

STYLE UPDATES:  
**CUT TO THE CHAISE**

WE ALL HAVE FABRIC-COVERED FURNITURE THAT COULD DO WITH A REFRESH. LEARN THE TRICKS OF THE UPHOLSTERY TRADE WITH OUR EXPERT GUIDE TO CUSTOM COVER-UPS

Words VANESSA KEYS

Whether it's a family heirloom that's seen better days or a market find that needs TLC, every old piece of furniture has the potential for new beginnings. "Giving a piece of furniture a new lease of life through a custom covering can not only be fun and therapeutic, it can often be cheaper than buying something new," says Natasha Dickins, DIY specialist and furniture maker at Little Red Industries. Before you start, use this guide to decide on the difficulty level of your project: is DIY upholstery an option? Or should you hire a professional? Once you know the answer, says Natasha, "it's all down to the fabric you choose". >

PHOTOGRAPHY ANNETTE O'BRIEN



### CALL IN THE PROFESSIONALS

Reupholstering is the perfect way to revive a much-loved piece without compromising on the comfort and style of the original design. Technically speaking, you can replace the fabric on any item of furniture that has already been upholstered, such as dining chairs, wing armchairs, club chairs, chaises and sofas. When you decide to hire someone to complete the task for you, expect to pay upwards of \$50 for a dining chair, \$400 for an armchair, \$500 for a small sofa and \$600 for a medium-to-large sofa. But, depending on the piece's condition, the job may need to include more than just re-covering – the upholsterer may find they have to reinforce the frame and joints, replace springs, and insert new stuffing or padding. This will add to the overall cost of your project. Little Red Industries DIY specialist and furniture maker Natasha Dickens suggests finding a professional who is willing to talk through the entire project with you – from fabrics to foam.



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**"IT'S SATISFYING TO HAVE ONE-OF-A-KIND pieces THAT REPRESENT MEMORIES"**

~ NATASHA DICKINS, LITTLE RED INDUSTRIES

### GET HANDS-ON

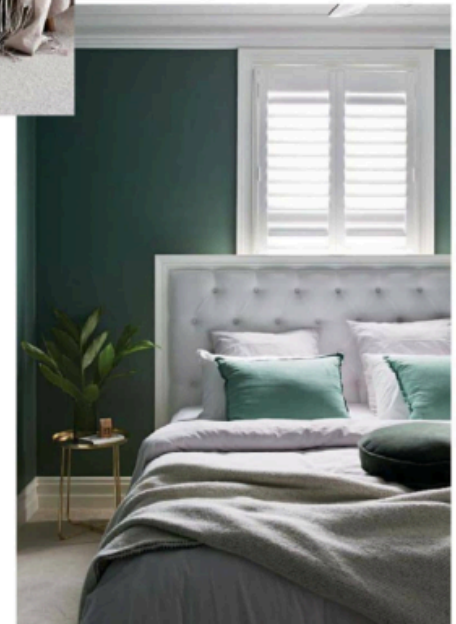
Simple DIY upholstery can be a rewarding and budget-friendly solution for renewing a piece. So that you don't overcommit – and to make sure you love the finished result – furniture maker and DIY expert Natasha shares her top tips for success:

- **First-timer?** Choose furniture with straight lines. "For more complicated pieces with curves, pleats, buttons, piping or things that require tricky sewing, sign up for an upholstery course."
- **Know the parameters of the job.** "To fully revive an old piece, you may need to consider removing the varnish and stain from the timber components to highlight the original raw timber and joints. You can finish the timber with wax for a natural look – then add new fabric for a modern edge."
- **Consider other techniques.** "I recently painted a vintage vinyl office chair with Annie Sloan chalk paint, then sealed it with wax. This produced a silky smooth finish that feels like leather."
- **Know when to hire a professional.** "DIY requires your time and effort, so be prepared to do research and invest in the necessary tools, otherwise it might be better to hire an expert." >

### expert advice: TO UPCYCLE OR REPLACE?

Are you unsure whether to re-cover or just buy new? Interior designer Liz Hayward of Hayward & Co poses the questions you need to ask.

- **Is there sentimental value?** "When an item of furniture has been in the family for generations or can't be replicated again through modern manufacturing, it's probably worth investing to have the piece restored."
- **Does it have good bones?** "A broken timber frame of a sofa or chair is often a sign that it is time to say goodbye. However, sagging foam or padding can be replaced – but will add to the cost."
- **Do you love the furniture's existing shape?** "Reupholstering will only alter the fabric style and colour, so it's vital you love the piece for its comfort or shape."







"TAKE NOTE OF A FABRIC'S 'RUB RATE'. FURNITURE *intended for* EVERYDAY USE NEEDS A HIGH 'RUB RATE'"

~ BETHANY JAMES, JAMES SAID

#### CHOOSE THE RIGHT COVER

When you shop for an upholstery fabric, let your practical needs lead, suggests interior designer Liz Hayward of Hayward & Co. "Are there young children or dogs in the home?" she asks. "Will it sit in direct sunlight? Also consider the budget you have in mind - this can narrow the options fairly quickly." Before committing to a material, request to see the largest sample piece available and drape it over the furniture to get an idea of what it will look like - a small sample isn't enough to give you the full picture. Here are your go-to guidelines when picking a fabric:

- **Linen:** Resists pilling and fading, but stains and wrinkles easily, so it's best suited for adult areas. Must be professionally cleaned to avoid shrinkage.
- **Leather:** Ideal for sofas and other larger pieces. Can be damp-wiped.
- **Cotton:** Good resistance to wear, fading and piling, but less resistant to stains and wrinkling. Look for canvas weaves (duck and sailcloth) for durability.
- **Wool:** Excellent resistance to pilling, fading, wrinkling and soil. Look for a synthetic blend - this will make it easier to keep clean.
- **Blended:** Polyester and nylon are often added to the natural fabrics mentioned above for wrinkle resistance and to reduce fading. However, try to avoid polyester blended with wool, as it can aggravate pilling.

#### expert advice: 3 THINGS TO CHECK WHEN CHOOSING AN UPHOLSTERER

**1** REVIEW THEIR PREVIOUS WORK  
"Go to their workshop and take a look at what they're working on," says Liz. "Look at the seams, corners and edges: are they straight, folded well and sewn well? These are the hardest areas to do and will show up skill level straight away."

**2** ASK ABOUT THE QUALITY OF THEIR MATERIALS "Enquire about what type of foam they use," says Bethany James, interior designer and director of James Said. "Make sure you pick a density that has the comfort level that suits you."

**3** LOOK AT THEIR TRACK RECORD "Experience is everything," explains Elaine Ellis, founder of the Hamptons-inspired furniture and homewares brand Henry & Oliver Co. "Being a professional upholsterer typically requires completing an apprenticeship and years of training."