

Three Generations, One Living Room: How Multigenerational Households Are Reshaping Sofa Designs

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One of the most consequential demographic shifts in American housing has received almost no attention from the furniture industry that serves it. Multigenerational households — homes where two or more adult generations, or grandparents and grandchildren, live under one roof — have grown steadily for decades and now represent a substantial share of U.S. households, according to widely reported analyses of census data by research organizations including Pew Research Center. Driven by housing costs, caregiving needs, cultural preference, and adult children remaining home longer, the trend has reshaped kitchens, bathrooms, and floor plans. DreamSofa, a direct-to-consumer custom furniture manufacturer, says it is now reshaping seating requirements too — and that the standard sofa, designed implicitly for one able-bodied adult demographic, is the piece of furniture least prepared for it.



Landon Modulares.



Landon Sectional

The engineering problem, the company says, is that a multigenerational living room contains directly conflicting requirements in a single piece of furniture. Older adults are best served by firmer seats, higher seat heights, shallower depths, and sturdy arms — all of which reduce the effort of sitting down and standing up. Younger family members and teenagers gravitate toward deep, low, soft lounge seating. Small children and the adults supervising them need durable, cleanable surfaces. A standard fixed sofa forces one specification onto everyone. "Mass-market

furniture answers the question 'what does the average sitter want?'" said a DreamSofa spokesperson. "A three-generation household doesn't have an average sitter. It has a grandmother who needs to stand up without help and a sixteen-year-old who wants to disappear into the cushions, sharing the same room and often the same piece of furniture."

Seat Height and Depth Are Accessibility Features

The dimensions most relevant to older adults are precisely the ones standard furniture varies least. Occupational therapy and aging-in-place guidance has long noted that low, deep, soft seating is among the most common household obstacles for people with limited knee, hip, or core strength: rising from a seat requires substantially more effort as seat height drops and depth increases, and very soft cushions that allow the body to sink compound both. Common guidance places accessible seat heights around 18 to 20 inches or higher, with firm support and armrests positioned to bear weight during the sit-to-stand movement. Standard sofas, by contrast, commonly place the compressed seat height in the 15-to-18-inch range and are trending deeper and softer as lounge aesthetics dominate the market. DreamSofa says its FlexForm made-to-measure system allows those dimensions to be specified per order — seat height raised an inch or two, depth shortened, cushion cores firmed — without the piece looking like medical furniture, which the company says is the objection families raise most often about accessibility-oriented seating.

Modularity Resolves the Conflict Nobody Can Average Away

Where one household genuinely needs both firm-and-high and deep-and-soft seating, DreamSofa says the answer is not a compromise specification but a configuration that stops pretending one seat fits all. Because [modular systems](#) are built from independent sections, [a single sectional](#) can be specified with mixed seating within one continuous piece: a firmer, shallower, higher-seated section at one end — typically positioned nearest walkways and with a solid arm for support — and deeper lounge sections elsewhere. The company says mixed-specification orders of this kind, rare a few years ago, have become a recognizable pattern among its customers, and that buyers frequently arrive describing the need in family terms rather than furniture terms: a parent moving in, a grandparent's knee replacement, a household consolidating homes. "Customers don't ask for 'variable seat geometry,'" the spokesperson said. "They ask whether we can make one end of the sofa easier for Mom. The answer is yes, and it shouldn't require custom furniture to get it — but in today's market, it usually does."

Durability Requirements Multiply With Occupancy

A three-generation household also concentrates more use into the same furniture: more hours of daily occupancy, more meals eaten in the living room, more spills, and often pets alongside children. DreamSofa says multigenerational buyers select performance fabrics and high-resiliency cushion cores at above-average rates, and disproportionately choose removable, washable cushion covers — choices consistent with furniture expected to serve as the

household's central shared space rather than a formal room used occasionally. The company's kiln-dried hardwood frames and lifetime frame warranty, it says, matter more in these households for a simple reason: the furniture works more hours per day, so construction shortcuts surface sooner.

Sleepers and Storage Carry the Flex Burden

Multigenerational living also blurs room functions. A home absorbing an additional generation frequently gives up its dedicated guest room, which pushes guest-sleeping duty onto the living room — and, with it, demand for sleeper sofas that function as genuine beds rather than emergency accommodations. DreamSofa says interest in its DreamSleeper line, built around a frame design that eliminates the traditional central support bar, skews toward exactly these households, as does demand for integrated storage that recovers space lost when a home's occupancy grows faster than its square footage. The company views these requests as parts of one pattern: households asking each piece of furniture to do more jobs, for more people, for more years.

Designing for the Household You'll Have, Not the One You Have

DreamSofa says the most forward-looking multigenerational buyers are specifying for anticipated needs rather than current ones — ordering the firmer end-section before a parent moves in, or choosing modular pieces that can be reconfigured when a household grows or contracts. Because life expectancy of a well-built sofa spans decades, the company argues, the relevant question at purchase is not who sits on it today but who will sit on it across its lifetime — a period long enough, for most families, to include both car seats and canes. "Furniture bought for twenty years will serve a different family at year fifteen than at year one, even if it's the same family," the spokesperson said. "Building for that is what custom is actually for."

The Caregiver's Specification List

For households furnishing with an older adult's daily needs in mind, DreamSofa's guidance consolidates the requests it most often receives from adult children coordinating a parent's move. Beyond seat height and firmness, these include arms built solid enough to bear real weight during sit-to-stand — a structural requirement, the company notes, not a styling one, and a place where lightweight frames fail first; fabric selected for cleanability with a W or WS cleaning code, since caregiving households clean upholstery more often than average; removable, washable cushion covers; and seat sections without deep crevices where dropped items and spills collect. None of these features needs to be visible, the company emphasizes: specified into a custom build, they read as an ordinary, well-made sofa. The alternative buyers describe encountering — recliner-lift chairs and institutional seating placed awkwardly beside the family's existing furniture — is, in DreamSofa's view, the market's admission that it never designed its standard products for the households that actually exist.

About DreamSofa

DreamSofa is a direct-to-consumer custom furniture manufacturer specializing in made-to-order sofas, sectionals, modular seating systems, and sleeper sofas built on kiln-dried hardwood frames. Its FlexForm sizing system allows seat height, depth, firmness, and configuration to be specified per order, including mixed specifications within a single piece. Every piece is backed by a lifetime frame warranty and a 100-day home trial

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