



Steven Jonas in his Manhattan showroom.

JONAS ON UPHOLSTERY

When Michael S. Smith needed sofas for the Obama Oval Office, he turned to Steven Jonas, the president of an upholstery and curtains firm dating from the 1920s. It was founded by his great-uncle Samuel Langer, an Austrian émigré who had worked with such artisans as Josef Hoffmann. Langer left the business to his nephew Ronald Jonas, a Holocaust survivor and Steven's father. Today, the Manhattan workroom—whose clients have included the Rockefeller family, Jackie Kennedy, and the late decorator Albert Hadley—still creates furniture entirely by hand in the traditional manner. His down-and-horsehair sofa can run about \$15,000, but Jonas believes it's worth the investment. "We see our furniture pull in big dollars at auction," he says. "I'm of the school that one should acquire less and keep it longer. This is heirloom furniture that will last a lifetime." **BY INGRID ABRAMOVITCH**



Jonas sofas in the Oval Office.

IN THE DETAILS

- We're seeing a resurgence of decorative detailing. Fabric is embroidered, then applied as a skirt detail. We can do razor-sharp welting, nailheads, or a precise luggage stitch, like on a beautiful saddle.
- A contemporary but soft approach looks fresh—such as a modern sofa with down cushions. People are requesting rectilinear shapes like the tuxedo, a square-armed seat where the arms are the same height as the back. Free-form shapes are popular, including a curved sofa first designed for Elsa Schiaparelli. We keep a copy of every model. If people request it, we can bring any style in for them to try.
- Beautiful curtains are back. I've got a pair of Fortuny and a pair of striped silk-taffeta curtains on the worktable. But drapery is less formal. We're doing simpler styles—curtains with Brisby-pleated headings, or cartridge pleats spaced every few inches.

TAKE A SEAT

- Like a house, a well-built piece of furniture starts with the foundation. Put your hand on the bottom of the frame of a chair, between the legs, and tap. You can hear if it has been made with webbing and coil springs. Run your hand along the platform underneath to ensure that the springs haven't popped. Test the arm: You should not be able to feel the wood, just the upholstery. Don't worry so much about the cushions. They are easily replaced.
- When a reupholstery estimate is higher than what you paid for the piece, throw it out. Or slipcover it. A well-made vintage piece is a good investment.

PROPER CARE

- Good furniture should last 30 years before it needs to be re-sprung. We see sofas that we made 50 years ago just now coming back for their first reworking. Depending on wear, the fabric might need to be replaced every 15 years.

- Let your upholstery breathe. It needs to be used and indulged a little bit. You need to beat the cushions and fluff them. Do not vacuum upholstery; that will just pull the guts through the fabric. Have the cushions refreshed with new down every 8 to 10 years. Put cushions in the sun for four to five hours and you'll get some of the springiness back.
- We use horsehair, a generic term for hog and horse hair (from the mane and tail) that is treated to be hypoallergenic. No animals are killed. It's been used since the 19th century. Alternatives like foam are chemical-based and break down. Horsehair gives bounce and lets you control the shape and edge.

MATERIAL WEALTH

- Lifestyle dictates fabric choices. For a formal space, try damask or silk velvet. For a private room, a print or heavyweight woven is more practical. When fabrics are used they take on a patina that makes them even more beautiful. We're seeing a lot of velvet, printed linen, and ikat.
- We've been making linen slipcovers since the 1970s. We worked on Calvin Klein's house in East Hampton—it was all white linen and ticking stripes. Today slipcovers are falling by the wayside, but we still have clients who request them. We will upholster furniture in a solid fabric, and then make a patterned slipcover for summer use.

MIX AND MATCH

- Contemporary rooms are multifunctional. You need a range of seating in a room to suit different needs. When I was younger I liked deep, slouchy English chairs, but now that I'm older I like more support—chairs that are easy to get in and out of.
- Today you can get away with mixing things up. A Victorian piece can look almost contemporary in white linen. That upholstery-on-steroids look from the 1980s? Even that's starting to return, in the form of marshmallow tufting.

A New York City apartment by William Sofield, with a custom-made Jonas sofa.



A variety of chairs in the Jonas showroom.



FROM TOP: DON FREEMAN; DOUG MILLS/THE NEW YORK TIMES/REDUX; SIMON UPTON; DON FREEMAN; SEE RESOURCES