



Illustration by New York Times News Service

## THE MONEY'S IN THE MATTRESS

*Why buy that new Porsche when you can have an Italian bed?*

By **PENELOPE GREEN**  
New York Times News Service

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 Ed?"

Burney is the U.S. 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 show-

room 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 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."