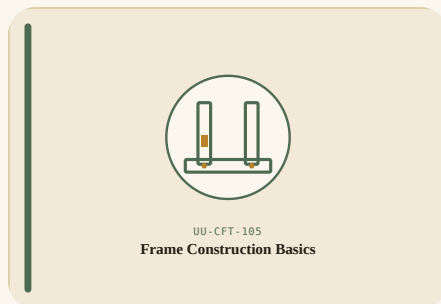


Frame Construction Basics:

Hardwood vs. Softwood, Joinery

How to evaluate the part of the piece nobody sees and everybody relies on, before quoting a re-cover.



1. Why the frame is the part nobody sees and everyone relies on

Fabric and cushions get replaced every re-upholstery cycle; the frame underneath usually isn't, which makes it the single biggest determinant of whether a piece is worth re-covering at all. Learning to evaluate a frame — and knowing when to recommend against investing further work in one — protects both the shop and the customer from putting good fabric over a frame that won't last.

2. Hardwood vs. softwood frames

FRAME MATERIAL	WHAT IT MEANS IN PRACTICE
Hardwood (e.g. oak, maple, birch, poplar)	Holds staples, screws, and glued joints far better over repeated re-upholstery cycles; the standard for higher-end and commercial-grade furniture expected to be re-covered multiple times over its life

FRAME MATERIAL	WHAT IT MEANS IN PRACTICE
Softwood (e.g. pine)	Lighter and less expensive, common in lower-cost and some contemporary furniture; holds fasteners less reliably over multiple re-upholstery cycles and is more prone to splitting at joints under repeated stress
Engineered panel (plywood, particle board, MDF)	Common in modern mass-manufactured furniture, often combined with solid wood at stress points; particle board and MDF in particular don't hold screws or staples well once a hole is stripped, and don't tolerate repeated rework

3. Joinery quality — what to check before quoting

- **Corner blocks** (glued and screwed triangular blocks reinforcing frame corners) present and solid — their absence or failure is one of the most common sources of a wobbly frame.
- **Doweled, mortise-and-tenon, or dowel-and-screw joints** tight with no visible movement when the frame is racked by hand — a joint that moves under hand pressure will fail faster under years of seated load.
- **Staple and screw holes** from prior upholstery work — check whether the wood around existing fastener points is still solid or has become stripped/split from repeated use; a frame with heavily worn fastener points may need wood filler, a doweled repair, or relocated fastening before it can take a new cover reliably.
- **Glue joints** free of visible gaps or old, dried-out, failed glue — a joint that was glued decades ago often needs to be disassembled, cleaned, and re-glued rather than simply re-stapled over.

Shop practice

Flex-test a frame by hand (rack it gently in multiple directions) before quoting, not just after the old cover is removed. A frame that fails this test needs repair priced as its own line item — or, if the damage is extensive enough, an honest conversation with the customer about whether re-upholstery is still worth it.

4. When to recommend against re-covering

Be direct with customers when a frame has failed badly enough (extensive rot, insect damage, cracked structural members, stripped engineered-panel fastener points beyond repair) that re-covering it isn't a good investment. A shop's long-term reputation is better served by an honest "this piece isn't worth re-covering" than by a nice new cover over a frame that fails within a year.

Sources

General trade reference reflecting standard furniture frame construction practice. Specific repair methods depend on the frame material and failure mode in front of you.

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