

RENO GAZETTE-JOURNAL

Stuff your money into these pricey mattresses

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NASHVILLE, Tenn. — How to make a \$12,000 mattress: Start with some classy materials like cashmere, expensive latex and hand-woven coil, add several hours of labor by a few craftspeople, throw in an English royal warrant or two and you've got a bed that costs almost as much as a new car.

The Hypnos brand has been around in England for more than 100 years and carries with it the approval of the late queen mother and Queen Elizabeth II, who commissioned the company as their royal bedding maker. For more than a year, the beds have been made for markets in the United States in a nondescript brick building in Gallatin, Tenn.

Frank Gorrell, president of Jamison Bedding Inc., itself a more than 100-year-old brand, bought the license to make the beds from Hypnos — a company named for the Greek god of sleep.

In 2003, about \$2 million worth of the beds were sold in the United States as the Hypnos brand expanded into retail shops across the country and benefited from a growing trend of consumers plunking down cash for high-end bedding.

"This product is not for everyone. It is for those people that want the best," says Gorrell.

The International Sleep Products Association, a trade group, says the percentage of beds sold in high-end categories has been increasing. The latest beds data show that 2.8 percent of beds sold in 2002 cost more than \$2,000, up from 1.9 percent of sales in the same price category the year before. Beds that cost between \$1,000 and \$2,000 accounted for 17.3 percent of sales, up from 13.9 percent the year before.

Nancy Butler, the editor of industry magazine Sleep Savvy, attributes the sales uptick to aging baby boomers with aching muscles and tired backs demanding more comfort at night.

"We are not as willing to spend our nights on something that's not as comfortable as we can get," she says. "Our muscles and our bones aren't like they used to be."

Nationally, Hypnos is increasing the number of retail outlets selling the brand. In total, about 30 dealers sell the Hypnos brand, including Marshall Field's department stores.

Adrian Jones, 37, a British-accented Hypnos salesman, says there's a fine line that the bed maker must be careful not to cross in sales. If the mattresses end up in too many stores, he says, it could cheapen the brand's image.

Jones encourages retailers to market the bedding by highlighting its royal heritage through in-store displays and other sales techniques.

At Bradford's, a retailer in Nashville, Tenn., the queen's coat of arms is displayed on a wall of royal blue. Blue curtains surround a little room where shoppers can discreetly lie on the bedding. Customers are told about other Hypnos owners, including opera star Luciano Pavarotti, Russian President Vladimir Putin and the sultan of Brunei.

The mattresses, which range in price from \$4,000 to \$12,000, are made alongside \$150 mattresses, the low end of the spectrum for Jamison Bedding. But separate craftspeople make the Hypnos bedding by hand with rigid specifications.

Hypnos' U.S.-made mattresses are slightly different from those sold in England. For Americans, the company decided to replace the bedding's horsehair with latex padding, thinking that animal hair wouldn't go over so well in the United States.

The beds are also slightly softer to conform to American tastes.

(REST OPTIONAL)

Joey Hudson is among the Jamison employees who make the Hypnos beds, handcrafting two or three a day. He builds the mattress frames out of poplar (not pine), and he and two other employees sew the covers onto the frames after ringing it with three-ounce firm fiber.

Hand-made pocket springs from England, each wrapped in fabric, help keep one side of the bed from sloping when someone sits on the other side. The eminence mattress, which can sell for up to \$12,000, has honeycombed coils, leaving no gaps between the rows. That's the box spring. The top mattress is lined with latex, cashmere and lamb's wool.

"The only thing we're missing is the goose from out back to get the feathers," Hudson jokes.

Once the pieces of the mattress are sewn shut, it all goes in a compressor and gets squeezed thinner. Then, Hudson and another employee thread a large needle through and attach woolen tufts, a type of cloth button, as a finishing touch.



LOOK INTO MY MATTRESS: Linda Creviston works on an Hypnos mattress in Gallatin, Tenn.