

Richmond Times-Dispatch

Cool, hot, scented and eco-friendly mattresses luring weary baby boomers

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Published: February 19, 2010

Bedtime is becoming much more of an adventure.

No longer do consumers have to choose from firm, medium or soft mattresses and call it a night.

New tricked-out models heat up, cool down, scent the room and offer sexy images on their covers.

In the 1960s and 1970s, specialty bedding meant water beds. In recent years, it has been dial-up firmness and memory foam. The current trend is mattresses with eye-opening, state-of-the-art features designed to enhance comfort and encourage sleep.

"Mattresses have followed the path of food, exercise, ergonomic furniture and the like and have been led by the desires of the most powerful shoppers of the last several decades - the baby boomers," said Sarah Paxton, vice president of La Difference furniture store in Shockoe Bottom. "As they've aged, their needs have changed, and right now they want a healthy, good night's sleep."

With bedding sales at their lowest in 40 years, according to analysts, the once recession-proof industry is attempting a full-blown makeover focused on innovation. Technologies have created gel inserts, eco-friendly filling materials and dual temperature controls.

Consumers have never had more choices. But are the bells and whistles just marketing fads?

Ron Trzcinski is president of Cleveland-based The Original Mattress Factory, which makes mattresses in local factories - including Richmond - and sells them direct to consumers. He said he analyzes innovations as they pop up, but dismisses most of them as just merchandising.

"Almost 100 percent of everything coming out has been more gimmick than value," Trzcinski said. "Our company wants to provide quality products at a reasonable price and these things go totally against our purpose."

Some of the gadgets - aromas, wicking covers and fancy designs - are covered when you dress the bed anyway, he noted. "If we saw the value, we'd do it," he said.

Here are some of the more unusual mattresses to hit the bedding market:

- Temperature regulating/anti-sweat. Waking up hot and sticky is miserable. Some consumers find memory foam mattresses retain too much heat. To address that issue, manufacturers have devised innovative moisture wicking and temperature-regulating properties. The 3D Bed by Hollandia International (<http://www.hollandiainternational.com>) is one of several manufacturers using specialized porous-weave covers that improve air flow.

High-end Italian manufacturer Magniflex, sold at La Difference, makes mattresses from Eco Green open-cell memory foam, a plant-based material that reacts to body weight. The mattress is cooler than most viscoelastic memory foam, which is activated by body heat and feels too warm to some sleepers.

ChiliBed Mattresses, made in North Carolina and introduced this month at an industry showcase in Las Vegas, gives partners dual controls that will heat and cool the bed from 48 to 118 degrees Fahrenheit. "You no longer have to fight with temperature at night," said Todd Youngblood, CEO and co-founder of ChiliBed.

The temperature is regulated by water flowing through silicone tubes embedded about an inch below the surface. Semiconductor chips heat or cool the water to a selected point within the temperature range. No wires or other electrical elements are embedded in the mattress.

The soy foam mattress is available in standard sizes at <http://www.chilitechnology.com>. A queen ChiliBed with dual controls, for example, sells for \$2,899.

The company also sells a ChiliPad mattress cover with heating and cooling functions. It's designed to provide comfort to consumers who suffer from sports injuries, arthritis, insomnia, chemotherapy symptoms and menopausal hot flashes. A dual-zone ChiliPad in queen size is priced at \$599.

- Gel beds. Gel cushioning material covers the bed's support structure, which helps relieve pressure points while maintaining the spine's alignment. Canadian manufacturer Natura makes its gel from food-grade mineral oil, which is poured into molds. The molded gel forms a layer over a core of either latex or memory foam. When a person stretches out on the mattress, the gel structure's vertical walls buckle under the person's weight - more under the heavier parts of the body and less under the lighter parts. For more information, visit <http://www.naturaworld.com>.

- Eco-friendly. As consumers look to natural home products, companies are launching organic and recyclable mattresses. The new OrganicPedic by Organic Mattresses Inc.

in California uses materials that include bamboo, organic wool and cotton, shredded rubber and buckwheat hulls. They have 100 percent natural latex cores. Prices range from \$1,595 to \$4,995; <http://www.organicpedicbyomi.com>. •Aromatherapy. Magniflex makes an aromatherapy mattress with tiny capsules of lavender essential oil, a natural sedative, embedded in the fibers of the cover. When the bed is touched, the friction releases some fragrance from the capsules. The cover is removable and washable. The lavender aroma will last five to seven years.

Another Magniflex model can be flipped for winter or summer - warm cashmere on one side and cool silk on the other. Bits of silver are embedded within the cover to dissipate static electricity and kill bacteria.

- Magnetics. Restonic's Healthrest Magnetic mattress contains a concentric field of Bioflex medical magnets to improve circulation and alleviate pain, the company's literature says. For information and pricing, visit <http://www.restonic.com>.
- Decorative mattresses. Serta has teamed up with Nickelodeon to put SpongeBob SquarePants and Dora the Explorer on children's mattresses (\$199 for a twin inner spring mattress and \$299 for the foam version). Traditionally, bedding has been female-focused, but companies are now launching male-oriented products to answer growing demand. Magniflex makes a mattress with a Tonino Lamborghini logo and a suggested retail price of \$2,999 for a king.

Magniflex also produces mattresses with images of oversized red lips, peace signs and hearts. The collection has removable covers that can be laundered, offering the option of sleeping without a fitted sheet. Prices range from \$999 to \$2,499 in queen.