

## The best investment furniture

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By Terri Sapienza, Published: June 1, 2011

When furnishing your first apartment, there can be an overwhelming urge to rush out to the nearest chain store and blow your budget outfitting the entire place.

Resist that temptation.

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When furnishing your first apartment, pace yourself. Spending more money now will pay off later.

versatile?

Keep in mind that it's not necessary to buy your "forever" furniture right away or all at once. The following list is meant to be used as a guide as you plot your course. When it comes to buying furniture, spending your time and money slowly and surely is the key to long-term success.

There are many deals to be had if you shop around, keep your eyes peeled and know what you're looking for.

Scour yard sales, estate sales, flea markets, antiques shops and auctions for basics and one-of-a-kind treasures, says [Raji Radhakrishnan](#), a designer in Brambleton.

"Go to a few and just look, don't buy.

... Get a feel for what you like, what things cost, what they are called, then hit the markets with whatever cash you have."

And don't forget to keep your individual style in mind. The furniture and accessories that showcase your personality are what make your home shine.

Here, local designers give us their picks for the best investment pieces.

### 1. Sofa

"You're going to use it forever, so buy something good with really durable fabric," says Gibson Island designer [Erin Pitts](#). "Just don't get it in a print."

A plain, neutral fabric may seem boring now, but you'll be happy with the choice down the road as your tastes and color preferences change. Swapping pillows or wall color is easier and less expensive than having a sofa reupholstered or buying a new one. Even if a small-scale sofa is all you have room for right now, resist the urge to skimp on quality.

Something small can be a comfortable companion in a guest room or office space when you upgrade to a larger space.

**Tip:** Spend a little more for a sofa with a stain-resistant fabric.

### 2 & 3. Chest of drawers

"A chest of drawers is such a universal piece of furniture," says Alexandria designer [Shazalynn Cavin-Winfrey](#). It can be an entry hall table, anchor a living room or double as a wet bar and is an excellent bedside table or place to rest a TV, she says. It can also be moved into a closet for extra storage. "Mine has housed clothing to dining room linens and now holds boxes of Legos."

A smaller-scale [bachelor's chest](#) is also versatile and more portable, says D.C. designer [Annie Elliot](#). It can go in a smaller front hallway with a lamp and a tray for mail on top, in a living room flanked by two chairs or next to a bed, she says.

As difficult as it may be, pace yourself.

Spending more time and more money on fewer items now will pay off later.

"Instead of using your budget on items that will fall apart, invest in quality items that you can use for many years to come," says Bethesda designer [Marika Meyer](#).

"It's good to think of how you can use [something] now and how you can use it later," says Amy Rutherford, owner of [Red Barn Mercantile](#) in Alexandria. "You want the piece to grow with you, so it needs to be timeless and multipurpose."

Before plunking down your cash card for a piece of furniture, ask yourself: Do I love it? Will I still love it five years from now? Is it well-constructed? Is it too trendy? Is it

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**“I even have one in my bathroom right now. It’s such an elegant way to store things. And they’re easy to move, which is ideal for a recent graduate unlikely to stay put for more than a year or two.”**

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**Tip:** For the bachelor’s chest, look for a piece that isn’t too deep, so it can function in the narrowest of spaces; less than 20 inches is ideal, says Elliot.

### 4. Lighting

A light fixture can alter the feel of a room, especially in a small space. Every room should have multiple sources of light, including table lamps, floor lamps and sconces, even if you have a ceiling fixture, says Radhakrishnan. (But stick with your basic needs first.) “Lamps are to a room like jewelry is to an outfit,” she said, “so go bold and have some fun!”

Tip: Antiques shops (online and physical storefronts) are the best sources for lighting, says Radhakrishnan. “They won’t always come cheap, but you are much more likely to find a vintage lamp that’s very well made, unique and beautiful for little more than the price of regular store-bought ones.”

### 5. Original art

Forget framed posters, says designer [Dana Tydings](#) of Laytonsville. Instead, start building an art collection.

Works by students and other undiscovered artists are original and affordable. Buy several smaller pieces to hang together, or save for one or two large statement pieces.

“Good art hung over an Ikea sofa will make [the sofa] look like a million dollars,” says Tydings.

Tip: Affordable, original art can be found at local art schools, such as the [Corcoran College of Art and Design](#) or the [Maryland Institute College of Art](#) (call to ask about upcoming art sales); the [Torpedo Factory](#); [52 O Street Studios](#); [Columbia Pike Artists Studios](#) and [Jackson Art Center](#). Online options: [www.etsy.com](http://www.etsy.com), [www.lostartsalon.com](http://www.lostartsalon.com), [www.20x200.com](http://www.20x200.com) and [www.fineartadoption.net](http://www.fineartadoption.net).

### 6. Desk

Everyone needs a designated place to keep a laptop and writing utensils, check e-mail and sort bills.

A desk can also be used as a bedside table, a console table (add lamps), an entry table (tuck stools beneath for extra seating) or a dressing table. In a pinch (and with the help of a tablecloth), a desk can even serve as a small dining or buffet table, says Cavin-Winfrey.

**Tip:** Hide unsightly computer components and wires by having a tailored table skirt made. Use a colorful patterned fabric for more punch.

### 7. Bed

“When you receive a diploma, you also graduate from the land of futons,” says Meyer.

An upholstered headboard is a classic piece that doesn’t take up much space, so it’s a sensible option for smaller studios and will also work well in a large master bedroom down the road, she says.

Tip: Have several slipcovers made in different colors or patterns to change the look of your headboard (and your entire room) in an instant.

### 8. Leather club chair

“A good leather club chair will stand the test of time and only get better with age and use,” says D.C. designer [Patrick Baglino](#).

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Choose a classic style, and a leather chair can work in a contemporary or traditional setting and in many rooms, including a family room, living room, bedroom and home office, he says. “Look for a chair made by a manufacturer with a reputation for good quality.”

**Tip:** Avoid leather chairs that are too trendy or too distinct in style because they won't be as versatile later on, says Baglino. “Light-colored leather or dyed leather may not be the best choice.”

### 9. Dining table

A dining table that can have multiple uses in smaller spaces (a place to eat, work and entertain) will also serve you well when you move.

“If you get a pedestal table now, it can be used as a center hall table in your next house,” says D.C.-based [designer Joe Ireland](#). “Or a game table in a great room or a kitchen table.”

Depending on what size and style you choose, a dining table can add the wow factor in your temporary place, he says.

**Tip:** The outlet section of [Baker Furniture](#) in Georgetown (in the basement of the store) has floor models discounted up to 60 percent off the suggested price, says Ireland. It has upholstery, leather furniture, beds, etageres, dining room tables and chairs and more.

### 10. Something unexpected

Not every investment piece has to be a staple, says Baglino.

“I always love to add a ‘jewel piece,’ ” he says, “something that reflects the individual's personality, tells a story and stands on its own.”

The [Jonathan Adler bench](#), above, “is sort of retro but it works today and will work well down the road,” says Baglino. “It's beautiful walnut; I love the teal. It could work as a bench, a table, storage. It can go in a bedroom, living room, media room, could be cool in a kids' room down the road. It's quirky, it's fun, it has personality.”

“It's not inexpensive,” admits Baglino, “but you're getting a lot for your money.”

**Tip:** Sticking with the investment staples is smart, but adding a special piece that reflects your personality adds style.