

The beds that cost as much as a Porsche

Would you be prepared to pay £68,000 to get a good night's sleep, ask **Susan Emmet**

What's a good night's sleep worth these days? Tens of thousands of pounds and then some, judging from the growing demand for super-luxe, oversized and sumptuous bespoke beds. Blame stressful modern living, rising levels of insomnia or George Osborne's Armageddon economic forecasts, but the desire to sink into the ultimate refuge under your duvet has never been greater. And top brands are happy to oblige.

Those who can are spending up to £68,000 for 7 sq ft of pocket springs, stuffed with bouncy horsehair and clad in the softest cashmere and pure silk ticking otherwise known as Vi-Spring's "The Majesty" at Harrods. For £58,000 you can sleep on a Savoir No 1-the bed that you'll find in the Royal Suite at The Savoy hotel.

It's consumption by stealth. When

710,000 public sector jobs are on the line and the Government is threatening austerity for another six years, it may not do to zip around in a Mercedes SL convertible but paying the same amount to slumber on a cloud is somehow more acceptable. Sleep enthusiasts can justify their purchases by citing the fact that we spend a third of our lives in bed.

Yet forking out such enormous sums for a bed is a relatively recent phenomenon. Back in 1997 when Alistair Hughes, a former management consultant, bought the Savoir business from The Savoy hotel, he couldn't find a shop to stock his wares. "Every retailer told us that the product was too expensive," he said. Including Harrods.

Convinced that there was a market for Ultra-sumptuous beds made only from natural materials by traditional craftsmen, Hughes started to sell directly from his factory in North London and soon had a following. Today there are three Savoir shops in London; including a concession in Harrods. Half of Savoir's mattresses are sold overseas, with the biggest showroom in New York. Despite the recessionary gloom, Savoir also opened shops in Delhi last April and Shanghai in October, all helped by the falling value of the pound as well as an emerging class of wealthy consumers from the developing world. Many had experienced quality beds at top hotels



£58,000

Main picture: Savoir No1; Left below: Savoir No4 in Aztec yellow; Right below: Savoir No4 in Baltic blue



£8,578



£25,160

and wanted the same at home.

But although beds are getting bigger, bolder and more fashionable as pieces of furniture in their own right, it's not the bling that is enticing people to spend. Pamela Taylor, the manager for furniture and beds at Harrods, says that what a customer buys "is not a new bed but a perfect night's sleep". More than ever buyers focus on the mattress.

"Ten years ago customers buying quality beds would have been steered toward a bed base and mattress as a set," says Taylor. "Now there is also a demand for high-quality mattresses that can be put on a slatted or shallow bed base."

At the Savoir factory, crafting the bits you don't see is more than a manufacturing process, it's a labour of love. The formula has not changed since 1905 when The Savoy hotel first - commissioned its own beds featuring the Trellis ticking designed by Lady D'Oyly Carte, wife of Richard, the theatre impresario and founder of the hotel.

Now, as then, the beds are made up of dainty pocket springs encased in calico and smothered with South American horsetail (other types won't do) and pure wool. The only difference is that these days Hughes offers a wider range of beds with slightly different types of finishes and fillings-starting with a Savoir No 4, which costs £55,750 for a standard king size, rising to the ultimate No.1. Each one is hand-stitched by the

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same craftsman from start to finish. "It makes for a more interesting job and we end up with a better-quality product," says Hughes. "It might be cheaper to have a production line but we would lose the quality."

Hughes says: "People confuse soft with saggy. You don't want to lie on a bed like a banana. You want the mattress to contour your shape. The hips have to sink in and it ought to support your back. The support should match your shape and size."

Part of the attraction of the bespoke bed is that manufacturers can use different spring tensions on different parts of the bed to suit couples who may differ considerably in shape and size. For the tall, it also means no more cold toes poking out of the bed at night. A bed should be 6in longer than you are tall, yet standard beds are typically 6ft or 6ft 3in. According to Lucy Benham, an assistant buyer of beds and bedroom furniture at John Lewis, where mattresses range from £80 to £13,095, the bed market is going in opposite directions. As with all retail these days, there is a glamour for affordable value at the bottom end and a flight to quality at the top.

But it's not just the very rich who are seeking higher levels of comfort. Benham says that middle-class buyers are becoming increasingly interested in the provenance of their mattresses and the materials that go into them. They are prepared to spend more to get a better night's sleep and will opt for a king size rather than the standard double.

For the cautious spender, justifying the cost is imperative but not impossible. No bespoke mattress is ever going to be cheap, but given that a good one should last about ten years, a Savoir No 4 king size mattress at £3,125 would cost 86p a night over that period. Suddenly it doesn't seem that ridiculous. But you may want to sleep on-it.