

## A bedtime story, for \$20,000

You can sleep in a bed literally fit for a queen, but the world's best mattresses cost plenty.

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### NEW YORK (CNN/Money) - Do the rich sleep more soundly than everybody else?

If so, you might think it's because of the cushion of their bank accounts. But maybe it's the cushion of their beds.

According to the International Sleep Products Association, nearly 20 percent of American mattresses sold in 2003 cost at least \$1,000. That's a stark increase from just three years ago, when only 15.5 percent sold for that much.

The ultra-luxury niche may be growing faster still. To be sure, it represents a tiny sliver of the overall market. But an increasing number of people seem willing to spend \$5,000 to \$20,000 to ensure a comfy night's rest.

"The Baby Boomers are getting older, and more affluent," says IPSA spokeswoman Nancy Blatt. "As you get older, your body changes and those aches and pains develop. So they have the money and the inclination to upgrade."

#### Cashmere, silk, and other fine fabrics

Four European models routinely rank among the best in the world: Hästens and Duxiana from Sweden, and VI-Spring and Hypnos from Great Britain.

Hypnos makes the mattresses the Queen of England sleeps on; Hästens serves the Swedish royal family. VI-Spring won't name its noble customers, but the firm does outfit the Queen Mary II luxury liner (it also did the Titanic).

What makes these beds so special? Craftsmanship, for one thing. They are hand assembled, either entirely or mostly so.

At VI-Spring, workers train for about eight months before they're able to make the starter models, according to managing director Trevor Lay

Top-of-the-line mattresses require at least five years of apprenticeship. Then there are the innards, made of the stuff dreams are made of.

"We handcraft everything, from all-natural materials," says Adrian Jones, U.S. director of sales for Hypnos. "We use silk, lambswool, cashmere, and talalay latex, which is a 100 percent naturally forming variety." (In Canada and the UK Teased White Hair is used instead of Latex)

Ever woken with creases in your face? Bed-head's no problem here, since seams are pliant and rivets are encased in soft fabrics, not the hard plastic found on cheaper mattresses.

### Heavenly rests

These top-of-the-line mattress makers offer beds fit for a king -- at princely prices

COMPANY	ORIGIN	STARTER PRICE	TOP MODEL
Hästens	Sweden, 1852	\$3,000	\$16,000
Hypnos	Britain, 1900	\$6,000	\$12,000
Duxiana	Sweden, 1926	\$4,000	\$8,700
VI-Spring	Britain, 1901	\$8,000	\$20,000

SOURCE: COMPANIES

Spring systems are superior, too. The best mattresses have more springs, arranged more intricately and tied by hand with loving precision. This allows a much finer tension calibration than any machine-made mattress.

### Test naps

With knowledge of pocket springs and fabric breathability, I went to check them all out. My tests were discreet, no special pillow-fluffing for this investigative reporter but hardly scientific. Basically, I just lay on a bunch of beds around Manhattan.

All the salespeople were extraordinarily nice. But they found subtle ways to make the case that their upmarket bed is best.

Duxiana, the least expensive, let its showroom do the talking: a private bedroom, with soft music and mood lighting. Within minutes, I was in Neverland, that magical place between asleep and awake.

At Hästens, the store manager was impressively knowledgeable about latex. (It hardens and cracks, so Hästens doesn't use any, but the others do.)

The VI-Spring rep argued that low-riding Swedish designs don't provide the support of a proper British bed, which sits higher in its frame.

Only the Hypnos salesman fired no shots. I guess with Queen Elizabeth as a patron, one can afford to be gracious.

Lying back on any one of the four seems like reclining on the puffiest of clouds, only less wet. Roll over on your side, and your entire frame will be enveloped in downy comfort. That means proper support for your shoulders and rib cage, down to your ankles and feet.

Each bed I tried was fabulously comfortable. But to my aging male body, the Hästens was most fabulous of all, albeit by the thinnest of silken threads.

That's just me, though, a 6 ft. 2-inch, 185-lb. guy in his late 30s. Individual experiences will vary. What's more, every company is able and eager to make adjustments to suit their clients' tastes.

Luciano Pavarotti, for example, is a Hypnos customer with more than a few years and pounds on me. He gets extra stuffing and more tightly pulled strings.

Vladimir Putin, on the other hand, is a small man with a proletarian background. Even in the new Russia, I imagine his Hypnos is less stuffy than the one supporting the grandest of tenors.

But if that's not enough to persuade you to buy, here's an alternative: a mere \$600 gets you a top-of-the-line mattress from McRoskey in San Francisco. Of course, the company intends that model for dogs.

The Good Life is a weekly column that chronicles products, people and trends in luxury consumer goods, travel, and fine food and drink.

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**A Hästens worker stuffing a new mattress. That's horse hair in the background.**