



KING HICKORY

NATURAL LEATHER GUIDE



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Leather has been around since the dawn of man and ranks up there with fire as a key catalyst for human progress. It has clothed, sheltered, protected, transported and even fed mankind since the early beginning and has played a vital role to our early existence. It provided belts that helped run the machinery that fueled the Industrial Revolution; it really is the fabric of life in so many ways.

It is by far the greatest by-product in the history of the world—perhaps the “original sustainable solution.” Because of the demand for meat, hides are a ready commodity that are bought, sold and traded in global markets, similar to other commodities like oil, cotton and coffee. China is the largest importer of American hides; Italian tanneries buy hides from England; Thailand imports salted (preserved) hides from England, Ireland and New Zealand. Surely, it would be a waste to cast leather hides aside without making use of them.

Instead, leather serves a broad range of markets including ready-to-wear, footwear, handbags, and of course, upholstery. There is no other material, natural or man-made, that can rival leather’s perfect construction. This random entanglement of collagen fibers is constructed in such a way that it provides incredible performance and durability characteristics, making leather virtually tear proof and puncture resistant. It is a porous, breathable material that regulates moisture making it an extremely comfortable surface for seating. Add luxury to that equation and you have a material that truly stands apart.

Today, leather is a symbol of style and sophistication. The ability of craftsman and artisans around the world to transform this raw material into a work of art through a blend of sound scientific principles and craftsmanship is truly remarkable. The analogy of tanning to fine cooking provides the perfect metaphor. The brilliance of the culinary genius is not in the recipe, but in the execution of it in order to create something truly special. The same is true for the tanner who approaches tanning as an artistic endeavor that requires vision, patience and a meticulous attention to the finer details of his craft.

The emergence of upholstery leather in the last 15 years as a fashion category, similar to the leathers in the ready-to-wear, footwear and handbag markets, has challenged the conventional wisdom of traditional upholstery leather and created a whole new category from an aesthetic point of view. The evolution to “natural” leathers, devoid of the pigments and other finishes that conceal the inherent beauty of leather, has allowed the market to offer a material that stimulates the senses, providing both visual beauty and tactile appeal. To simplify it, it is not how much you can do to over engineer the leather, but how little can be done to preserve it and expose it for what it is to celebrate all of its natural features and attributes.

Most of our hides are fully drum dyed in vats of water-soluble aniline dyes that fully penetrate the hides from face to front. They are then dressed with waxes, oils, and other tanning ingredients that help showcase the leather and enhance its natural appeal for added depth and character. They are designed to age gracefully with time being an ally and not an enemy, wearing in and not wearing out.

Color variation, pull up effects, healed scars, fat wrinkles and other natural markings are a signature to its authenticity and should be viewed as features, but not defects, of the product. Each hide will absorb the dye differently, both within the hide and from hide to hide, making every piece distinct and completely unique. Very often issues of color and other natural features are ultimately the features that make the leather appealing and unique. A similar analogy would be the variation and colorations of natural wood grains—every one is unique and distinct.

The emergence of fashion colors in upholstery leather has helped fuel the growth of leather upholstery offerings to make them an important artery in the web of good design. The category has expanded beyond the traditional brown, burgundy and green categories and now offers rich, saturated hues of yellow, orange, red, teal and purple that opens the door to a sea of endless possibilities for leather in the home. Today, leather can blend into and complement almost any design scheme.

The “less is more” approach of better scaled leather frames also creates numerous options to place leather in the home. It is no longer about the collection of the huge sofa, love seat and ottoman completely strangling a room. Now it is about the collectable that offers a lens to see leather become a part of your home in a simple, subtle and sophisticated manner and often times in areas you might not think of otherwise. There are simply more places to showcase leather today.

When it comes to cleaning less is more as well. Leather is designed to be a very low maintenance cover. Conditioners and cleaners that are specifically recommended for leather can be used but should always be tried in a hidden area first to insure there are no adverse effects to the leather. Never use harsh solvents or cleaners that are not specifically recommended for leather. Dust periodically with a dry cloth otherwise, leave it alone and allow the leather to age gracefully over time. Sunlight will fade leather over time; if the furniture is located in an area that gets heavy direct sunlight, take pro-active measures to reduce the exposure up front—i.e. put a throw over top of it during the day and remove it when being used.

Leather production is a more environmentally friendly process than ever before. Tanneries go well beyond adhering to the minimum standards of environmental regulation to co-exist as good neighbors in the communities they serve and live. Modernized water effluent treatment centers today capture water run off very effectively and filter out all of the necessary materials before being released. In many cases, the captured materials are re-used and recycled, again leading to reduced costs and increased efficiency. The movement to water based systems and less solvent based articles also helps make tanning a cleaner, more eco friendly process. Modern methods like chrome tanning combined with the age-old art of vegetable tanning produce leathers that capture the benefits of modern science while staying true to leather’s heritage and rich history. Extracts from trees like Mimosa and Chestnut are still used in tanning, just as Native Americans used them.

We hope this guide fosters a greater understanding and appreciation for Natural Leather. Realize that natural leathers will exhibit variation and thus each hide is unique. We select our leathers carefully and feel certain they would make a satisfying addition to your home’s décor.