

# Sofa beds 101

PRICE POINTS: SOFA BEDS

In April's *Hard Word* we featured an ad for a sofa bed that claimed it was "great for unwanted holiday guests". OK, so they probably meant 'unexpected' rather than 'unwanted', but it tickled many a funny bone among our contributors, suggesting to them that the bed might not be very comfortable. And no doubt there are many among you who've had the unfortunate experience of a less than comfortable sleep on a dodgy sofa bed. It's enough to make you feel ... well, unwanted.

CHOICE has compiled this price-point shopping guide to get you up to speed on what's out there, how much it will cost and what to look for when shopping.

The models we chose are good examples of the features and

quality you'll typically get for your money in each price range. In the real world, though, prices are a little more malleable, and with a little give and take, you can more or less customise your own sofa bed: the bed mechanism, mattress, choice of fabric and cushion fillings can often be altered to suit your needs.

## First things first

The kind of sofa bed you buy — and how much you spend — will depend largely on how you'll use it.

- If it's going in your lounge room and will be used mainly as a sofa, its comfort, style and practicality (durability, cleanability and so on) will be your prime concern. You might want to spend more on a good sofa and less on the bed mechanism — one with a foam

## Three sofa bed price points

### IN A NUTSHELL

- We chose three two-and-a-half seater sofa beds at three different price points: \$749, \$1299 and \$2150.
- The beds are double in size, and feature a 'trampoline' sleeping surface: a woven polypropylene mat attached to the frame with springs.
- We show you, feature by feature, what to look for and what you can expect to find at these price points.



### Coogee

**Retailer:** Fantastic Furniture ([www.fantasticfurniture.com.au](http://www.fantasticfurniture.com.au))  
**Sofa dimensions (cm):** 205 W x 81 D x 77 H; 220 cm from back of sofa to end of bed.  
**Warranty:** Five years on sofa frame; one year on bed mechanism; two years on seat cushions; one year on fabric.  
**Options:** Stain-resistance treatment (\$70, five-year warranty). We chose from the 'everyday' fabric range ('fabric A'); fabric B costs \$80 extra.



### Ashbury

**Retailer:** Freedom Furniture ([www.freedom.com.au](http://www.freedom.com.au))  
**Sofa dimensions (cm):** 203 W x 92 D x 72 H (90 cm to the top of the loose back cushions); 240 cm from back of sofa to end of bed.  
**Warranty:** 10 years on sofa frame and seat cushions; two years on mechanism; five years on back cushions.  
**Options:** Foam mattress instead of inner-spring \$1199. Stain-resistance treatment \$90.



### Stravinski

**Retailer:** Sofa Bed Specialists ([www.sofabedspecialists.com.au](http://www.sofabedspecialists.com.au))  
**Price paid:** \$2150 for a 2.5 seater and inner-spring double bed; other sizes are available.  
**Sofa dimensions (cm):** 205 W x 105 D x 80 H; 225 cm from back of sofa to end of bed.  
**Warranty:** 10 years on frame, one year on bed mechanism, 'lifetime' on seat cushions, five years on back cushions. Warranty on fabric depends on the fabric you choose, generally 1–5 years.  
**Options:** \$2150 is the price for a two-and-a-half seater sofa that converts to a double bed. What's pictured is a three-seater that converts to a queen bed, which costs \$2495 with a mid-price fabric.



mattress may do the trick for the occasional guest (though inner springs aren't a great deal more expensive).

- If, on the other hand, it's going in the spare room, to be used more as a guest bed than a sofa, put more value on the bed mechanism and mattress, and get a simpler sofa, perhaps without separate back cushions.

Other things to consider include:

- If you regularly host couples, consider going queen size in a three-seater sofa. This may not be an option at furniture chain stores with standardised production.

- For kids, you could get away with a foam mattress instead of inner spring.
- If you're pushed for space, look for an armless sofa (use bolsters on the seat ends), or get an ottoman with a fold-out bed.
- When you're checking what will fit, don't forget to measure the distance from the back of the sofa to the end of the opened bed.

#### Put it to the test

When you're shopping, take someone with you — someone much heavier than you if you're light or much lighter if you're heavy.

Try out the bed: lie on your back and both sides, and move around while the other person lies still. Is it comfortable? Is there more movement than you'd like? Do you roll into the middle?

Also test the sofa. Do you tip sideways when sitting? Is it too firm to sit comfortably on? How close to the arms can you get before it becomes awkward or uncomfortable? Some sofas we tried were very hard and uncomfortable with the sofa bed inside, yet the non-bed version of the same model was much more comfortable. The take-home message from this is *never* choose a sofa bed without testing the complete package.

## Decision guide: What do you get for your money?

### BED FRAME



#### Coogee

(A) **Tubes** Round.

(B) **Mattress retainer** The bar at the head of the bed is raised to keep the mattress from sliding off. There are no retainers at the foot end.

This bed doesn't have a TV headrest (see right) or additional supports directly under the 'trampoline' mat. Because the mattress is quite thin, make sure you can't feel any bars supporting the sleeping platform (a common complaint with some sofa beds).



#### Ashbury

(A) **Tubes** Round.

(B) **Mattress retainer** The bar at the head of the bed is raised to keep the mattress from sliding off. There are no retainers at the foot end.

(C) **Support wires/ bars** Slats on the underside of the bed at hip level provide body support. They also provide increased support under the sofa cushions, so it doesn't sag in the middle.

There's no TV headrest (see right).



#### Stravinski

(A) **Tubes** Square. These allow greater precision during assembly for better overall quality.

(B) **Mattress retainers** The bar at the head of the bed is raised to keep the mattress from sliding off. Retainers at the foot of the bed hold the mattress firmly in place.

(C) **Support wires/ bars** There's a support bar at hip level for structural strength.

(D) **TV headrest** The head-end of the bed can be raised for reading or watching TV.

(E) **Seat support** Support wires at the foot of the bed provide increased support when used as a sofa, so it doesn't sag in the middle.

(F) **Comfort curves** Contoured seat section on the frame: at the bottom end of the bed there are convex curves in the side frame — when it's all inside as a sofa, they're concave, allowing you to sit closer to the edge of the cushion (next to the arm).

(G) **Extended deck coverage** The polypropylene decking (trampoline) extends beyond the frame, so when folded up it goes right to the sides of the sofa base, covering the springs and minimising contact between the upholstery and the springs.

### CHOICE sofa bed verdict

- Get your priorities right: if you're mainly going to sit on it, make sure it's comfortable and well built as a sofa. If it's mainly going to be used as a bed, concentrate on the bed mechanism and the quality of the mattress.
- You seem to get better cushions if you pay more, and probably a better mattress. Other than that the differences between a \$750 and a \$1300 sofa bed seem fairly small. Both of our sofas at these prices arrived with cracks in their frame. Only in the \$2000+ price range did we start to see attention to detail and to quality. So if you're going to live with the sofa on a daily basis, rather than hiding it in a spare room, it's worth buying at the high end of the market.

The bed frame, sofa frame, mattress, mechanism, cushions, fabric and quality of finish are the crucial components to base your buying decisions around.

## SOFA FRAME



### Coogee

The frame is made from pine, and non-structural components from chipboard.

There was a crack in one of the beams.



### Ashbury

The frame is made from pine, and non-structural components from chipboard.

One of the boards had cracked into several pieces, with the rear left leg caved in.



### Stravinski

Solid pine throughout.

### DECISION GUIDE

- Push down on the back rail and arms and try to wiggle them. A little give is OK, but it shouldn't be excessive. For greatest strength, frames should be assembled using dowels, with corner blocks to reinforce joints.
- Hardwood is more expensive than pine, and 'kiln-dried' hardwood means moisture has been removed, minimising future warping. As a rough guide, this will add at least \$500 to the price of a sofa bed. A hardwood frame should last a lifetime, as long as it's well constructed. Two of our sofa beds already had cracks in the pine structure, which doesn't bode well for their longevity, although they both come with a warranty.
- Check the padding by kneading the frame along the back rails and arms: hard or sharp edges indicate skimpy padding.

## MATTRESS



### Coogee

Foam, 6 cm thick  
Cotton cover  
134 cm wide,  
180 cm long



### Ashbury

Inner spring, 10 cm  
Damask cover  
133 cm wide,  
190 cm long



### Stravinski

Inner spring, 15 cm  
Damask cover  
133 cm wide,  
181 cm long

### DECISION GUIDE

- Inner-spring mattresses are more comfortable than foam, and not a lot more expensive. Rotate the mattress periodically to prolong its life.
- Can you feel the bars? A common complaint with sofa beds is that you can feel the support bars through the mattress.
- You can add a 'topper' to make a mattress thicker — but you'll have to store it somewhere.

## HOW MANY FOLDS?



### Coogee

Tri-fold (folds into three).



### Ashbury

Tri-fold (folds into three).



### Stravinski

Bi-fold (folds into two).

### DECISION GUIDE

A bi-fold bed is better because it allows you to use a thicker mattress, and the fewer folds in the mattress, the better. It's also a little easier to set up. However, the sofa has to be of a design that can accommodate its depth.

## FABRIC



### Coogee

100% polyester. Graded 'domestic medium-duty/ commercial light-duty' according to the Australian Standard for upholstery fabrics (AS 2687-1997).

Stain protection is available for an extra \$70.



### Ashbury

100% polyester. Graded 'domestic medium-duty/ commercial light-duty'. Stain protection available for an extra \$90.



### Stravinski

Chenille (polycotton). Graded 'domestic medium-duty/ commercial light-duty'.

### DECISION GUIDE

Your choice of fabric can substantially alter the price of the sofa bed. Unfortunately, though, cost of fabric isn't a reliable guide to its quality. For example, big retailers can keep prices down on popular fabrics due to mass-production and buying power, whereas more expensive fabrics may have racked up their costs due to lower production rates and consequent loss of economies of scale. Also, some commercial-grade fabrics (for use in cinemas or offices, say) can be tough but cheap; more expensive ones may be more delicate.

As a guide to quality, when you're in the shop, ask for fabric samples or swatches, so you can give the fabric a better appraisal than you could by just looking at the finished product.

- Fabric should be firmly woven: hold it up to the light and see how tight the weave is.
- Look at the raw edges of the fabric to check for any evidence of fraying or unravelling. This could mean that the fabric stretches and pulls away at the seams of your sofa.
- Stretch the fabric diagonally and release: does it completely recover? If not, the fabric may wrinkle and buckle over time.
- A latex backing may be applied to the back of the fabric to help prevent seam slippage, make precise cutting easier and prevent dirt seeping through. This is especially important in looser-weave fabrics.

## SETTING IT UP



### Coogee

You need to pull it up and out, then unfold it; a bit fiddly, quite stiff and heavy.

### Ashbury

You need to pull it up and out, then unfold it; a bit fiddly, quite stiff and heavy. It has a handle to make the initial lift-out easier, though.

### Stravinski

Easy to pull out, pretty well just pulling in one direction. Feels very light and smooth, though the frame is in fact heavier than the other sofas.

## DECISION GUIDE

Test the mechanism in the shop, both pulling it out and putting it back in. If it's too hard, keep looking, though bear in mind it should get easier once you get the knack and the joints loosen up.

## FINISHING



### Coogee

Generally quite well-finished and the obvious linear texture mostly lies straight — there are some off-kilter lines near seams, minor instances of crooked seams and some puckering at the curves of the arms.

### Ashbury

Generally well-finished, with only some slight puckering on the arms.

### Stravinski

Excellent quality of finish and generally more detail than the other two sofas.

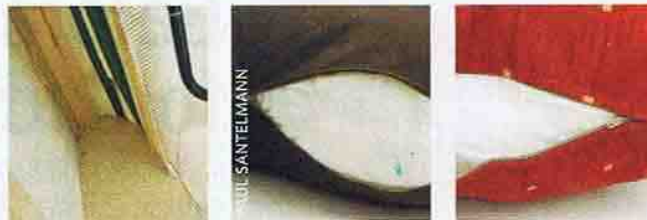
## DECISION GUIDE

- Check the seams and piping, to make sure they're straight and unpuckered. Also check the fabric lies straight, especially if there are obvious stripes or a linear pattern (either printed on the fabric or within its texture).

Note, however, that unless you're buying floor stock, the sofa bed that ends up in your home may be better or worse than what you saw in the shop. A look at the general quality of upholstery provided by the manufacturer might give you an idea of what you'll get, so look at a variety of similarly priced products in the store. Check what your rights are regarding returns/replacements if you're not happy with what you get.

- If the sofa isn't going to be standing against a wall, remember to check the rear as well.

## BACK CUSHIONS



### Coogee

Fixed back — no cushions. The back is hollow, with padding and elasticised webbing in the backrest to give it a springy feel.

### Ashbury

Back cushions are filled with polyester fibre, separated into two walled compartments.

### Stravinski

Back cushions are filled with polyester fibre.

## DECISION GUIDE

- Loose polyester fibre fill looks plump and luxurious at first, but the contents can settle and redistribute themselves. Better-quality cushions have walled compartments to keep the fibre in place.
- Feathers (or a feather and down mix) are another option, and while they need attention in terms of plumping and fluffing, longevity isn't as much of a problem in back cushions as in seat cushions.

## SEAT CUSHIONS



### Coogee

Standard-duty polyurethane foam, with polyester wadding on the top and bottom. The sofa retailer offers a two-year warranty on the cushions.

### Ashbury

Seat cushions are made from 'Premium comfort foam', which is medium-grade foam. There's polyester wadding on the top and bottom. It has a 10-year guarantee.

### Stravinski

Premium grade 'Luxura' foam. There's a 'lifetime' guarantee (the sofa's lifetime, not yours).

## DECISION GUIDE

- Are the cushions reversible? You'll get more life out of them if you can flip them (check the piping allows this), or at least swap them from side to side.
- The warranty on the cushions gives an indication of the quality of the foam.
- Feather-filled cushions are more susceptible to damage than foam or a foam/feather combination. Cushions with feathers in them may have shorter warranties.