

SHOWCASE



Kelly Behun and her Vladimir Kagan masterpieces

“A cloud wrapped in a blizzard” is how interior designer Kelly Behun describes her pristine, shades-of-white apartment overlooking Central Park. If that’s the case, then her pair of custom Vladimir Kagan sofas are the eye of the storm. Fifteen years ago Behun collaborated with the late designer on two expansive (12-by-8-foot) sofas upholstered in Ultrasuede: “I often walk by them and think fondly of him perched there, smiling like a proud papa.”

Serious About Sofas It’s the most important piece of furniture in any home—and sometimes the hardest to get right. The following pages will guide you in selecting the perfect place to plotz.

Soft Landings

Starting the hunt can be overwhelming, so we break down the best sofa sources for every taste.

by Rima Suqi. Portraits by Jeremy Liebman



The Freeform sofa by Isamu Noguchi from Vitra.

of durability (cushions once filled with natural materials, like wool and horsehair, are now done in foam). The Chieftain sofa, like the chair of the same name, is a classic with a separate back and seat floating on a walnut frame (from \$23,380); the Poet sofa is a lesser-known, cozy settee with the minimalist version of a tufted back (from \$9,290). finnjuhl.com

HERMAN MILLER

George Nelson's Marshmallow sofa—a series of upholstered circular discs on a steel frame—is one of the most recognizable pieces of the modern movement. It has been in continuous production by Herman Miller since 1956 (from \$6,470). So have the Eames sofa (from \$11,870) and the Eames sofa compact, so named because it's only six feet long (\$6,000). While the brand has produced pieces by a host of designers since, it has remained faithful to the modern aesthetic. hermanmiller.com

Forever Midcentury Modern

This style was born from a post-World War II movement hugely influenced by Bauhaus principles, including the idea that design could be both beautiful and functional. Makers of the time also believed it should be affordable, which led to innovative and economical use of materials and fabric. Today these pieces, designed by the likes of Florence Knoll, Charles and Ray Eames, George Nelson, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, and Le Corbusier, are de rigueur in minimalist settings, but they can also compliment more ornate interiors. Reproductions, both authorized and not, are widely available, but purists will go to extreme lengths to score an original 1940s, '50s, or '60s design and faithfully restore it. But you can find authorized reproductions, mostly available from the original companies, that are often free of the previously strict restrictions on fabric colors and patterns.

WHERE TO BUY

CASSINA

Le Corbusier, Charlotte Perriand, and Pierre Jeanneret created their most iconic furniture in the 1920s, but they have come to be associated with midcentury modern. Cassina began producing the trio's pieces in the 1960s, and today it sells the full range, including the LC2 and LC3 sofas (aka the Fauteuil Grand Confort, Grand Modele, from \$7,310), with leather cushions set into a tubular chrome

frame. Upholstery is restricted to fabrics and leathers approved by the Fondation Le Corbusier, but choices encompass a surprising range of colors in addition to the expected neutrals. Contemporary sofas in the collection include designs by Patricia Urquiola, Piero Lissoni, and Ronan & Erwan Bouroullec. cassina.com

FINN JUHL

An architect and self-taught furniture designer, Juhl is credited with introducing Danish Modern to America. His pieces are still made in Denmark, albeit with some material updates in the interest



The Marshmallow sofa by George Nelson Associates from Herman Miller.



Athena Calderone and her '70s Italian icon

Food personality and author of a new interiors book, *Live Beautiful* (Abrams), Athena Calderone had her eye on a 1970s Mario Bellini sofa for years before she owned it. In fact, it was the very first piece she purchased for her Greek Revival townhouse in Brooklyn. "Because the home has traditional architecture, I wanted something that would create some contrast and juxtaposition," she says. While she reupholstered the low, vintage sectional in a putty-colored velvet, she's not precious about it. "It was a purely aesthetic purchase," she says, "but it's oddly incredibly comfortable and gets used more than any piece in our home."

KNOLL

While the company's designer list reads like a who's who of modernism, Knoll's sofa offerings from that time period are fairly limited. Florence Knoll's 1954 design—a tufted look without buttons, set on exposed metal legs—is still

immensely popular. It is available as a two- or three-seater, with a choice of foam or foam-and-down fillings. Eero Saarinen's Womb settee (from \$6,260), created in 1948 as a companion piece to the Womb chair, was recently brought back into production.

A variety of fabrics are available for every piece, depending on the design. Knoll's contemporary options include sofas by Barber Osgerby and David Rockwell. knoll.com

VITRA

This Swiss company's midcentury sofa offerings in the United States are limited to Isamu Noguchi's Freeform (from \$12,330), which has been produced since 2002 under an agreement with the late designer's foundation. It comes in a small range of solid-colored upholstery and with two wood options. The firm also offers upholstered pieces by Jasper Morrison and Antonio Citterio. vitra.com

Cassina's LC3 three-seater sofa.





Carleton Varney and his sky-blue satin roll-arm

For an apartment in a glass-and-steel Manhattan skyscraper, Carleton Varney's space is anything but spare. As with his Georgian home in London's Mayfair district, the president of Dorothy Draper & Company opts for environments that reference nature. "I'm a color person," the native Bostonian says. "I have to have around me happy things. I like the yellow of the daffodil, and I like country garden flowers—all of the things that nature gives us." His American-made Lawson sofa by Kindel (in Dorothy Draper Duchess Satin), therefore, is a precise shade of sky blue (Mitford Blue, to be exact) and is paired with aqua walls. Palette aside, Varney's number one sofa requirement? "It has to serve a purpose. It has to be comfortable."

WHERE TO BUY

BAKER FURNITURE

Siebe Baker founded the company now known as Baker 130 years ago as a woodworking concern based in Michigan. In 1973 it started making upholstered pieces in High Point, North Carolina. The company has always collaborated with notable designers; its current roster includes Obama White House designer Michael Smith, whose Churchill Dressmaker sofa has a skirted design with an exaggerated saddle arm (from \$10,800), and the St. James, French legend Jacques Garcia's interpretation of a chesterfield (from \$12,000). bakerfurniture.com

HICKORY CHAIR

A 109-year-old North Carolina company, Hickory Chair crafts every sofa to order. It has also enlisted interior designers to create collections, including Mariette Himes Gomez, whose Smith sofa with a divided back cushion and roll arms was inspired by an English club sofa. David Phoenix created the Pierre, which has an exposed-wood frame and a tall, tight back. hickorychair.com

Sticking with Tradition

While they have their roots in historic British and French designs, today's traditional-style sofas have evolved from the formality of yore into pieces that are structured but not stuffy. Most are handcrafted using decades-old techniques and materials: wood frames and steel coils that are fastened to the frames using twine, cotton, or jute webbing and covered with natural materials like horsehair, wool, and cotton (although coconut husk can be used as an animal-free alternative). Standard cushions are foam, but a foam and down combination will hold its shape longer. Traditional sofa shapes can be integrated into a surprisingly wide range of interiors—a tufted chesterfield, for example, can be at home in a wood-paneled library or in an airy loft. The same is true of a camelback or a classic Bridgewater three-cushion with low arms—and they don't have the fabric limitations of other categories.



Christina Juarez and her exuberant skirted loveseat

A self-admitted “true, unabashed maximalist,” design publicist Christina Juarez didn’t hold back when it came to furnishing and decorating her Manhattan apartment. She credits the first 20 years of her career in fashion—working for Oscar de la Renta and John Galliano during his tenure at Christian Dior—for teaching her to be fearless with color and pattern. There was also her childhood home: “My mother always had a love for color,” she says. “My bedroom in the early ’70s was lime green and bright yellow.” So naturally, the vintage refurbished loveseat from a Housing Works thrift store (plus the walls and ceiling) in her home office is covered in a tangerine Elizabeth Hamilton linen called Persia. “Everyone who visits might not want to live with this much pattern,” she says, “but everyone loves it.”



POLTRONA FRAU

The Chester sofa (from \$14,350) was designed by Renzo Frau in 1912, the same year he founded the company that bears his name. Frau was inspired by English chesterfields and was determined to introduce the style to his native Italy. It takes 55 hours to craft one sofa, usually in one of the seven leathers Poltrona Frau developed—which have also become popular with carmakers such as Ferrari and Range Rover. poltronafrau.com

GEORGE SMITH

In just 35 years this company has become synonymous with classic English upholstery. All pieces are handcrafted in its northern England factories. Its catalog is an encyclopedia of traditional shapes, including a Chippendale with nailheads and an exposed-wood base (from \$9,230), a Turkish-inspired Ottoman sofa with bolster arms (from \$9,640), and, of course, many styles of chesterfields (from \$10,546). georgesmith.com



Above: The leather-covered Chester sofa from Poltrona Frau.

Right: The Ottoman sofa by George Smith in Quadrille’s China Seas Indramayu fabric.

Misha Kahn on the fab, wacky settee he designed himself

"I always want to be shocked by an object when I first see it, like it's so irrational that it's hard to understand how it could've come to life," says Brooklyn-based furniture designer and artist Misha Kahn. Pieces like that are hard to come by, so sometimes he just makes his own—like his *Around the Tree and Into the Hall*, a cashmere-covered sofa. Known for his over-the-top designs (like those he recently exhibited at Friedman Benda gallery), Kahn combined steel, wood, and foam to create something that's certainly a bold statement. friedmanbenda.com



No-Holds-Barred Avant-Garde

Statement sofas are meant to be the stars of a room, and they're typically produced by Italian companies skilled in making the different types of foam required to create these unorthodox designs. There are numerous standouts in this category, including de Sede's giant boxing glove, Daniel Libeskind's faceted Gemma sofa for Moroso, and the Campana brothers' frameless Boa sofa for Edra, a woven "nest" made with almost 400 feet of velvet-upholstered tubes. These futuristic pieces, often found in collections of museums worldwide, don't always fit in well with other ones, so designers advise giving them plenty of breathing room. The good news: They can work in a range of interiors, from glass triplexes to Beaux Arts townhouses. The constraints in this category are fabrics—many can't be stretched over extreme curves or angles without creating an eyesore of a fold or seam, and patterns often won't successfully repeat over unusual shapes—so it's wise to abide by manufacturers' recommendations. But that's a small price to pay for a standout sofa that single-handedly defines a space.

WHERE TO BUY

MOROSO

Artistic director Patrizia Moroso is known for giving designers creative license, resulting in iconic silhouettes like the zaftig Double Soft Big Easy (from \$11,300) and the space-age Victoria and Albert (from \$10,400) sofas, both by Ron Arad. While the Tape collection modular sofa (from \$13,000) is decidedly more minimalist in design, it's a high-tech wonder. The piece is upholstered in material made from reused fabric scraps that are sealed with polyurethane tape and have pockets for electronics and chargers in the armrests. moroso.it



The front and back of the Eda-Mame sofa by Piero Lissoni for B&B Italia. *Below:* The Puka Sofa and Ottoman by Yabu Pushelberg for Ligne Roset.

DE SEDE

Engineering meets design in de Sede's complex sofas, some of which have moving parts. The DS-164, for example, features a two-part backrest that can be moved completely around the sofa's curved frame (from \$14,560). The 58-year-old Swiss company was founded by a master saddler and is still considered the premier source for leather upholstery. ddcnyc.com

LIGNE ROSET

A French company at the forefront of sustainability, Ligne Roset uses recyclable foam in more than two dozen densities to craft sofas. The Togo (from \$3,330), which resembles a large, structured beanbag chair, has been a best seller, as has Pierre Paulin's futuristic Bonnie, both introduced in the '70s. ligne-roset.com

ZANOTTA

This innovative Italian company debuted the first frameless sofa, the ultra-minimalist Throw-Away (from \$5,670) and also created fully removable

upholstery—even for its Onda (from \$8,970), which has a complicated, S-curve design—that has been adopted by the rest of the industry. Zanotta also invented the beanbag chair more than 50 years ago. zanotta.it.

EDRA

The Italian company has used some of the same materials found in the production of prosthetic devices, bulletproof vests, and even aerospace-industry innovations. The Boa (from \$36,800), by the Campana brothers, takes four people two days to “weave,” and the Standard (from \$11,900) has fully adjustable back- and armrests using a mechanism invented in collaboration with an automotive-engineering studio. edra.com

B&B ITALIA

B&B's founder, Piero Busnelli, is credited with bringing cold-foam production to furniture design, making Zaha Hadid's space-age Moon System (from \$18,260) and Piero Lissoni's soybean-inspired Eda-Mame (from \$8,260) sofas easier to



realize from its factory just outside Milan. The same facility produces the equally stylish but low-key designs of B&B's sister brand, Maxalto. bebitalia.com

DDC

Representing dozens of European lines (including Minotti, Molteni, Edra, Giorgetti, and Zanotta), DDC has established itself as a showcase for daring, contemporary designs. Its more unusual sofa offerings include Moroso's Soft Wood sofa, which looks like a wooden bench but is far more comfortable, and de Sede's DS-600 (from \$14,000),

which resembles a curvaceous spine with upholstered vertebrae. ddcnyc.com

ROCHE BOBOIS

The French company partners primarily with Italian workshops to craft designs like its best-selling Mah Jong and Satellite sofas. The former is a modular collection of floor cushions that have been customized by Missoni Home and Jean Paul Gaultier. The latter has a quilt-like top folded over a minimal base, the ability to recline with the push of a button, and optional integrated USB ports. roche-bobois.com



The Perspective sofa by Roche Bobois upholstered in Orsetto fabric.



Victor Glemaud and his Technicolor dream sofa

"It's very joyous and really happy," says fashion designer Victor Glemaud of his sofa from Modern Link, in New York, which is a perfect canvas for his rainbow throw. "Whenever people come over, they're immediately drawn to it. It's a focal point for the apartment, accompanied by my art and books." For Glemaud, it's all about color and shape. For his Fall 2020 women's-wear collection, for example, Glemaud experimented with color blocking and combinations through sharp chevrons and clean stripes. "I was drawn to the scale of the sofa that contrasts with the vibrancy of the blanket."

Contemporary Back to the Basics

Designs that are popular today and not associated with a specific era are considered contemporary. The pieces often have hybrid shapes that borrow from different time periods to speak to current stylistic and lifestyle trends—sectionals are a good example, but so are the curvaceous sofas inspired by Jean Royère midcentury designs. Most contemporary pieces have fairly streamlined frames upholstered in quiet palettes; they have lasting power because of their simplicity. Performance fabrics have become a popular choice for sofas in this category; formerly the purview of hotels and restaurants, these stain-resistant fabrics, when used on furniture, are great for families and are available in options from velvet to linen.

The modular Alexander sofa by Rodolfo Dordoni for Minotti has both curved and straight elements.



The Groundpiece sectional by Antonio Citterio for Flexform. Below: The Gregor sofa by Vincent Van Duysen for Molteni & C.



WHERE TO BUY

BERNHARDT

Based in North Carolina, this family-owned company has been known for more traditional designs, but has recently developed a contemporary collection using hardwood frames and foam cushioning. The Astoria sofa features modern curves (from \$3,000), while the Palisades (from \$3,500) has a sophisticated sloping-arm design with nailheads and exposed legs. bernhardt.com

FLEXFORM

The company, based in Meda, Italy, has a long-standing relationship with Italian architect Antonio Citterio. Groundpiece (from \$5,800),

which he designed in 2001, is a perennial best seller that incorporates a bookshelf as an armrest. The back and sides of the Cestone (from \$16,400) are crafted from woven cowhide with a metal frame, and the sofa allows for an optional table to be added to an armrest. Romeo (from \$11,775), introduced last year, is a more petite design with subtle grosgrain piping that seemingly floats on cast-aluminum feet. The company's fabric palette is almost exclusively neutral. flexform.it

MINOTTI

Also based in Meda, this 72-year-old company is known for its modular sofa systems, primarily designed by architect Rodolfo Dordoni, who has been Minotti's art director since

1997. The Alexander (from \$13,100), the Lawrence (from \$12,950), and the Freeman (from \$13,025) offer a wide range of configurations. The company's user-friendly website shows every single one from a bird's-eye view, along with fabric and leather options for each. minotti.com

MITCHELL GOLD + BOB WILLIAMS

This 30-year-old company continues to make sofas using many recyclable, sustainable, and/or renewable materials. An early adopter of performance fabrics, it recently partnered with Kravet to offer 300 of its fabrics, usually available only to the trade, in all Mitchell Gold + Bob Williams stores. Best sellers include the Hunter (from \$2,847), Gigi (from \$4,127), and

Keaton (from \$4,434); all have streamlined shapes available in multiple configurations. mgbwhome.com

MOLTENI & C

The company's creative director, Belgian architect Vincent Van Duysen, brings a fresh approach to its minimalist aesthetic. His designs include two sofa systems: the Gregor (from \$14,960), a midcentury-inspired modular model that has winged armrests and a metal base, and the Albert (from \$14,500), a low-to-the-ground sofa with a quilted back cushion. Molteni has introduced eco-friendly practices like recycling all scrap textiles and leather and making some frames from recyclable synthetics, including PET. molteni.it

