

Glossary of Interior Decorating Furniture Terms

Learn the Basic Terminology of Home Design

Nov 2, 2008 [Barbara Bell](#)

Whether one is a do-it-yourself interior decorator or one has hired a professional, knowing the most common terms of the industry will help with the process.

When beginning the process of redecorating one's home, it's easy to become overwhelmed by the vocabulary and confused by strange-sounding names. Just trying to decipher the difference between a wainscot, chair rail, and dado might seem beyond the scope of the layperson – or is there a difference after all?

Furniture Terms

Many of the more commonly used terms are from France, long believed to be the arbiter of good taste in interior decorating. While this opinion might be hotly argued by fans of English or Italian design, nonetheless French terms prevail – or may be, at least, the most confusing. In a series of articles on interior decorating terminology, here are some terms one might encounter, involving furniture facts:

- *Armoire* – a large wardrobe or movable closet, for storing clothes. Popular uses today include entertainment centers, TVs, and computer workspaces. See Case Goods.
- *Bergère* – a chair with an exposed wooden frame. The back and seat may be upholstered or may feature loose cushions.
- *Case goods* – large pieces of furniture usually used for storage, such as chests of drawers, armoires, hutches
- *Commode* – a stand or cupboard, once used for hiding chamber pots. Often used as a side table or nightstand.
- *Chaise* (with "loungue" or "longue") – a long chair for reclining with one's legs up, with or without one or two arms.
- *Credenza* – a buffet, side table, or bookcase, about table height, with a flat surface. Used for serving and storage.
- *Etagere* – a small, upright set of free-standing open sided shelves, similar to a "what-not" or baker's rack, for displaying small items
- *Escritoire* – a writing desk or secretary.
- *Fauteuil* – see Bergère
- *Futon* – Japanese-inspired thin mattress, covered in fabric, used on the floor or on a wooden frame, for sleeping. Also the name of the frame, which usually can be reconfigured as a sofa.
- *Highboy* – a tall chest of drawers on four legs, often in the Chippendale or other English or early American style.
- *Hutch* – an upper cabinet with shelves, with or without doors, placed on a chest, chest of drawers, or desk.
- *Jardiniere* – a large plant stand, typically a cache pot on a matching or complementary base. Lowboy – a low chest of drawers, or table with drawers.
- *Ottoman* – a hassock, upholstered low stool or footrest. Often used as a substitute for a coffee table.
- *Platform bed* – a mattress supported by a flat wood base, without a box spring or

- metal frame (a more expensive version, actually, of the futon.)
- *Settee* – a love seat or small sofa on exposed wood legs
- *Sideboard* – a credenza or buffet table, with a wide center drawer and several small drawers or shelves on either side of the center drawer.
- *Sleigh Bed* – a wooden bed with large headboard, and a curved footboard that resembles the front of a horse-drawn sleigh.
- *Suite* – a set of furniture pieces in matching wood, design and motif for use in the same room, usually the living room or bedroom.
- *Tallboy* – Drawers stacked on top of a low chest of drawers, to create a chest-on-chest.
- *Tambour Desk* – a roll top desk that uses thin strips of wood applied to a pliable back to create a flexible door.
- *Vitrine* – a cabinet with glass doors, for display.
- *Wardrobe* – a tall enclosed cabinet with doors, for storing clothing or bedding, sometimes with a single shelf and clothes rod, sometimes with a drawer in the bottom section. See Armoire.

Sources:

- [Furniture First](#)
- [Move.com Furniture Terms](#)

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