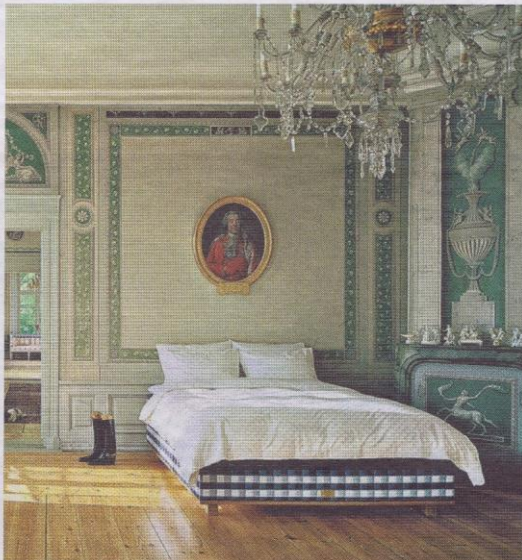


Bricks & Mortar



Mind the gap

WHAT NEXT FOR THE NORTH-SOUTH
PRICE DIVIDE
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The hand-made Vividus from Hästens. Each £67,490 bed takes 160 hours to make
Below: Vispring's Prestige king size divan, £6,925, with Achilles headboard, £940

The second sitting room in your home

Scrawling children or pets, scattered newspapers and tablets, and toast crumbs. If this is an accurate description of what your bed looks like on an average Sunday morning, your bed has become a "lounging haven" — or a place where your family relax together.

We are spending more time in bed these days, though we are not sleeping for longer. More people are taking tablets and phones to bed to send emails, shop online or watch catch-up television or box sets, so it has become more like a second study or living room. Pippa Paton, an interior designer, says this is because people increasingly want another room with lounging areas in their home. "The bedroom is now another room to live in," she says.

As a result, people are making their beds more luxurious and comfortable. Upholstered headboards are back in vogue, and there is huge choice of high-quality bed linen, throws and mattress toppers on the high street. Retailers are also offering collections of customised bedsteads and headboards — "personalisation" is the latest buzzword in the bed market.

As there are now so many different types of bed to choose from, it is wise to do your research first. Here are the latest facts and trends for anyone considering buying a new bed.

Beds are becoming more important
We spend an average of £583 every time we buy a new bed — this figure has remained static over the past few years, according to The Sleep Council, which is funded by the National Bed Federation, the trade body for British manufacturers.

However, Paton thinks that people are spending more money on beds. "People are starting to see beds as a long-term investment piece — rather than

something they will change every few years — something that you can have for a lifetime and possibly hand down from generation to generation," she says.

We don't spend as much as other countries, though. Duncan Ketley, Vispring's director of development, says that out of all the countries it supplies beds to — which include mainland Europe, Asia and the US — people in the UK spend the least money on their beds. He says: "They don't feature that highly on people's wish list, not like kitchens. It's probably because you can't really show it off to your friends."

Some cost as much as sports cars
Beds that cost thousands of pounds used to be a niche thing. Now there are many more products at the top of the market. The surge of interest in expensive beds has been attributed to the rise of "stealth wealth", which is all about the super-wealthy finding less obvious ways to spend their money. You can now get products such as the Royal State Bed from Savoir Beds, which features a hand-sewn crest by the Royal School of Needlework and costs £125,000 — the same price as a studio apartment in Peckham. Available in a limited edition of 60, more than half have been sold since Savoir Beds launched the bed last year. The company has just launched the State Bed for those who want the same comfort, but something less ostentatious, for £80,000. Vispring's most expensive bed, the

Majesty, costs from £50,000, while Hästens's Vividus costs £67,490. This bed has a 25-year guarantee, so it works out at about £7 a night.

They can take weeks to make
Many luxe beds are built by hand by craftsmen using expensive materials. At Vispring, the mattresses are hand-sewn and filled using a "recipe" of natural materials; the more expensive models are lined with sumptuous fabrics such as cashmere, silk and horse and vicuña hair. Ketley says: "You will notice the difference between the materials. It's like sleeping on a cloud." Savoir's Royal State Bed takes 604 hours to make. It takes an experienced craftsman a week to make the frame for Hästens's Vividus bed.

We want our bedrooms to look like hotel suites
The biggest source of design inspiration comes from boutique hotels where the look is homely but polished. Tall headboards — specifically upholstered tufted ones (think button-back sofas but on a larger scale) — is one style that has come from the hospitality sector. The private members' club Soho House is a big fan — in Berlin, it has beds with teal headboards that almost reach the ceiling.

Bespoke style is in vogue
Paton says many of her clients ask for bespoke beds — she recently commissioned a bed fashioned from a single piece of wood. This approach is even happening on the high street — at Button & Sprung, you can choose the frame, headboard, fabric and feet, while John Lewis has customised bedsteads and headboards.

Your bed might need an MoT
National Bed Month, next month, is an initiative set up by the National Bed Federation to encourage people to check whether they need a new bed. The Sleep Council has a checklist you can use to see whether your bed is up to scratch. It is a two-minute test which, the federation says, should be done every year after the first three to five years. Some beds last longer, however — Vispring beds have a lifetime guarantee, which makes its Majesty bed (from £50,980 at Harrods) seem almost a bargain buy.



Kingsize is king
Kingsize is the most popular bed, with 31 per cent of buyers choosing this size, according to The Sleep Council. Some retailers say that king and super-king are overtaking sales of standard double beds — Button & Sprung says that the majority of its sales are for these type of beds.

Paton says: "Large beds are a trend that has come over from America and from the hospitality industry. It is all about the bedroom being used as another room rather than just a place you sleep in."

"People want to lounge in bed on the weekends, reading papers and eating breakfast, and they don't mind if the bed takes up the whole room."

It has become fashionable for master bedrooms to have a dressing area, which means that the bed can be the focal point. Paton adds: "People are bringing beds forward to the middle of the room and putting up a stud wall, so they can have the dressing area behind the bed." Claire Carponen