



Dieter Braun

The Money's In the Mattress

By PENELOPE GREEN

ONE hot morning in late June, I was lying flat on my back on a bed in lower SoHo, my eyelids struggling to stay aloft, when Henry Burney, a gentle guy with a borscht belt sense of humor, leaned over and asked, "So, would you rather sleep with an Italian or Mr. Ed?"

Mr. Burney is the United States sales representative for Magniflex, the Italian mattress company that makes the \$24,000 foam mattress I was lying on in the Casa Poggesi bedding store on Crosby Street. His little dig was aimed at a Swedish mattress maker, Hastens, which stuffs its versions with horsehair and charges as much as \$60,000 for them. But his focus in this seduction scene was less on trashing the competition than on winning me over, not just to his product but to the seemingly absurd notion of the

multithousand-dollar mattress. And he was not alone.

All spring and summer, Hastens has been running an ad in magazines like *Elle Decor*: a photograph of the blue-and-white-checked Vividus bed topped with a puffy white down comforter, one corner pulled back invitingly, with a pair of sharp-toed stiletto shoes on the floor beside it. The come-on reads: "Who would spend \$59,750 on a bed?"

Who indeed? And what is the calculus — economic or otherwise — that brings a mattress to that particular figure? Or to \$24,000, in Magniflex's case? Or \$50,000, which is the sticker price of a bed being made by Hollandia, an Israeli company that opened a showroom in the Marketplace Design Center in Philadelphia last fall and a flagship store in the Mall at Short Hills, N.J., last Thursday. I mean, what

For \$15,500, you're promised a good night's sleep; for \$59,750, a brass nameplate.

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the heck? Why would anybody pay that much for a mattress?

"What did that guy say when he was asked why he climbed Mount Everest?" said Pamela N. Danziger, a marketing consultant and the author of "Let Them Eat Cake: Marketing Luxury to the Masses — as Well as the Classes" and "Why People Buy Things They Don't Need."

"Because it's there!" she exclaimed. "I would be very interested in how many they sell at that price. I would suggest the price is more of a positioning tool, though it is true that there are a lot of rich folks. Those making over \$250,000 a year are the fastest-growing households by income in the country. We know that from our survey," (Ms. Danziger's company, Unity Marketing, tracks the luxury market in an annual survey of the spending habits and behaviors of affluent Americans.)

Like nature, the luxury market abhors a vacuum. But certain luxury items are selling better these days than others, Ms. Danziger said. Driven, still, by inexorably aging baby boomers, all 78 million or so of them, the luxury market is most active right now, she said, with things that can be described as "experiential" and restorative, like a huge new spa bathroom or an exotic vacation. Further, some boomers are suffering the aftereffects of those exotic vacations — some may even have mounted Everest themselves. Their rotator cuffs are torn, their knees and hips are shot. They are, in fact, more ached and tired than ever — and are sleeping less, as a raft of sleep studies will attest.

"They don't want to put their money on a new handbag anymore," Ms. Danziger continued. "They aren't buying that Kelly bag. A mattress really does deliver an experience to the consumer. And as you get older, sleep doesn't come like it used to."

After the craze over Ambien, the boomers' last deep love, was derailed by a flurry of bad press about its potentially bizarre side effects, including sleep-aping and sleep-driving (a state that Representative Patrick J. Kennedy, Democrat of Rhode Island, may have experienced late one night in Washington last year), the mattress industry is cheerfully hurling itself into the breach, marketing mattresses to cure every ill, claiming even to put the brakes on time itself.

The narrator of a Hastens promotional video states, in a charming Swedish accent, that its beds, which start at \$4,375, will give you fewer wrinkles and can slow aging.

(Hollandia turns out to be a maker of adjustable "sleep systems," priced from about \$15,000 to \$50,000, that look and feel like nothing so high-end and hospital beds. With their German motors and 12 massage programs, they seem to acknowledge that a body ravaged by time can be only soothed, not remade. Its marketers also claim its beds cure snoring.)

Tempur-Pedic, the foam-mattress maker whose beds range from \$1,300 to \$7,299 (chump change on planet Hastens), sponsored a study recently that claimed, straight-faced, that Americans would rather sleep than exercise as part of their "wellness regimen," that three out of four Americans say a good night's sleep makes them feel younger and that a good pillow is a better "sleep accessory" — nine times better — than a "sleep partner." More than a third of them spend as much money on their mattresses as they do on their sofas or their televisions, and 17 percent as much as on their vacations.

At the low end of the luxury mattress market, at least, things have been heating up. Six years ago, barely 2 percent of the mattresses sold cost more than \$2,000, according to the International Sleep Products Association, a trade group for the industry, which had \$6.7 billion in sales last year. By 2008 about 5 percent of purchases had crossed the \$2,000 line. (The median price of a queen-size mattress was \$650 last year, according to a survey by Furniture Today, a trade magazine.)

"I think it's about time that Americans place the value on sleep that they place on other aspects of their life," said Rick Anderson, president of Tempur-Pedic North America, adding, as every good mattress executive is wont to do, that "after all, we spend a third of our lives in bed."

Mr. Anderson's company has just rolled out a television campaign — with dreamy little spots of tropical islands, misty fjords and glistening jungles — that positions Tempur-Pedic as a "wellness brand" and its mattresses as "tools for personal revival."

"If you asked someone 10 years ago what their mattress is for," Mr. Anderson said, "they'd say it's where I sleep. Now they expect it to relieve their stress, to relieve their aches and pains, to provide comfort. It's emotional, it's physical and it's a status thing, too. You know what they say: sleep is the new black. Sleep is in style." Gone are the days, Mr. Anderson suggested, when captains of industry bragged about sleeping just three hours a night. The power nap, he said, is gaining currency.

As proof, Mr. Anderson pointed to nap centers like the two that MetroNaps and Yelo operate in Manhattan, charging \$12 to \$14 for 20 minutes of shut-eye, and centers by the National Institutes of Health and Harvard about napping and productivity. (There is even a nap how-to book, out since January from Workman: "Take a Nap! Change Your Life" by Sara C. Mednick, a napping-research scientist at the Salt Institute.)

Wenger, editor of *Tristat Monthly*, a lifestyle magazine for a select segment of the self-made super-rich, like hedge fund managers, agreed with this paradigm shift: a good night's sleep is a sign of weakness, but something to boast about.

"My readers are almost like athletes in the way they perceive themselves and pamper themselves," Mr. Wenger said. "A good

The Bottom Line on Over-the-Top Dozing

Swedish steel, hand-teased horsehair, 22-karat gold, German motors: these are some things you'll find in the most expensive mattresses right now. Here's what it felt like to spend 15 minutes — the minimum recommended sampling time, according to the International Sleep Products Association — on each one.

THE TEMPUR-PEDIC GRAND BED

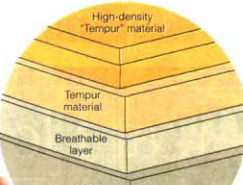
\$6,299

For a queen set

WHAT YOU GET Four layers (14 inches): high-density "Tempur" material (which the company says "senses body temperature and weight and conforms to exact body dimensions"); regular-density Tempur; a breathable reticulated layer; and a high-resiliency base with a blended-silk allergen-resistant cover.

HOW IT FEELS

Like a damp marshmallow, but in a good way.

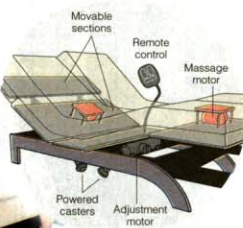


HOLLANDIA GRAVITY ZERO ULTRA

\$15,000-\$20,000

WHAT YOU GET Four German motors; 12 massage programs. Two ergonomic remote controls. A mattress made of "talalay latex," "Vita talalay latex," coconut fibers and "open-cell polymers" in an aloe vera-treated cover.

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE A high-end Barcalounger. As if you'll never get out of bed again.

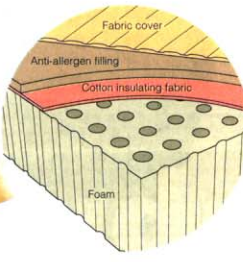


MAGNIFLEX GOLD

\$24,000

WHAT YOU GET A "memmofoam" (made of a mixture of 22-karat gold fabric) that arrives rolled up in a vacuum-sealed plastic tube, like a new syringe.

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE A springier, cleaner Tempur-Pedic.



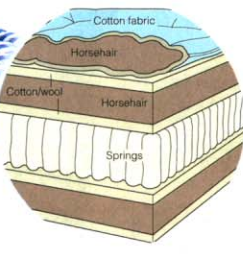
THE HASTENS VIDVUD

\$59,750

WHAT YOU GET A layer cake of oak, flax, wool, cotton, steel coils and hand-teased horsehair finished with a brass plate with your name on it, and the name of the Hastens craftsman who built the bed. Free home delivery and setup. And a monthly phone call reminding you to flip and massage your new mattress.

HOW IT FEELS Firm. Soft. Dry. Deep. Dizzy-making.

Sources: Tempur-Pedic, Hollandia, Magniflex and Hastens



The New York Times; illustrations by Al Grabner

night's sleep can mean millions for them the next day. How they prepare themselves for their job is the difference between brilliant and wealthy and going completely belly up. They aren't hedonist playboys like those 80s guys. They work out like crazy; they eat the finest food. It's all about honing their instrument."

Will they spend tens of thousands on mattresses? "Absolutely," he said. "The high end exists because there is somebody who wants to spend that kind of money. It's like a consumer care."

Casa Poggesi has been offering the \$24,000 Magniflex Gold for a month and a half, and as of yesterday afternoon, Mr. Burney said, no New Yorker had bought one. He added that on average, Magniflex mattresses go for \$1,200 to \$3,000. "But the Gold gets people in the door."

Mr. Burney said his company had sold 53 Gold mattresses to individuals in Russia, and one to a hotel in Dubai. Its cost, he said, is largely a result of the fact that its cover is woven with 22-karat gold thread — "gold is a natural antimicrobial," he said, as well as a barrier against dust mites and bedbugs — and has a cashmere-2 underlayer. What's inside the mattress is, as in most mattresses, a mysterious layer cake of stuff. Like every mattress sales agent, Mr. Burney has cross sections at the ready, along with diagrams and schematics and a pocketful of scientific-

sounding terms.

"I know, none of it means anything to anyone," said Mr. Burney, who explained that in plainer terms the Magniflex mattress is foam with holes drilled through it. So it breathes, as opposed to, say, a Tempur-Pedic mattress, he said, which has ridges so the air flows around the foam, but not through it. "People complain that the Tempur-Pedic is too warm," he asserted.

"If you consider the average person sweats about a pint each night," he said, pausing to let his words sink in.

WARREN SHOULBERG, the editor of *Home Furnishings News*, a trade publication for the furniture industry, reckons that a mattress purchase is the most "blind" purchase anybody ever makes.

"You only buy it once every 10 or 20 years," he said, "so you are woefully unprepared and uneducated." You are confronted with this police lineup of white boxes that all look remarkably similar. The one that's \$500 doesn't look all that different from the one that's \$5,000, or now, \$50,000, the way a Hyundai looks different from a Ferrari. The attributes that distinguish this product you can't see.

"So you do the obligatory five-minute lie-down, but you're incredibly self-conscious. Whatever very personal way that you sleep, you can't do it on the floor of Sleepy's. It's

not a product you can shop smart for, and that's allowed the mattress companies to be all over the place. They kind of went crazy, and you've got to hand it to them."

"Now, there are a lot of affluent people who will pay a lot of money for a good night's sleep. I think the mattress guys are the smartest people in the whole home furnishings business. They have managed to attach an emotional element to your mattress. It's not just layers of foam and padding."

The Hastens store, in a classic SoHo cast-iron building on Greene Street, is huge and white. This whiteness sets off the fetching blue and white plaid ticking that covers nearly every mattress. (The alternative is a white and taupe plaid.) Lina Schlenovitz, the store's young manager, listed the layers in a Hastens mattress: flax, wool and cotton, as well as horsehair, which has been not only cleaned but permed.

"Horsehair is hollow tubes," she said proudly. "Nature's air-conditioner." If you consider that you sweat one liter a night, and all that stays in the bed, unless the bed can breathe."

Here we go again. If the foam mattresses promise, as Mr. Burney said, better living through chemistry, Hastens, with its horse-and-fjord imagery, is the antifoam — the free-range bed. Its show pony, the Vividus, lies behind a velvet rope. With permission, I clambered

aboard, and Ms. Schlenovitz pushed down on my shoulder.

"You want to feel that the bed accepts you," she said. "You have to open yourself to a new experience."

"This," she said, answering the \$60,000 question, "is something without compromise. It takes 160 man-hours to make this bed. The horsehair is hand-selected, for example, and longer and straighter than what we use in the other beds. It has a deep feel, a bottomless feel."

Not only that, she said, it comes with a brass plate engraved with your name. I spent an hour here, rolling from bed to bed. It is true that the Vividus is very, very comfortable, but all the mattresses there are — beyond anything you can imagine, which is as it should be, considering that most of them cost more than a car. They even need maintenance like a car, specifically a massage and a flip every month for a year. "We call you and remind you," Ms. Schlenovitz said.

I flopped down next to Beth Fussell, who was played out on the Excelsior mattress (\$15,500), her clogged feet hanging over the edge.

Ms. Fussell, 41, works at an architectural firm around the corner. She said she and her husband, who is also an architect, have been visiting this bed once a month for a year, and they plan to buy it in 18 months.

"What do you need in the city?" she said. "You don't need a car. We sold our car last year. I think you need a good bed. It's so stressful here."

"We were subletting an apartment and sleeping on a futon. I like the idea of something that lasts. The feeling of this bed is almost primal. You feel safe on this bed. You can't forget this bed."

It took two years of research and bed-testing for Suzanne Durand, 57, and her husband, Everett Ferri, 62, to circle in on their Hastens, the \$22,950 200T, which they bought in December. "Lina let us take a nap one Sunday," Ms. Durand said, "she turned up the air-conditioning, turned down the lights and gave us a comforter."

Her husband has had rotator cuff issues, she has sore hips and they had been buying mattresses every four or five years, they said. "I was still waking up as stiff as a board," Ms. Durand said. "The way I rationalized the cost was that this was something that was going to last us for the rest of our lives. And I think that you wake up and feel better is worth it. And I do feel better."

Mr. Ferri said he did ask Ms. Schlenovitz if she would take their '05 BMW X3 in trade.

The 200T is the company's best seller, said Erick Svensson, Hastens's sales manager in the United States. As for Vividus sales, he said guardedly that "more than 15" have sold since the introduction last fall.

THERE is something about a hospital bed that works, said Sharon Kaplan, 59, who bought a \$23,000 Hollandia with her husband, Arthur, 62, a few months ago. Or dueling hospital beds, which is what a Hollandia looks and works like: two single adjustable beds that sit side by side but operate independently.

The Kaplans, real estate developers who live in Philadelphia, weren't looking for a new bed, but a friend invited them to Hollandia's grand opening last spring, and one thing led to another. "You get to a certain age," Ms. Kaplan said, "and it's the one thing you can do, give yourself a good night's sleep. I haven't slept this well in years."

I asked Mr. Kaplan how he rationalized the cost.

"You don't," he said. "It's not possible." And then he tried to, so, bit "I used to sleep on a \$6,000 mattress. Now I sleep on one that cost \$23,000. I sit on a sofa that costs as much, and I'm only on that for about 20 minutes a day."

On a recent Monday, David Ashe, who is marketing Hollandia's beds in the United States, was presiding over the company's showroom in Philadelphia.

"Let me get you on a bed," he said soothingly, leading me to a red velvet number in the showroom window. He drove the remote, elevating both my feet and my head, and Maria Rohe, another marketing manager, tucked a sarcophagus-shaped blanket around me. It had a pocket to slip the feet into and two pockets up top, for the hands. It was wicked comfy.

"Do you like the way that feels?" Mr. Ashe asked. "All our fabrics are coated with aloe vera."

The obligatory cross section was hauled out, a stunning array of layers and mysterious substances. The curly stuff was coconut fiber; the pink and cream-colored stuff, drilled with holes like a Magniflex, was a foam. "A natural foam," Mr. Ashe hastened to say.

What's in it? "A bunch of stuff —"

Ms. Rohe broke in: "A proprietary blend of material."

And then, like Mr. Burney, Mr. Ashe began tearing into the Tempur-Pedic: "Take Memory Foam," he began. "It's synthetic, it's dense, it doesn't breathe, it's hot, you end up lying in a pool of your own perspiration."

The sweat again. How much did Mr. Ashe reckon the average person dropped in a bed each night? Was it, and I quoted Ms. Schlenovitz, a liter?

"That's disgusting," he said. "I'm not sleeping with you, I'd say a cup, max."

Fine. New where was the \$50,000 bed? We'd discussed it on the phone. Its moah cover, its built-in iPod jacks and television. I was ready.

"It's not here," Mr. Ashe said. "It's in Israel. It will be here in a year. I do have a \$35,000 that's come over from the old switcheroo."

Mr. Ashe said, in a mollifying tone, "You know, I can get you a great night's sleep on a \$17,000 bed."