

# LAPCO Leather Buying Guide

## Quick Tips

### for furniture buying

- Know what you are buying. Is it genuine leather .(All over) Ask questions.
- Does the leather have certification, is it from a reliable supplier.
- Is the entire object made from leather.
- Questions to ask: How thick is the leather is it cow hide? Where is the leather from, the country of origin.
- Get it in writing.

## Faux, fake, synthetic.. You can call it anything you like, but should you be calling it leather?

There is a lot of controversy with “leather type products” products that are made to emulate quality genuine top grain leathers. Some of the names for these are Bi-cast, split leather; faux leather, Pleather reconstituted leather, bonded leather or PU coated leather. These products are anything but genuine leather.

Some fake leather look products are so realistic when on an upholstered item it is difficult for even an expert to tell they are not real, until they start to break down (this can happen in as little as 6 weeks). Some upholstery suites may have the seats in leather and the back or sides in a vinyl or fake leather. Sadly there are all kinds of dodgy practices going on, that make it hard for the consumer to trust they are buying the real thing.

All upholsterers will have horror stories of badly constructed imported furniture, packing crates can be better constructed than your \$1500+ couch (though poor quality is not always cheap), it sometimes pays to have a piece of quality furniture recovered, if you love sitting in it, amazing what a recover can do.

The LAPCO Leather Buying Guide, will hopefully help understand leather terms, and give some good information if you are looking to buy leather LAPCO does not sell anything but genuine high quality upholstery leathers.

Why pay for real genuine leather? Simply, it lasts. We see people who have had suites that still look fantastic ten years later, and it is a luxurious natural product that never goes out of fashion. Leather gets a bad reputation, from people with cheap leather, or bicast leather suites. Full aniline luxury leathers provide a higher level of seating comfort.

## So who are LAPCO?

LAPCO are New Zealand's largest leather and associated products wholesaler; selling a huge variety of genuine leather from all over the world. We are also the agents for NSW Leather, many of our LAPCO and NSW leather upholstery hides have AFRDI\* (Australasian Furnishing Research and Development Institute) certification and we are members of New Zealand's LASRA (Leather and Shoe Research Association)

\*AFRDI are a non-profit, independent organisation providing Australian and New Zealand furniture buyers with a set of standards, product certification, testing and research.

We also sell, Sorensen Danish Leathers, New Zealand Leathers, Bridge of Weir, Muirhead and Boxmark leathers.



## Many terms about leather are confusing; So here are some common genuine leather types and terms

### **Corrected grain also called pigmented leathers:**

This is a widely used leather, hides that do not have a perfect enough surface to be full anilines, have the surface buffed and filled and an application of colour put over the top and a texture print rolled across the surface (embossed). These leathers are the lowest price genuine top grain leather you can buy, and are durable practical leathers. Picasso and Toro are both pigmented corrected grains. Both come with Commercial and Domestic certification and Toro has a Marine certificate.

### **Full Aniline or Aniline leather:**

These are very natural looking leathers and are very popular. Vintage looking leather falls into this category. Full aniline leathers use the best quality hides, though you will see pores, scars, stretch marks, as they retain the hides natural surface commonly called top or full grain. Aniline leathers are drum dyed so the pigment goes all the way through. They are not coated with topcoat paint or insoluble pigments. These leathers can be two tone or pull up (the colour varies when stretched), and are often finished with waxes and oils. These leathers are susceptible to fading in sunlight, and can mark when scratched. They do require care but have a timeless beauty. Havana, Hampton, and Sundance in the Artisan Collection are a few of our full anilines and come with a Commercial and Domestic certification.

### **Semi Aniline:**

Semi-aniline leathers are produced through a very similar process to full-aniline, but have a small amount of pigment and a thin clear protective top coat added to protect it from wear and staining. The natural beauty of the hide still shows through while offering colour consistency and higher durability. Nova and Sovereign are semi anilines and have a smooth natural finish.

- A higher cutting ratio is required in semi and full aniline leathers, these show more natural surface.

**Hair on Hide:** Fur/hair on finished animal hides, commonly cow, used in the design interiors market. LAPCO carry a full range.

**Top Grain:** Top grain means that it has the natural skins surface.

**Full Grain:** This is also the top grain skin surface of the hide, with little change to the skin surface.

**Splits:** We refer to suede splits, not vinyl coated leather splits or imitation leather or any product trying to emulate quality full top grain leather. LAPCO also sell suede, this is not for upholstery. Leather wholesalers and tanners call suede, suede splits, as they are separated from the top grain leathers (skin surface)

**Certification:** LAPCO carry leathers with certification. Certification shows the leather is suitable for purpose, be that aviation, marine, auto, commercial, heavy commercial or residential usage. Common certifications are FAR, Fire retardant and wear and rubbing tests. Certification also shows leather is genuine (this is the AFRDI cert).

## Terms continued

**Thickness:** LAPCO upholstery leathers start at 1mm some of our premium leathers are 1.4mm thick. To be suitable for purpose upholstery leather needs to be durable, leather thickness helps durability.

**Hide size:** Cow hides vary in size an average sized hide for an Italian or Argentinean leather is 4.8m<sup>2</sup> for Central European hides it will be an average size of 5.4m<sup>2</sup>. \*note not all leather is cow leather; it may be buffalo from Asia

**Country of origin:** LAPCO has upholstery leathers from Italy, Argentina and Central Europe. Argentina has Brahman cattle, so there is a chance in these hides for a zipper (this is a hole where the hump is removed) Central European hides have a very even finish as the cattle are barn raised and are often bull hide, bull hide is reputed to be stronger than cow.

**Suitability for purpose:** Leather comes in 100's of colours and many different finishes, there are heavy commercial leathers that will stand up to sun, heat, moisture and still look beautiful for years. If you have high use, heavy wear, or very full sunlight you may wish to consider a harder wearing leather made to withstand heavy use.

**Marks, scars and holes:** Leather is a luxury product, while you can get hides with little flaws in them, these will be higher priced. All hides will have holes and scratches and marks, scars, creases and brands; this is seen as part of the natural character of leather. Leather will have creases and marks in it, remember it is skin. All these marks show it is genuine, you do not find fake leather with them. Upholsters and furniture manufacturers do their best to cut around them, there will be scars and marks on most furniture.

**Bi-cast, split leather, faux leather, Pleather, Bonded, reconstituted leather or PU coated upholstery leather:** These are not genuine leather. They are not a luxury natural product. They were developed so people could have a leather look, with none of the actual benefits of genuine leather.

**Leather:** An animal skin which has been preserved and dressed for use.



*Leather is a luxury product- that's probably why they fake it.*



## Tannery leather terms

**ANILINE LEATHER:** Leather that has been dyed through with aniline dyes. Pure aniline leathers represent approximately 5 percent of all upholstery leathers produced worldwide. Sometimes topped with a resin, or lacquer protective coating; can also be waxed or oiled. **ANILINE:** Transparent dye used to colour dyed leather.

**BELT LEATHER:** Vegetable-tanned leather can be used in the construction of furniture generally over 3mm

**BLUE or (WET-BLUE):** Chrome tanned hides after tanning, these are sold globally to make finished leather. Chromium salts make the tanned hides a light blue/grey colour.

**BUFFED :** Leather which has been buffed or lightly sueded. This can be referred to as snuffed, nubuck leather, or grain-sueded leather.

**CHROME TANNAGE:** Leather tanned in chromium salts, generally chromium sulphate resulting in soft, mellow hides receptive to excellent colour variety. Currently the most widely used tannage in the world.

**CORRECTED GRAIN -** The outside skin or top grain is sanded/buffed/snuffed or abraded to minimize faults. It is then pigmented to cover the sanding and printed with an artificial grain. A spray sealer topcoat is then applied.

**CRUST (SEMI-FINISHED LEATHER):** Leather which has been tanned, re-tanned, dyed (or not), fat liquored, dried and softened, but not finished. Such leathers referred to as being crust.

**DRUM DYING:** The application of dyes to leather by the immersion of the leather in a drum that is tumbled. This process allows full dye penetration into the leather fibre.

**EMBOSSSED LEATHER:** A pattern is applied by extreme pressure in a press to give a unique design or imitation of full grain characteristics (light grain pattern or hair cell prints. Sometimes leathers are embossed to make them appear to be exotic leathers, such as embossing an alligator pattern into cowhide or a floral pattern.

**FINISH:** Surface applications on the leather to colour, protect, or mask imperfections. More specifically, all processes administered to leather after it has been tanned.

**FULL GRAIN -** The term used for the outside original skin or hide which has had the hair removed, but otherwise has not been corrected or altered. Full-grain leather possesses the genuine original grain of the animal.

**GLAZED FINISH:** Similar to an aniline finish except that the leather surface is polished to a high luster by the action of glass on steel rollers under tremendous pressure.

**GRAIN:** This term is used to describe the surface of leather. The hides finished surface consisting of pores, wrinkles and other characteristics which constitute the natural texture of leather.

**GRAIN, EMBOSSSED:** An artificial grain pressed into the surface of top grain leather from which the original grain has been removed.

**HAND:** A term used to describe the feel, i.e., softness or fullness of upholstery leather.

**IMITATION:** A variety of materials which have been made to resemble genuine leather. The great bulk of these are rubber or plastic-coated fabrics.

**PATINA:** A surface appearance of something grown beautiful, especially with age or use; an appearance or aura that is derived from association, habit, or established character.

**PERFORATED:** Leather with small holes cut in the hide. Perforated leather is achieved by die cutting small holes in the leather to form a pattern in the hide. Commonly used in the Auto industry.

**PIGMENTED:** The process of colouring and coating the leather surface with pigments dispersed in film-forming chemicals called binders which can be tailor-made to produce surfaces that are highly resistant to wear and fading. Leathers that have been sprayed with a pigmented, opaque finish. This is usually done to cover imperfections in leather.

**RECONSTITUTED LEATHER:** Material composed of the collagen fibre obtained from macerated (chopped up) hide pieces, which have been constructed into a fibrous mat.

**SIDE:** Half a hide cut along the backbone.

**SPLIT LEATHER (SPLIT):** Skin sliced in layers to give uniform thickness to the piece (grain side). Split leather (inside) is trimmed and finished as suede (suede splits). Cheap leathers are sometimes pigmented splits with embossed imitation grain.

**SUEDE:** Leathers that are finished by buffing the flesh side (opposite the grain side) to produce a nap. Term refers to the napping process, and is unrelated to the type of skin used. (referred to as splits or suede splits by wholesalers) See: Split Leather.

**TANNIN:** Any various solvents; astringent substances of plant origin used in tanning leather (vegetable tanned).

**UPHOLSTERY LEATHER:** A general term for leather processed for use in furniture, automobiles, and airplanes.

**VEGETABLE TANNING:** The conversion of rawhide into leather with a greater body and firmness than the more general method of chromium tanning: Russet leather is a vegetable tanned leather.