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It's to dye for

A blue couch gets a new look, and a new life, thanks to experts in recoloring leather.

By **NANCY LUNA**

The Orange County Register

Anytime you furnish your first home, decorating blunders are bound to happen. For us, that mistake came in the color selection of our couch.

When my husband, Brady, and I purchased a 1909 bungalow in Old Towne Orange six years ago, we knew our 1980s flower-fabric sofa had to go. Its successor would be a fine leather couch.

After sitting on dozens of stiff, leather, brown sofas in multiple showrooms across Orange County, we finally found a comfy Nubuck leather piece that we loved. There was only one problem.

It was denim blue.

The color didn't exactly fit our tastes, but it was oh, so snuggly and the leather so soft. Each cushion hugged every curve of our bodies. In my family, we have a saying for something so fine: "It's to die for."

Since our living room walls were white, we convinced ourselves that the blue jean look wouldn't clash with the unimaginative decor. So we plunked down \$3,000 (on credit, of course) for the sofa and matching chair.

But after six years of living with a mish-mash of flowery wallpaper and plain walls, we decided it was time to spruce up the living room by painting.

We chose a traditional look: beige and brown for the ceilings and walls and white for the baseboards and crown moldings - all of which had been painted, gasp, green by the previous homeowners. (We're talking the minty kind that resembled the bridesmaid dress I wore at my brother's 1989 wedding.)

With our new latte-inspired color scheme, we knew the days for the denim leather couch and chair were numbered.



DYED AND IT'S HEAVEN: Brady MacDonald, Nancy Luna and their daughter, Hannah, lounge on their newly dyed brown leather couch. ANDY TEMPLETON, FOR THE REGISTER

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But our redecorating budget didn't include a new leather couch, which could cost as much as \$4,000. Besides, the couch and chair were still pretty darn comfortable and in good shape, despite the addition of a dog and child over the years.

"Ahhhhhh. I just love this couch," is the typical response made by friends as they sink their weary bodies into it.

We toyed with the idea of buying suede slipcovers, but weren't thrilled with the idea. Then Brady, a think- outside-the-box-guy, said: "Why don't we dye them brown?"

I balked at first. Who would tackle such a project? But we were desperate, so I gave it a shot.

And, like all good American consumers, I turned to the Internet for help. Surprisingly, I got one hit: Two Fat Guys, based in Fullerton.

According to the Web, these guys do it all when it comes to leather - dyeing, cleaning, refinishing, repairing. I sent them an e- mail, and got a return phone call within a couple of days from co-owner Frank Mundi. He said he'd have to see the couch before offering an estimate.

When Mundi and his partner, Jerry Dungey, arrived at my house, it was clear that their business was aptly named.

As soon as I opened my door, the self-described burly men made a beeline for my couch - examining it like a jeweler fingering a fine diamond. They flipped over cushions, felt for crevices and swiped their palms across the leather to get a feel for its thickness.

"Well, whaddya think?" I asked nervously.

They said they would do it for \$900.

Holy cow, I thought. (Actually, I thought something else, but this is a family newspaper.)

Since seeing is believing, I asked Mundi and Dungey - who were not at all pushy salesmen - if they would dye a sample area of the couch, underneath a cushion. They obliged, using a chocolate brown color.

It looked really good.

So, after talking it over, Brady and I decided to save up the money and do it even though we remained nervous about the finished look. Would the blue bleed through? Would it look tacky? Would the dyeing ruin the soft feel of the leather we first fell in love with?

Luckily, these guys knew what they were doing. Using a half-gallon of brown dye mixed with a half-gallon of top-grade leather conditioner, they sprayed every inch of the couch and chair in one day.

Anxious to see the transformation, I dropped in on them during my lunch break, and couldn't believe my eyes when I saw one of the newly dyed cushions. It looked absolutely gorgeous.

Because they were conditioning it at the same time, the leather had a soft sheen to it that - combined with the new color - made the two pieces of furniture look brand new. A little



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bleeding, however, did occur. But Mundi said that was expected, and he didn't hesitate to make two more trips to my house to touch up spotty areas.

As for the softness of the leather, it isn't exactly the same. Mundi had warned us that the leather would stiffen slightly with the dye job. But after a few days, the stiffer feel was hardly noticeable, and we had these leather specialists to thank.

Had I known more about them, I shouldn't have been so surprised. The men have spent a combined 25 years cleaning, dyeing and reiling any type of leather - from shoes to car interiors. "We've even done saddles," Mundi, 61, said dryly.

Their service is so rare, it's not uncommon for customers to seek them out from hundreds of miles away. A North Carolina woman - who also found them on the Internet - once shipped them her favorite boots for redyeing.

"They tell us they can't find anyone else who can do it," Mundi said.

Still, our request was somewhat of a challenge for them. "This was very hard," said Mundi. "We very seldom like to change from one color to another. That's why this was so expensive."

But when you look at what we got, we felt it was absolutely worth what we paid for. Better yet, you could actually say it was to dye for.

RESOURCES

You can reach Two Fat Guys at (714) 272-9413 or go online to www.clean-leather.com for more information.

CONTACT US: (714) 796-6756 or nluna@ocregister.com

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