updating it first, so why would anyone buy an imported leather sofa with a particle board frame for thousands of dollars? Price and appearance are not safe measures of quality, so knowing before you buy is more important than ever.

Whether your space or budget is large or small, you won't want to apply good money to poorly constructed furniture. Aside from the normal exceptions of a staged setting where nobody will use the furniture, or where the person using the furniture expects to use it for only a short time, the cost of buying lesser quality is much higher when considering the lifespan of the furniture. Rarely do we meet people who truly enjoy the exercise of re-decorating a room, choosing furniture, fabrics and finishes,



Spring is the perfect time for improving your home: Buy furniture in materials that withstand the romps of children.

to the extent they want to do it all over again within a few years. A well made sofa should easily last 20 years with normal residential use, but one made of particle board can't be expected

to last more than a few years before it needs to be replaced. Compare your carbon footprint in each scenario.

Buying from a locally owned store with roots in your com-

munity can make all the difference. Require knowledgeable sales service that knows that upholstery shopping, like so many other things in life, has just gotten more complicated over time, and who can tell you how and where each piece in the store is made, what warranties exist, and the strengths and weaknesses of each brand.

Shoppers do well to scrutinize and research these issues as intensely as fit, cover and style. If you find solid, American-built quality, and service worth your loyalty from a local merchant, reward that good behavior and keep your dollars in the community.

Ross Endicott owns and runs Endicott Home Furnishings at 429 US Route 1 in Scarborough, Maine. For more information, call 888-832-5888 or visit www.condofurniture.com.



Got Space?



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