

Home



PALE AND INTERESTING

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Something strange is happening in British sitting rooms. After decades of lounging around on chintz, stripes, shabby chic and Scandi, Brits are now taking inspiration from Los Angeles, Ibiza and Miami, specifically one piece of distinctly un-British furniture: the white sofa. Once the preserve of boutique hotels and tropical poolside bars, the aspirational white sofa is suddenly everywhere, from Mayfair to Milton Keynes.

Amanda Baker, an HR director and antiques upcycler (@holly.lodge.home), 51, describes herself as a “white sofa enthusiast”. The living room in her Warwickshire home is a winter wonderland of off-white love seats and chesterfields, while she recently filled her gîte in the Loire valley with white sofas. So dedicated is Baker to the aesthetic that when

Sleek or squishy, cosy or conspicuous – why the white sofa is this summer’s status symbol (and they are easier to clean)

she had cats she chose white ones to match the sofas so their fur wouldn’t show. “I love the Hamptons style, but I think white sofas can work in the UK,” she says. “Natural light is so important, and it just radiates off white sofas. Dark sofas drain the light out of a room. I also like the way they make me feel: calm and peaceful. Home is a sanctuary. And white sofas have glam appeal: they look expensive, even though some of ours are from Ikea.”

White sofas have long been acquired by the rich and famous, who can afford the dry-cleaning bills and multiple sets of slip covers: white sofa owners reportedly include Elton John, Jemima Khan, Gordon Ramsay and the Kardashians – Kim’s daughter Chicago West once made headlines in *Hello!* for getting red lipstick on her mother’s pristine sofa. Now the pure look is going positively

mainstream – neutral and white fabrics account for 23 per cent of sofa fabric sales, up 18 per cent from last year, according to the furniture company Loaf; its white Egg Box shade of vintage linen is the top seller out of 24 colours; over the past four months the furniture company Maker & Son has seen a 12 per cent increase in sales of white sofa covers, the highest of any colour; at John Lewis, sales of its light cream Twisted Boucle fabric are up 43 per cent year on year. “I’m covering everything – sofas, chairs, my husband, my dog – in ivory bouclé,” says the interior designer Jonathan Adler.

Not everyone is a fan. “Can we compare it to Liz Hurley and her white jeans? It says, ‘I’m so wealthy and fabulous that nothing will get me dirty,’” says the designer Monique Tollgard, co-founder of Tollgard Design Group. “I actually hate white

sofas. People say it’s neutral, but it’s like an iceberg in the middle of the living room. It makes sense in Ibiza – bleached-out white linen in high summer – but not in the English climate. And it’s inherently impractical. We specialise in family homes, so the most we’d do is an off-white or grey sofa, and it’s certainly Scotchguarded, and it’s not the TV sofa – it’s the sofa that not a lot of people are going to sit on. I’ve got an Airedale and two teenagers. I’m not brave enough.”

There are many theories to explain the rise of the white sofa. Number one is *Selling Sunset*, the Netflix reality show about glamazons who sell luxury property in Los Angeles, where white sofas are as much a part of the uniform as botoxed lips and boob jobs; see also the Kardashians. The interior designer Juliette Byrne attributes the

rise of the white sofa to WFH – they make a space feel brighter, more spacious and uplifting.

The rise of spa culture has also fuelled the trend, says Anna Burles, the founder of Run for the Hills interior design agency. “It’s so crisp and fresh, it makes the whole space feel like a cloud.” Burles also attributes their rise to the recent popularity of bold dark colours on walls – white sofas will go with any shade and provide a foil.

When Burles decorated a house for the pop star Ellie Goulding in 2017, she put in a white Conran sofa: “Back then nobody was asking for it, but Ellie’s well travelled and has a global perspective, she’d stayed in a lot of amazing hotels and loved the freshness of white, so she was ahead of the curve.”

The spiralling British interest in home decor, coupled with Insta culture, makes white sofas a weirdly practical choice, according to Baker, owing to their versatility. “People are really into styling homes now, and it’s a great backdrop for accessories. I change the cushions and throws



“The dog is always allowed on the sofa. I’ve spilt everything on it: hot chocolate, ice cream, chocolate bars”
Steff McGrath



GET THE LOOK

Compiled by **Katrina Burroughs**



Dwell’s Paris II four-seater chaise end sofa; £2,499, dwell.co.uk



Modern chesterfield by Danetti: the Luxe white leather three-seater sofa; £2,699, danetti.com



Sensuous sofa, Linen Combination, from DFS; £3,799, dfs.co.uk



The Sephy medium sofa by Arlo & Jacob, shown in Husky, Ivory; from £1,995, arloandjacob.com



Flaneur by Gam Fratesi for Gubi; £3,999, viaduct.co.uk



Sofa.com’s Otto two-seat sofa bed; from £1,600, sofa.com

according to the seasons: dark green at Christmas, pale blue in the spring, olive green in the autumn.”

Practical is not exactly the first word that comes to mind with white sofas. Indeed, most owners opt for slipcovers that can be dry-cleaned. But more designers are making family-friendly white fabrics with in-built stain resistance – synthetic materials normally used in yachts and gardens have migrated indoors and are easily wipeable. Byrne rates fabrics by Perennials, Neptune, Kvadrat, Holly Hunt, Christopher Farr, Elitis and Scalամandre.

Dara Huang, the founder of Design Haus Liberty, has just launched a line of white and cream sofas made of stainproof fabrics that she says have been tested with tea, coffee, red wine and even Marmite – they cost from £3,533. “My six-year-old son is regularly on my sofa and that was the reason we created it – for sticky hands. A sponge and a bit of water and soap is all it takes,” she says.

In a strange way it might actually be easier to keep a white sofa clean, says Burles: “You are forced into

upkeep, you take better care of it, the way you would a white top, whereas dark sofas you just kind of trash it and live with the stain.”

Steff McGrath, an entrepreneur from Leeds, believes white sofas are the most practical choice of all, especially leather ones. “My kids are 18 and 20 and I’ve had white sofas the whole time,” says McGrath, 50, who runs the luxury lingerie business Something Wicked. “People are so scared of staining white sofas, but to be honest the opposite is true. We eat on it all the time. The dog is always allowed on the sofa. We’ve had teenage parties here. The good thing about white sofas is you see the dirt more, so you are quicker to clean them. I just give it a wipe with a damp white flannel every weekend, and for spills nothing beats a baby wipe. I’ve spilt everything on it: hot chocolate, ice cream, chocolate bars. It helps that it’s leather, it always comes off a treat.”

Best of all, McGrath says, it’s a blank canvas that will never fight the style of your house. “If you get sick of it, just get some new cushions. The white sofa just keeps on giving.”

Right: an interior design by Juliette Byrne. Clockwise from above: white seating is a feature in the Netflix series Selling Sunset; Steff McGrath and her dog on her white sofa; Pukka range by Yabu Pushelberg for Ligne Roset; Amanda Baker in her Warwickshire home; sofas in Baker’s gîte

