

HOMES

By Debbie Arrington
Sacramento Bee

Nothing says "I love you" like a good night's sleep, especially in luxury. "It's all about comfort," says Earl Kluff, a third-generation mattress maker and president of Aireloom Co.

Italian mattress maker Magniflex goes further, with its Love Collection, adding a removable and washable plush cover that is made to be seen (who needs sheets?), to luxury mattresses that boast body-contouring memory foam and even adjust to body temperature.

Walt Bader's all-American organic mattresses have made his company a go-to source for the ultimate in feel-good sleep. (Organic Mattresses Inc. mattresses reportedly grace some White House bedrooms.)

As with other home goods, eco-friendly features have boosted mattress brands such as OMI, which has seen business double in the past three years. Its pure natural latex layers reportedly help with muscle recovery, a selling point for older weekend warriors.

Well-off shoppers also can find mattresses sewn with silver, gold or platinum thread (to discourage germs), covered with silk or cashmere. Fibers are infused with scent, so a gentle roll will release waves of lavender, chamomile or other therapeutic fragrances.

Such ultra-luxurious mattresses cost more than many cars. "We make custom models that cost \$24,000 to \$75,000 for a queen size, and we sell quite a few," says Magniflex's Andrea Mugnai. "They look really expensive; they're very niche-y, very edgy. But you'd be surprised. We sell a lot of them in the U.S., particularly to professional basketball players."

Adds Aireloom's Kluff, "We're introducing a \$44,000 model at Bloomingdale's because the \$33,000 (mattress) we brought out last year wasn't enough. People wanted something even more luxurious."

Trying to bounce back from its worst sales slump in 40 years, the mattress industry is using luxury as a lure.

Though high-end mattresses costing more than \$2,000 still account for less than 10 percent of total sales, this segment keeps growing. Demand for eco-friendly products has joined with a desire for pampering.

Makers have also begun targeting men with extras such as beds made with pop-up flat-screen TVs, built-in safes and champagne buckets. Magniflex markets its Tonino Lamborghini model (with logos from the famed carmaker) as man-cave material.

But the high-end excess has more affordable layers underneath.

"We're experiencing two levels of luxury shopping," Mugnai says. "Yes, we have mattresses sewn with 22-karat white gold, but we also have queens starting at \$1,000 that feature all the same quality and 'green' certification. That's a big plus for consumers."

Magniflex rolled out its Love Collection at the winter Las Vegas Market furniture show. The reaction?

"It generates a major wow effect," Mugnai says of his whimsical mattresses, priced at \$2,000 and up for queens. The Lamborghini king retails for about \$3,000.

Kluff wants a different exclamation. "We're all about the 'ah' factor," says Kluff, who has introduced several mattress innovations.

Aireloom has re-emerged as America's premier luxury mattress brand. Kluff, whose family has been making mattresses since the 1920s, bought the brand in 2004.

"Even in a bad economy, we're No. 1 on the high end," he says. "Aireloom has always been the mattress

of the rich and famous. The Reagans took them with them to Washington. Frank Sinatra and John Lennon slept on

IN & OUT



Courtesy of Magniflex
THIS MATTRESS costs \$75,000. Made by Magniflex, the "Platinum Mattress" is marketed as the most luxurious and expensive mattress in the world. It's stuffed with foam made from soy and vegetable oil and is sewn together with thread made from precious metals.

Sleeping on Luxury

Mattress industry has products for high-end shoppers

Airelooms." Though Airelooms feature such patented innovations as "open-chamber construction," the brand's appeal stays rooted in old-fashioned craftsmanship, Kluff says much of it by hand.

An average mattress takes an hour to put together. High-end mattresses take four to five hours each; the most expensive require four to five days.

Industry experts say new products are the key to reinvigorating the sales of mattresses, which are designed to last seven to 10 years.

Sealy, Serta and Simmons still lead the U.S. market, accounting for about 60 percent of sales. They, too, have followed luxury trends. For example, designer Vera Wang teamed with Serta for a special edition.

At OMI, Bader has seen the work force grow to 50 at his state-of-the-art factory in a converted fruit storage warehouse in Yuba City, Calif. Its queen mattress prices range from \$1,695 to about \$8,000.

"Even in the recession, there are still people who are able to effectuate their desires and are willing to pay for it, be it a couch or a mattress," Bader says. "A lot of celebrities buy our mattresses; Ben Affleck bought one (recently)."

Comfort always is bedding's bottom line, and that differs with every sleeper. Giving as many options as possible, OMI's OrganicPedic 81 includes 18 layers of latex, each individually upholstered, that can be reconfigured into 81 different combinations. (The king retails for about \$8,200.)

"People want comfort, and there's a lot of comfort available in natural, all-organic materials," Bader adds. "This is a product you're going to use one-third of your life."