



The Leather Buyer's Guide

Air leather, Euro leather and top grain — what each one is

Glyde-X Recliners · Johannesburg, South Africa · WhatsApp 083 378 7864 · glydex.co.za
Every claim in this guide is one you can check, and we would rather you checked it.

There is more nonsense written about leather furniture than about almost anything else you can buy for a house. This guide explains what the words on a label actually mean, what we build, and — more usefully — the two questions that tell you more about a suite than any label does.

We build in two coverings. One of them is man-made, and it is our best seller. We are going to tell you exactly what each one is, what it does well, and what it will not do, including the parts that do not flatter us.

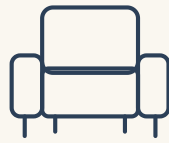
The short version

- The label tells you which *layer* of the hide was used. It does not tell you how *much* of the suite is hide at all — and in this price bracket, that second question is usually the one that costs you money.
- Our genuine leather range is **top grain** — the outer, strongest layer of the hide, sanded smooth and finished. It is not full grain, and we say so.
- It is hide on **every panel**: the backs, the sides, the outside arms. Not only the parts you sit against.
- **Air leather is man-made**, and it is our best-selling range for good reasons: it wipes clean, it costs a fraction of hide, and it asks nothing of you.
- Every suite we build uses the same frame, springs, foam and mechanism whichever covering you choose. The covering is the difference, and the price follows it.
- If nobody in the house will remember to condition hide, air leather is the more sensible purchase. A neglected hide suite ages far worse than a well-treated man-made one.

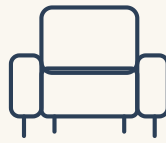
The two coverings we build in

One is man-made and one is hide. The chair underneath them is identical.

	AIR LEATHER	TOP GRAIN GENUINE LEATHER
What it is	Man-made. A polyurethane surface on a fabric backing. Not hide	Real hide. The outer, strongest layer of the skin, sanded and finished
Coverage	Every panel	Every panel — backs, sides and outside arms included
Look	Consistent colour and grain throughout	Natural grain and tone; varies from hide to hide
Everyday care	Warm damp cloth, water only. Nothing to feed	Damp cloth, water only, plus a pH-neutral conditioner every 6 to 12 months
Ages by	Staying as it is, then wearing	Developing a patina and taking on character
Can it be restored?	No. A coating cannot be re-finished	Often yes, by a specialist, years later
Warranty	1 year	2 years
Price, 3-2-1 suite	R19 799	R49 999



air leather



top grain

same frame, springs, foam and mechanism

The same chair, wearing something different

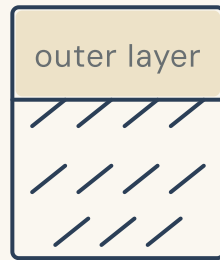
The chair is identical whichever covering you choose. Only the covering changes, and the price follows it.

Everything under the covering is the same on all three: solid pine and plywood frame, high-density foam over pocket springs with zig-zag springs beneath, polyester fibre-filled backs, and an imported steel reclining mechanism fitted in our Johannesburg factory. Whichever covering you choose, you are buying the same chair, wearing something different.

What the words on a label actually mean

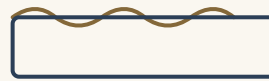
A hide is not one material. It is split through its thickness into layers, and the layers are not equal. Almost every confusing phrase in furniture retail comes from which layer is being sold and how honestly it is being named.

one hide, split into layers



splits, underneath

full grain



top grain



sanded flat, then sealed

Full grain and top grain are the same layer

The difference is not which part of the hide it comes from — it is whether the natural surface was left alone or sanded smooth and sealed. Splits are a different, weaker layer altogether.

THE TERM	WHAT IT ACTUALLY IS	HIDE?
Full grain	The outer layer of the hide with its natural surface left intact — not sanded, not corrected, not printed. The strongest leather there is	Yes
Top grain	The same outer layer, with the surface lightly sanded to even out blemishes and a finish applied. Real hide, from the strongest part of the skin, more uniform and more resistant to staining than full grain	Yes
Split leather	The lower layers left after the grain layer has been split away. Weaker, and usually embossed and coated so it reads as grain	Yes, but the weak part
Bonded leather	Leather fibre ground up and bonded with polyurethane onto a fabric backing. Closer to chipboard than to timber	Only as offcuts
PU, faux, leatherette, air leather	A polyurethane surface on a fabric backing. A man-made upholstery designed to look and wipe like leather	No

The phrase “genuine leather” is the slippery one

You would think it was the strongest claim on the list. In the trade it is often the weakest of the hide grades — it has commonly been used to mean split leather, the layer underneath the good one.

We call our hide range **genuine leather** on the website because that is how people search for it. So we will be specific, in writing, and you can hold us to it: **the grade is top grain**. If a salesperson anywhere — including ours — says only “genuine leather” and stops there, ask which layer. It is a fair question with a specific answer.

The question that matters more than the grade

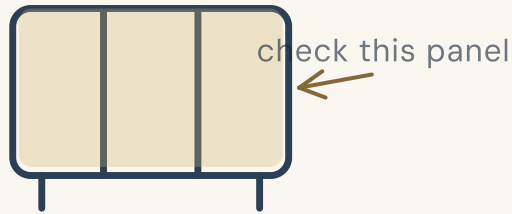
Grade tells you which layer. It does not tell you how much of the suite is hide at all. That is a separate question and in this price bracket it is usually the more expensive one to get wrong.

“Leather uppers” — what it is really telling you

You will see this phrase, or something like it, on a lot of lounge suites in this bracket. It means the parts you sit on and lean against are covered in leather, and the parts you are less likely to touch — outside arms, back panels, sometimes the sides of the seat cushions — are covered in something else. Usually a man-made upholstery chosen to match.

It is not dishonest. It is a disclosure, and a manufacturer using it is telling you the truth in the smallest words available. But it is easy to read past, and it changes what you are buying:

- You are paying a leather price for partial leather coverage
- The two materials age differently, so the back of a suite may not match the front after a few years
- Sun affects hide and man-made upholstery differently, which shows up first on whichever panel faces the window



tip the suite and look at the back

Where the money is really saved

The panels you never look at are the ones worth looking at. Ours are hide too — tip a suite over in our factory and check.

If a suite says leather uppers, ask which panels are hide and which are not. Ours is hide on every panel, and that is a claim you can check by tipping the suite on its side. We will do exactly that for you on a video call.

Air leather, honestly

Air leather is a man-made upholstery: a polyurethane surface on a fabric backing. It is not hide, it has never been near an animal, and no amount of marketing language changes that. We sell more of it than everything else put together and we still say so on every product page.

Having said that plainly — it is a genuinely good material for a family lounge, and we would not put our name on it otherwise. It is the range most of our customers choose, and for most households it is simply the right choice.

WHAT IT DOES WELL

- **It wipes clean.** A warm damp cloth handles most of what a household throws at a sofa
- **It is consistent.** Every panel matches, because it is manufactured rather than grown. No hide variation to argue about, and a replacement piece years later will match
- **It asks nothing of you.** No conditioner, no feeding schedule, no penalty for forgetting
- **It costs a fraction of hide** — about 2.5 times less for the same suite, which is the whole reason it exists
- **Spills are less frightening.** A coated surface does not drink a spill the way hide can, so you have longer to get to it
- **The chair underneath is identical.** Same frame, same springs, same foam, same mechanism as our most expensive suite
- It contains no animal product, which matters to some households

WHAT TO KNOW FIRST

- **It will never develop a patina.** Hide gets better looking with use; a man-made surface does not — it stays as it is, and then it wears
- **It cannot be re-finished.** Hide can often be cleaned back and restored years later. A coating cannot, so damage to it is permanent
- **It does not breathe the way hide does,** so it can feel warmer against bare skin in a Highveld summer
- **The surface is the part that works hardest.** Sunlight, heat and detergents all attack it, and it is unforgiving about all three
- It carries a 1 year warranty rather than 2

We do not publish a lifespan figure for any of our coverings. We have no laboratory abrasion testing to point at, and we would rather say that than invent a number. What we will tell you is how ours is built, and show you.

Euro leather — what it was

We no longer offer Euro leather. It is here because a number of households own one, and because a guide that only lists what we can sell you today is a brochure rather than a guide.

Euro leather was a premium synthetic — man-made, not hide, in the same family as air leather but a considerably better version of it. It was noticeably thicker in the hand, and the fabric backing had a soft, suede-like feel much closer to the reverse of a real hide than to the backing on a standard synthetic. Picking up a panel of it, the difference from air leather was obvious. It sat between the two on price, at R23 999 for the 3-2-1 suite.

If you own a Euro leather suite: it is a man-made covering, so **look after it exactly as you would air leather** — water only, no detergents, no solvents, out of direct sunlight. Our [air leather care guide](#) applies to it in full.

Top grain genuine leather

This is the top of our range. It is real hide, taken from the outer layer of the skin — the strongest part — with the surface lightly sanded to even out natural blemishes and a protective finish applied. That process is what makes it top grain rather than full grain, and it is a trade-off rather than a shortcut: you lose some of the character of an untouched surface, and you gain uniformity and a good deal of resistance to staining.

It is hide on every panel: the backs, the sides, the outside arms, not only the parts you sit against.

WHAT IT DOES WELL

- **It is the strongest layer of the hide.** Not the split from underneath, and not a coating with hide in the name
- **It is hide everywhere**, which is the claim most suites in this bracket cannot make, and the difference you see after five years when a hide back panel and a man-made one have aged apart
- **It ages into something better.** Hide takes on a patina; the seat somebody always uses starts to look like theirs
- **It breathes**, so it stays more comfortable against skin over a long evening
- **It can usually be restored.** A specialist can often clean back and re-colour a hide suite years later. That option simply does not exist on a coated surface
- **The finish resists staining** better than an untreated full grain surface would
- It carries a 2 year warranty

WHAT TO KNOW FIRST

- **It needs feeding** with a pH-neutral conditioner every six to twelve months, or it dries and can crack. This is not optional and it is a warranty condition
- **It costs about 2.5 times** what the same suite costs in air leather
- **Grain, tone and small markings vary** from hide to hide, and across panels of the same suite. That is what real skin looks like. It is not a defect, but if you want every panel identical you will not enjoy it
- **It marks more readily** than a coated surface. Most of those marks settle into character rather than damage, but some people find the first few upsetting
- **It is not full grain**, so it will not develop patina to the degree an untouched surface would
- Colour choice is narrower, and a hide dye lot is never a perfect match to one from another batch

Top grain and full grain — the honest comparison

Full grain is the outer layer with the natural surface completely intact. Nothing sanded, nothing corrected, nothing printed. It is the strongest leather there is and the most expensive, and it is the grade that develops the deepest patina, because there is no finish sitting between you and the skin.

Ours is not full grain, and we would rather tell you that than leave the phrase sitting on our website doing work it has not earned. Almost no three-piece recliner suite sold at South African retail prices is full grain. A suite that genuinely is will say so loudly and will cost several times what ours does.

What you actually give up by choosing top grain over full grain is a degree of character and a degree of ultimate strength. What you get back is a surface that is far more forgiving of a household — more uniform in colour, more resistant to a spilled glass of wine, and considerably less expensive. For a lounge suite that gets sat in every evening, that is a reasonable trade, and it is the trade nearly the whole furniture industry makes.

Which one to choose

We would rather sell you the right one than the expensive one, because the wrong one comes back.

IF THIS IS YOU	THEN
Young children, pets, a busy family room	Air leather. It wipes, it does not drink a spill, and a permanent mark on it costs you a fraction of what it would on hide
Nobody in the house will remember a conditioning schedule	Air leather. Genuinely. A neglected hide suite ages far worse than a well-treated man-made one
You want every panel to match exactly, now and in five years	Air leather
The budget is the deciding factor	Air leather. It is the same chair underneath, and it is the range most of our customers choose
You want a material that improves with age and can be restored later	Top grain genuine leather
You will keep this suite for a very long time	Top grain genuine leather, provided you will condition it
Someone in the house sits on it for hours at a stretch	Top grain genuine leather, which breathes

The frame — the part you will never see

Upholstery is what sells a suite. The frame is what decides whether it is still solid in year five, and it is hidden under fabric at the exact moment you are making the decision.

What to look for

- **Solid timber and plywood** in the load-bearing parts — the rails, the corners, the seat box
- **Screwed and glued joints**, not stapled ones. Screws hold under repeated flex; staples work loose

- **Corner blocks** at the joints, which is what stops a frame racking side to side over years of getting sat on

What to be careful of

Particle board and chipboard are common in furniture because they are cheap, flat and consistent. In a static cabinet that is fine. In a seat frame that flexes every time somebody sits down, a staple driven into a chipboard edge has very little to grip, and that is where movement and squeaks tend to start.

This is the hardest thing for a buyer to verify, which is precisely why it is worth asking about. Any manufacturer can tell you what their frames are made of. Ask.

Ours are solid pine and plywood, screwed and glued, and every seat is rated to 130kg.

The mechanism

On a recliner the mechanism is the part most likely to fail, and it is the part with the least information attached to it. Two questions are worth more than any spec sheet:

- **Who made it?** Ours is imported steel, fitted in our Johannesburg factory by the people who build the suite
- **Who fixes it in month fourteen?** If the answer involves an importer, a distributor and a shipping timeline, factor that in. Ours is us

Manual and powered mechanisms are a real choice, not just a price difference. A manual recliner has no motor, no transformer and no cable, so there is less to fail and it works in a power cut. A powered one is easier for someone with limited strength. Neither is simply better. Our Cordoba is manual.

Seat construction

A seat that is foam alone will feel good in a showroom. Foam compresses over time; how quickly depends on its density and how much it is used.

Pocket springs under high-density foam cost more to build and behave differently under repeated load, because the springs carry the work rather than the foam alone. Press a seat down hard with your palm: foam sinks and pauses, a sprung seat pushes back. Ours is high-density foam over pocket springs, with zig-zag springs beneath.

Back cushions are a separate question. Fibre-filled backs feel softer and need plumping. Foam backs hold their shape and feel firmer. That is preference, not quality. Ours are polyester fibre fill.

How to check any suite in five minutes

- 1 **Tip it forward and look at the back panel.** Is it the same material as the front? This is the single most revealing thing you can do, and it takes ten seconds
- 2 **Press a seat hard with your palm.** Does it sink and pause, or push back?
- 3 **Take a corner in each hand and try to rack it gently.** A frame that flexes and creaks in a showroom will not improve at home
- 4 **Work the recliner three or four times.** Does it latch positively in every position, or drift?
- 5 **Look along a panel edge in daylight.** Hide varies slightly along its length; a printed surface repeats exactly
- 6 **Smell it.** Hide smells like hide. This is not decisive — finishes and treatments confuse it — but it is a data point

Questions worth asking any manufacturer, including us

- Which layer of the hide is it — full grain, top grain, or split?
- Which panels are hide and which are not?
- What is the frame made of, and are the joints screwed or stapled?
- Who made the mechanism, and who repairs it in month fourteen?
- What is the seat built from — foam alone, or springs under foam?
- What exactly does the warranty exclude?

A manufacturer who knows their own product can answer all six without checking. WhatsApp us on _____ and try it.

What we build

Our Cordoba 3-2-1 recliner lounge suite — a three-seater, a two-seater and a single chair, six seats of which five recline, the centre seat of the three-seater being fixed.

- **Air leather**, R19 799, 1 year warranty — [how to look after it](#)
- **Top grain genuine leather**, R49 999, 2 year warranty — [how to look after it](#)

Not everything we build is listed on the website. If you have seen a colour or a configuration elsewhere and cannot find it here, ask.

We build these suites in Johannesburg, South Africa, so if something does go wrong you are dealing with the people who made it. Every claim on this page is one you can check, and we would rather you checked it.

Glyde-X Recliners — built in Johannesburg, South Africa.

WhatsApp **083 378 7864** with your order number, a photograph, and a short video if it is a mechanism problem.

Air leather suites carry a 1 year factory warranty and genuine leather suites 2 years, from the date of delivery. Full terms at glydex.co.za/warranty/