



Beauty sleep

IT'S ESSENTIAL TO REJUVENATE BODY AND MIND. GET YOUR DAILY REST IN A COMFY BED

BY VICTOR DWYER

To sleep, perchance the next day to be something other than cranky, irritable and moody. Perchance to be more productive. To concentrate better. Fall ill less often. Be more insightful. Perchance, if nothing else, to look your best.

Sleep, science tells us, is the repair shop for our brains and bodies, the dreamy hangar into which we must check them each night so that our tanks can be topped up, our engines tuned up, our outsides chamoised and shined while our noggins take a break from decision making and

social intercourse. Growth hormones go into overdrive, allowing a quick reno of everything from skin and eyes to muscles and joints. And, of course, let's not forget what experience tells us: sleeping feels terribly good, especially to those regularly deprived of it.

Yet for all of sleep's patent worth and worthy pleasures, many people who willingly spend several thousands on a winter holiday in an effort to recharge their batteries balk at spending a fraction as much on an equally reliable (not to mention reliably serial) way of doing just that. Although that may be changing, especially as boomers,

their bodies and their bank accounts all grow a little more mature. "More people," says Amit Talwar, manager of Gobelins Fine Linens in the Manulife Centre in Toronto, "are starting to look at their bed as an investment. They're willing to pay what it costs to feel better in the morning."

What makes you feel better—or at least better rested—is not a mahogany sleigh frame or a silk-tufted headboard. When sleep experts talk about the importance of a good bed, they mean a good mattress and box spring, which together form what architects call "the minimum habitat."

And a good bed takes account of the



Like Queen Elizabeth II, you can rest your head on a luxurious Hypnos bed, like the Empress

fact that you lose not just all consciousness but all muscle tone when you sleep. With your body as flaked out as your mind, you need a bed firm enough to support your spine and thus fend off back pain. But it must be supple enough to maximize the body area in contact with the mattress in order to relieve pressure-point pain at the hips, shoulders and knees, and to allow easy blood circulation at, uh, weight-bearing locations. Otherwise, you'll toss and turn, waking up briefly as you do so, and in the process disturb the sleep of both your body and your brain.

Given all that, the right bed depends not only on your bank account but also on your height, weight, age and physical condition. Nor does it depend solely on such factors as coil gauge numbers—although, as a general rule, the lower the number, which indicates a thicker spring wire, the firmer the suspension. While the strength and number of coils have played a key role in mattress comfort ever since the 19th century, when bedsprings were invented—partly to improve parasite resistance—it's ultimately your body's unique makeup, in combination with your bed's, that makes for a great sleep.

In fact, some very restful beds have no springs at all. The only one Gobelins sells is the Swedish-made Tempur. Designed by NASA to relieve the pressure astronauts endure during liftoff, the Tempur bed is, effectively, a slab of very high-end foam. Just eight inches thick, it takes your body's temperature in order to mold itself around you, in the process supporting your various parts. The result: solid support, but also a freer flow of blood at those pressure points. The price: starting at \$2,399 for a queen.

Tempur also sells an electric-powered adjustable base, playing to a demand that many bed makers say is also growing as yuppies morph into ouppies. Talwar notes that 10% to 15% of his sales are now

adjustable models, which are great not only for watching TV but for easing everything from asthma and acid-reflux disorder to poor circulation. Adjustability is also great for people who like to work in bed, à la John Milton and Rossini, who wrote, respectively, *Paradise Lost* and several operas while propped up on pillows.

For the past year, Natura World of Cambridge, Ont., has been filling what it says is a market gap for adjustable models that don't look like hospital beds. Electric-

The NASA-designed Tempur bed takes your body's temperature and molds itself around you

ally powered, Natura beds are supported by flexible wooden slats instead of steel panels, which means they provide a titch more give at weight-heavy points. Made entirely of latex, the firm's mattresses are just six inches thick and equipped with separate control panels for each of two sleepers. Best of all, the whole bed can tuck inside your existing headboard and footboard. A commodious king will run you between \$3,900 and \$4,500.

A more micro-oriented kind of adjustability comes with what a cynic might call air mattresses for the upper classes. Employing air-filled, generally cotton-wrapped rubber chambers, such beds can be inflated to the firmness your body demands—which, by the way, can change over time and even day-to-day. Air, like high-end foams, is adept at dissipating pressure. Minneapolis-based Select Comfort—which advertises on the radio show of Rush Limbaugh, a man famous for enjoying a good zone-out—makes a model with a duvet-style pillow top, a foam layer quilted into the

cover, and a ticking of Belgian damask. It can be ordered from its eponymous website, with a top-of-the-line queen going for US\$3,600.

If hand-held controls and all that foam and air leave you feeling restless, there's always the option of bunking down to a royally worthy version of the pedestrian coils-and-fabric bed set. That would be the Hypnos, named after the Greek god of sleep, slept on by none other than Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip. Made in England for more than a century, the Hypnos brand became available in recent months in a handful of Canadian stores, including Jordans Interiors in Vancouver, Rogers Sleep Shop in Edmonton, and Manor House Furniture in Halifax.

Among its features designed to end-run royal pains: up to 2,088 extra-gentle coils with gauge measurements ranging from 16 to 17.5 (many mattresses top out at 700 coils and 15 gauge). Those are then topped with layers of cotton felt, cashmere, hand-teased white hair from the tails of cattle and hogs (which apparently give superlative resilience) and lamb's wool. Craftsmen finish off the Hypnos by threading immense needles through the mattress and attaching woolen tufts rather than hard buttons. The final product is then trimmed with brass-finished air vents. The suggested retail price for the best of the best? Hang on to your scepter: \$14,000 for a queen, \$17,000 for a king.

Before you lay down any money to better lay you down to sleep, keep in mind a few other expenses. A new bed can make sleeplessness downright passé, but it can make your current linens obsolete as well. For new, thin foam beds, traditional fitted sheets are too deep. With some high-end spring-packed models, they may be too shallow. Also entertain investing in a proper pillow. Tempur makes divine leg-spacing models to relieve pressure between the knees and feet, for about \$109.

If it's all sounding a bit too big-ticket, perhaps consider investigating whether a new, improved bed could somehow be funded as a company perk, akin to a fitness-club membership. On top of the many downsides of losing a good night's sleep, the U.S. National Sleep Foundation claims that mistakes and accidents resulting from sleep deprivation cost businesses in that country US\$18 billion annually. It may well be that the state has no place in the bedrooms of the nation. But does the modern corporation? Let's just say there's a case to be made. □