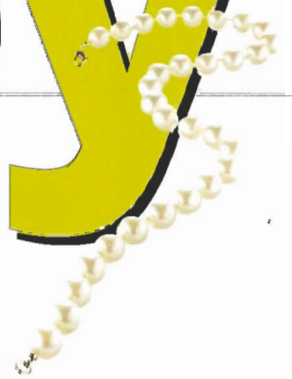


THE 8 HABITS OF WINNING INVESTORS P.106

Money



PLUS
Greatest Advice
of All Time:
20 Rules
to Grow Rich By
P. 88



INSIDER'S GUIDE TO SMART SPENDING THE BEST STUFF



AT THE BEST



PRICE

\$3.99US \$4.99CAN



SEPTEMBER 2007 | WWW.MONEY.COM



VALUE JUDGMENTS

SURPRISE, SURPRISE: The relationship between price and value isn't black and white. Certainly you know this if you ever thought you'd save money buying a cheapo desk chair, only to burn five times that in chiropractor bills. But you also know it if you passed up the high-end food processor and got yeoman service for years from the low-end one. So how do you

tell when paying up is more economical and when it's more economical to, well, economize? You look at durability and craftsmanship, as well as things like comfort and use. Walk through the hypothetical home on the following pages and learn if you need to spend more to get more. And discover where maximum quality meets minimum price—a sweet spot known as true value.

BY ANDREA BARTZ, ISMAT SARAH MANGLA, NOAH ROTHBAUM and WILSON ROTHMAN

To get the most for your money, you need to know two things: when the good stuff is worth paying extra for and when the economy choice is plenty good enough



PHOTOGRAPHS BY EVAN KAFKA ILLUSTRATIONS BY ZELA LOBB

SET DESIGN BY ADAM DE CROIX; STYLING BY ELLEN SILVERSTEIN; GROOMING BY ASSUMPTA/SUSAN PRICE

⇒ Sofa

RESTORATION HARDWARE
GRAND-SCALE CAMELBACK
SOFA | \$1,725 TO \$2,635

SPEND | "The sofa is the anchor of your living room," says interior designer Thom Filicia. That alone may make it worth a splurge. But also: Above \$2,000 you tend to get something sturdier. "The biggest thing to consider is the frame," says Jennifer Litwin, author of *Best Furniture Buying Tips Ever!* On cheaper couches, the frame may be made of metal or pressed wood. Kiln-dried hardwood like you'll find in this sofa from Restoration Hardware is better; it gives, therefore it won't crack. Look for a down-foam mix in the cushions. "The best couches feature eight-way hand-tied coils too," says Litwin. Ask the salesperson whether the store has a cutaway. But also just lift it—a solidly constructed sofa shouldn't be easy to pick up.



↗ Blinds

HOME DEPOT GRANDWOOD TWO-INCH FAUX WOOD
BLINDS, 35 INCHES BY 64 INCHES | \$71 EACH

SAVE | Wood-slatted blinds, which fit well in decor ranging from colonial to contemporary, will run you \$300-plus a window. But imitation-wood blinds—which you can get custom-made at stores like Home Depot—can be significantly cheaper, and they're actually more durable. No warping, splitting, chipping or fading, and they often have static control to reduce dust. No one will be the wiser, promises Patricia Algiers, a Milwaukee interior designer.

↓ Coffee Table

POTTERY BARN CHLOE COFFEE TABLE | \$299

SAVE | Increasingly, furniture is made from fiberboard and plywood. Since these can be labeled "wood," it's hard to tell what you're buying. On the plus side, the finishes "are more convincing than ever and the materials, stronger" says furniture expert Litwin. (This



Pottery Barn table is part veneer over bentwood.) And since your coffee table doesn't take much weight, you can safely buy on the lower end.

Headboard

SAVE ON IT

WEST ELM SQUARE CUTOUT HEADBOARD | \$359 QUEEN-SIZE

SAVE | Framed beds are out, says furniture expert Jennifer Litwin. Headboards are in: "They make a room look finished without your spending in the thousands." Because they don't support weight, you don't need to blow the budget. Litwin likes West Elm for its low-priced stylish headboards.



SPEND ON IT

Mattress and box spring

SEALY SILVER COAST ULTRA PLUSH EURO PILLOWTOP | \$899 (for queen-size mattress and box spring)

SPEND | This decision comes down mostly to comfort, but it's safe to say that the cheapest mattresses don't have much padding (you'll feel the springs), are made with polyester (which can pack down over time), and have fewer coils (you want at least 350). As you go up in price, you gain layers of support, like body-molding memory foam or the "Posturepedic innerspring" featured in this Sealy. Tip: Ask the salespeople to start you from the bottom up, or they'll have you test the priciest one first—and let you convince yourself that nothing less will do.

SPEND ON IT

Sheets

THE COMPANY STORE 420-THREAD-COUNT ELOQUENCE SUPIMA PALM PRINT BEDDING | \$172 (for queen-size sheets and two pillowcases)

SPEND | Here the measure is comfort per dollar. Generally, the higher the thread count, the softer a sheet will be. Theoretically it reveals the number of threads per square inch, but two twisted yarns acting as one (a.k.a. two-ply) can inflate that. Ergo, stick with counts from 200 to 500, as it's hard to pack more in an inch without double-counting twisted threads. The Company Store is known for its luxe sheets, many of which are made from Supima (read: American extra-long staple) cotton.

SAVE ON IT

Comforter

WAMSUTTA LUXURY COVERLET | \$100

SAVE | Save on the overblanket, which isn't in constant contact with your skin, to make up for the splurge on sheets. A basic polyester-filled comforter or coverlet like this from Wamsutta will keep you warm in any ordinary bedroom, says Linwood Wright of the National Textile Association.



Special-Occasion Men's Suit

HICKEY FREEMAN BARRETT SOLID NAVY SUIT | \$1,350

SPEND | "When you see a man in a suit looking like a million bucks, you're noticing the fineness of the fabric," says Karl Spilhaus, president of the Cashmere and Camelhair Manufacturers Institute. Problem is, the finer the fabric, the less durable it becomes. It's an unavoidable trade-off. The solution: Splurge on one or two high-quality suits for special occasions. Start with wool rated Super 180 and above (higher numbers indicate finer thread). Spilhaus gives high marks to Hickey Freeman for handwork and fabric.

Everyday Suit

JOS. A. BANK BUSINESS EXPRESS SUIT SEPARATES | JACKET \$395; PANTS \$155

SAVE | A suit you wear often has to hold up under frequent cleaning. Because of the fineness of the fabric, high-end suits can't. So for an everyday suit, choose coarse wool, around Super 100. This lasts longer than a poly blend, since polyester and wool deteriorate at different rates. With Jos. A. Bank, you'll get 100% merino wool, and you can build the suit yourself—from jacket style to fabric.



Diamonds

ONE-CARAT ROUND CUT H, SI2 DIAMOND | APPROXIMATELY \$5,000

SAVE | You don't have to go broke buying the highest-grade diamonds. This bling is rated on cut, carat, color and clarity. While the first two are a matter of preference, color is graded alphabetically from D (colorless) to Z (yellow), and clarity follows a scale of 11, starting with FL for "flawless." You can drop to an H in color and SI2 in clarity—the eighth category—and the flaws will be unnoticeable to the naked eye, says Helena Krodol of the Jewelry Information Center. And you'll save 75% off top quality.



Pearls

18-INCH FRESHWATER STRAND | \$100 TO \$150

SAVE | Jewelers use five criteria to evaluate pearls: luster, surface, shape, color and size. Akoyas are extra-lustrous, and South Sea pearls are large; because both are rare, strands run \$10,000 and up. Freshwater pearls are farmed in large numbers, and unless they're examined side by side with other varieties, they look perfectly lustrous, smooth, round, creamy and large. The human eye recognizes beauty, not rarity, so look for freshwater pearls that meet the five qualifications to your satisfaction.



Women's Jeans

7 FOR ALL MANKIND ERIN TROUSER | \$172

SPEND | Pricier jeans tend to use premium denim, which is heavy, tightly woven and often imported from Italy or Japan. Jeans made of this fabric lift and hug your body better, "like an old-fashioned girdle," says Jason Meyer, co-owner of Detour, a denim store in Milwaukee. Often the fabric is brushed for softness and pre-washed and stretched to curb shrinkage. Companies using this type of denim—Citizens of Humanity, Paige Premium Denim and 7 for All Mankind among them—tend to be meticulous with other details, using heavier-gauge stitching and nickel hardware (rather than lead, which corrodes), Meyer adds. Indeed, you'll pay for all this work; 7's jeans are \$100 and up. So keep your fancy denims looking new by buying a darker wash, washing them inside out and skipping the dryer.



Rachel Smith (Hickey Freeman suit and jeans); Getty Images (pearl necklace)