

welcome

life is short; the sofa is long

Since half of all marriages end in divorce, so should half of all sofa purchases. Not only would that be good for the furniture industry, it would also be good for the mental health of the citizenry. I know too many people who hate their sofas with a passion and yet cannot do anything about it. It is a big mistake to live with a big mistake.

I lost my first sofa in a divorce; it took years to replace it. Though I didn't realize it at the time, I was tangled in a crisis of doubt about the virtue of moving forward. I was finally motivated to change when a friend came to visit, and as we settled down to chat in the living room, in the only pool of light available, from the one lamp by the fireplace—he taking the only armchair, me in a creaky antique side chair—he said rather plaintively, “I feel awfully lonely in this room.” No one (besides my father, and who listens to their parents?) had bothered to point out the obvious. My living room was sad without a sofa. Well, the best thing you can say about a sofa is that it is so large that it's like having an endlessly needy pet—a Newfoundland, or a camel. I had an epiphany. You can never be lonely in a room with a sofa.

I had been looking for the perfect sofa for years, with no satisfaction. Though I have a pretty high threshold for paralysis, I grew tired of my inability to commit. One day, I opened the newspaper and saw a floor sample sale advertised at one of my favorite shops, a place I had haunted for years. I decided I had had enough of the tortured search. After all, hadn't I already learned the most important lesson about decorating (to say nothing of life): if it doesn't make you happy, change it. Life is short. Sofas are long. I was going to buy a sofa that day, no matter what; I vowed to find something on the floor that I would like. (I had always found *too many* there that I liked; that was one problem.) And, indeed, I did. The new sofa did not make a revolutionary style statement. It was not a radical design solution. It was pretty, and comfortable, and

took up lots of room. I had been silly to spend so much time without a place to stretch out in front of the fire. I had wasted precious years of lounging around due to my anxiety about compatibility. I had been a fool to look for perfection. It doesn't exist. The best thing about the sofa I bought that day? It was available.

So much for purchase power. Back to living with a problem. If it isn't working, and no amount of shopping therapy helps, get rid of it. Why would anyone want to live for years with something that causes so much grief? *Guilt? You've invested so much?* Learn to say, enough. Give that old dog away. Perhaps you have a little sister who could use some furniture. And there are Big Sister programs across the country that will come and remove the sofa, and deliver it to someone in need. *What about the memories?* Some memories are like reruns. They're terrible, but you can't avert your eyes. Neither can your guests—but all they're looking at is the sofa. Nostalgia is no excuse for bad decorating. Besides, the only memories that most sofas display are memories of the spilled red wine. (Remember that party? Of course not.) Or the leaky hamburger. (And who gave the kids permission for a living room picnic?) Or the cigarette that slipped from someone's fingers. (Forget him. Remember cigarettes?) These are memories that have left scars and scorches, and are best forgotten, along with the sofa. *But what about staying together for the sake of the children?* Whose living room is this, anyway? You don't have to live with something with popping springs and matted

stuffing just because the children think your furniture is their jungle gym. Send them out to play.

With some furniture, you have to be tough. You have to show who's boss. Remember, you're the grown-up. That's the illusion, anyway, which must, under all decorating circumstances, be maintained. Especially in a face-off with a sofa. Never let it get the better of you.



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