

How to choose a furniture or home furnishings store

Delivery access, lead times and what the consumer guarantees actually cover when something arrives damaged

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The price on a sofa is not what you pay. Delivery, access, assembly and the lead time all add up, and the lead time is where most disputes start because it is the one number nobody puts in writing.

What it should cost

Ask for the delivered price to your address, and ask specifically what happens at the door. Kerbside, room-of-choice and full assembly are three different services with three different prices, and stairs or a narrow access can change it again.

Lead times are the number to pin down. Stock items are days; made-to-order and imported items can be many weeks, and Tasmanian freight adds time to anything shipped from the mainland. Ask for the lead time in writing, in weeks, and ask what happens if it slips.

Deposits are normal for custom orders. Ask what the cancellation terms are, because custom orders often have restricted cancellation rights once production has started.

What the law requires

The Australian Consumer Law guarantees that goods are of acceptable quality, fit for their disclosed purpose and match their description. If an item arrives damaged or is not as described, you are entitled to a remedy - and for a major failure, you may choose a refund or replacement rather than accepting a repair.

A store cannot contract out of these guarantees, and a "no refunds on sale items" sign does not override them. If an item is faulty, the guarantee applies regardless of what the sign says.

Lay-by and credit arrangements have their own disclosure obligations, including what happens if you miss a payment. Ask for those terms in writing before entering one.

Red flags

A lead time given verbally and refused in writing.

"No refunds" or "no returns" language presented as overriding your rights.

Delivery priced at the kerb with no explanation of what that means.

A custom order with no written specification.

Pressure to pay a large deposit before the specification is agreed.

What good looks like

The delivered price and the level of service are stated clearly.

Lead time is in writing with the assumption it rests on.

They explain what your remedy is if something goes wrong, accurately.

They measure or advise on access before selling you something that will not fit.

Assembly and missing-part support are clearly explained.

What to ask

- "What is the delivered price, and is it kerbside, room of choice, or assembled?"
- "What is the lead time in weeks, and what happens if it runs late?"
- "Is this in stock here, or does it come from the mainland?"
- "What are the cancellation terms if I change my mind on a custom order?"
- "What is my remedy if it arrives damaged or the wrong size?"
- "Who do I contact if a part is missing?"

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