

# AMISH FURNITURE BUYER'S GUIDE

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## Table of Contents

What's my furniture style? .....	3
What are the wood types? .....	5
How do I choose a stain?.....	7
How do I find a dealer?.....	8
How do I spot quality construction?.....	9





## Amish Furniture Buyer's Guide

Style, durability, and longevity are words synonymous with Amish made furniture. But reputation aside, you may still have questions. Does all Amish made furniture look the same? Will it blend with the style I already have for my home? How long will it last? Where can I go to see pieces in person before making the decision to buy? This guide and the knowledgeable staff at **Modern Bungalow** will help you understand the different options that come with buying Amish furniture whether you're just starting out or already own a number of Amish made pieces. There is always something new to learn!



### What is Amish Furniture?

As a very basic and broad overview, Amish furniture is manufactured by Amish communities primarily living in Pennsylvania, Ohio and Indiana. The furniture is made with solid hardwoods typically cut, designed and put together without the use of electricity from the grid.



### Although this might sound simple, there's so much more!

What you may not have realized is that Amish furniture carries with it a huge variety of options the buyer — you — will need to make — from the type of wood used and design techniques applied all the way through the finishing layer of stain.

It's time to make some decisions to get you the design that fits your unique taste.

## Amish Furniture is for Life Think About Your Preferences and Style

Amish furniture is built to last a lifetime (and beyond). That dining table you order will likely be the last table you ever buy. Not saying it has to be, but because of the expert craftsmanship put into each and every piece of furniture made, it's important to make choices about style, wood and stain that fit your specific needs and wants.



### Choice #1: Style Family

Amish is not a style of furniture but rather a group of people who have made high quality, handcrafted furniture for generations. While the Mission and Shaker styles are often the most widely sought after, Amish craftsmanship extends to everything from Victorian through Modern.

**You'll want to start your search by first considering style.** Whether you have one in mind or not, read on to gather more information that will either help you make a decision or solidify one you've already made. The styles highlighted below are all represented in Modern Bungalow's timeless collection of furniture.



### Mission

Mission style furniture is inspired by the genius of Frank Lloyd Wright and his Prairie style. It captures geometric elements of nature on the prairie and is typically made of solid oak and quarter sawn oak, and finished in natural tones. Vertical spindles evoke prairie grasses and the warm tones make for a cozy natural look.

Find your ideal style by taking the Amish Furniture Style Quiz at [www.modernbungalow.com](http://www.modernbungalow.com)



### Craftsman

The craftsman style showcases the talent of the artisan with details that are sure to catch the eye. Features include through-tenons, exposed dovetails, corbels and other bits of woodworking artistry meant to draw the eye and show the 'hand' of the maker in each piece. Bold and substantial, these pieces are sure to ground a room.

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### Mid-Century

Light and airy, with touches of cool arches or steel elements, the mid-century modern look mixes simplicity and spunk. Did you think you couldn't get a mid-century piece from Amish makers? Think again! Typically in lighter finishes and with open elements, these pieces have slender profiles and often accents of offsetting wood or metal. With no excess details, just bold geometrics and strong curves, the look is futuristic while reimagining the traditional.



### Farmhouse

The farmhouse style is laid-back and inviting, with rustic finishes that are distressed, rough-sawn, or hand-scraped. This style is comfortable and functional, and is at home in the mountains, on the ranch or in the city.

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### Shaker

Simple and clean, with tapered legs and straight lines, the Shaker collection evokes the style of the original furniture-making minimalists. Typically shown in light stains to fit into existing decor and brighten a space.



### Contemporary

The Goldilocks of furniture styles, the contemporary collection is just right. Not too ornamented and not too plain, and available in light or dark, cool or warm tones, these pieces are easy to customize to fit your existing decor and make your own. Design features like an arched profile or a contoured pedestal give just a bit of style to showcase the craftsmanship.

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### Aspen

If you've ever seen ebony-inlaid Amish wood furniture with gently curving lines, then you've fallen in love with the Aspen collection. It's an original design by Simply Amish and often imitated, but only Simply Amish makes it with the care and quality befitting this timeless design. This style features geometric inlay patterns, gently sloping lines, and a multitude of design details that make it so desirable. It works well in cherry or maple wood, and is equally stunning in either rich warm stains or light and understated tones that let the wood shine through.

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### Traditional

Traditional furniture is most known for its regal style, think majestic, stately, and impressive. With hand-carved details and rich finishes, this style is meant to make you feel like royalty. Upscale European-inspired design is meant to make your rooms feel like a royal parlor. Durability and elegance make the pieces nostalgic yet timeless.

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## Choice #2: Wood type

Amish furniture is almost exclusively made from northern hardwoods and there's a very good reason for that.

Hardwoods (maple, cherry, oak) come from trees with broad leaves and are usually stronger and more stable than softwoods that come from evergreen trees with pine needles (pine, spruce, redwood, cedar). If the hardwood comes from a colder, northern climate, the tree will typically be heartier and the wood will have greater density. The short growing season means the rings of the tree are closer together, and therefore the wood is more dense.

Much like style, the type of wood you choose comes down to your taste based on the design you have in mind. The information below is meant to help you make a more informed decision before heading into a store like Modern Bungalow where you can see the various woods for yourself.



### Oak

With its wide, coarse grain clearly visible on each finished piece of furniture, oak offers unique characteristics and beauty while at the same time providing a natural camouflage to possible dents that may occur from everyday wear and tear. Considered to be a very forgiving wood, it is perfect for pieces of furniture that are used daily.

Oak used in Amish furniture is typically cut in the following ways:

Plain sawn or flat sawn is the most common type of cut as well as the least expensive. When logs are cut using this technique, the annual rings will have a “cathedral” or spiked look to them.

#### Benefits:

- Faster to produce
- Least expensive
- Readily available
- Displays varied grain patterns



### Quarter Sawn Oak

Quarter sawn, a more traditional method of cutting logs, produces wood with a more unique, linear grain pattern sometimes referred to as tiger oak because of the striping. A log is first cut into quarters after which the plain sawing method is used to divide the wood by flipping it over with each cut. Because it is more labor intensive, it is also more expensive. Here is our treatise on the difference.

#### Benefits:

- More stable than flat sawn
- Less likely to cup or warp
- Greater resistance to moisture
- Beautiful ribbon patterns (especially in red and white oak)



## Cherry

A prized hardwood used in furniture making, natural cherry wood is smooth-grained with a reddish-brown hue. It starts out a light pink and morphs into a rich red with a lustrous gloss as the wood goes through its aging process and is exposed to light. The center, or “heart” wood will remain lighter over time, giving a beautiful natural variation to aged pieces.

When deciding on the type of cherry wood you’d prefer, you’ll see the option of clean or character.

**Clean Cherry** is more uniform because the boards are carefully selected and put together so that the coloration is fluid with little to no impurities.

**Character Cherry**, with its knots, black flecks from mineral deposits, and discoloration, is also a beautiful option thanks to its rustic look. It is also more readily available and thus less costly.



## Maple

**Hard maple** produces an incredibly durable wood with its light, creamy color and smooth grain pattern. Unlike many of the other hardwoods in which the heartwood, or interior of the tree is used to craft furniture, pieces made from hard maple will come from the sapwood or outer layer of the tree. This makes the natural hue almost white with mineral streaks that can add a reddish-brown tint. When stained, the mineral streaks will become more prevalent.

**Soft maple** comes from the heartwood, and is less durable than hard maple but still a hardwood nonetheless. Showing more character over time, this type of maple is a more economical choice with greater variations and streaks within the wood. Keep in mind that when staining soft maple, you’ll want to go with something darker than its natural finish because of the greenish tones that are often noticeable in the wood.



## Exotic Woods

Unlike the domestic woods mentioned above that come from North America, exotic hardwoods are found in other parts of the world, especially the tropics. Mahogany, walnut and hickory are just a few examples that are used in a number of different furniture styles from Art Deco to Queen Anne and Renaissance Revival.

While they are the most expensive type of wood found in furniture making, you will be rewarded with rich coloration, durability and consistent grain patterns. These woods are often not stained because their character and beauty is already showcased in its natural state.

### Choice #3: Stain color

Stains can emphasize wood grains and offer character. It can make a new wood look old or make a common wood look rare. Remember that staining is not always necessary, like in the case of exotic woods that look best in their natural color.

Because a stain can affect the atmosphere of a room, it's good to give this some thought. The stain options are numerous, but the choice ultimately comes down to a few variations: Light or dark, warm or cool.



**Light stains** will brighten a room and are perfect for small spaces where there might be little to no natural light. Lighter stains also tend to hide dirt and dust a lot better than their darker counterparts making them more ideal for families with children and pets. The look will be relaxed and clean with wear and tear more easily hidden.



**Dark stains** provide a little more drama and formality to the room they are a part of. Alternatively, they can also emphasize coziness or help warm up a large open space. Imperfections such as knots, dents and uneven grains are less visible with darker stains. The look of less expensive or attractive woods is also enhanced. Contrast works well with a dark wood finish — think light walls and decor.



**Warm stains** are those made with oranges, reds and yellows. When applied to a piece of furniture, they visually make you think the piece is larger or closer. They can be used to make large rooms feel cozier. They exude an aura of warmth because of their brown and red undertones.

**Cool stains** are made with blue and grey undertones that calm and soothe. When applied to furniture, the piece may carry less visual weight than a warmer color. Cool stains are great for furniture placed in smaller rooms or spaces that you want to appear larger.



*If you're having trouble deciding what stain is right for you, look at the room you will be adding the furniture to and think about the following questions:*

1. What tones already exist in the room (consider the floors, lighting, walls, decor)?
2. Do you want the furniture to be the focal point or to blend in?
3. Do you want a formal or relaxed look?





2. Do they offer many different options to fit your own preferences and style?

3. Do they display pieces from multiple makers and offer information about their individual pros and cons?

Take the time to look beyond the sale price to get a better understanding of the type of service the dealer provides and the type of product they consistently sell. Google reviews and Facebook pages are a good place to find customer reviews - just be sure to read enough to get an accurate sampling. You'll be able to tell the common threads pretty quickly.



There's a lot to be said about having peace of mind when making a decision about furniture that has a reputation for lasting generations. It's important to feel confident that your furniture dealer cares about your specific needs and wants.

*At Modern Bungalow, we strive to bring your specific dream to life as we pay close attention to every last detail.*

*Visit Dealers and See the Furniture in Person to Check for Quality.*

While there are many online retailers offering to deliver Amish furniture to your door, there is a huge benefit to walking into a store and seeing the incredible craftsmanship of the furniture for yourself. Well made, long lasting furniture possesses certain tell-tale features that offer assurance you are getting a high quality piece. Once you have a handle on these elements and features, you can feel comfortable that you know the right questions to ask before purchasing online.

## Find a Dealer You Trust

It's no surprise that not all furniture dealers are created equal. So what exactly is it you should be looking for when planning to invest money and time into purchasing quality Amish furniture?

### Ask yourself the following questions before deciding on a dealer you can trust:

1. Do they display an adequate selection of pieces in their store that you can touch and feel to determine quality?

Here's a list of what you should be looking for before walking into an Amish furniture dealer. And don't worry if you forget, any white glove customer service staff like the one here at **Modern Bungalow** will be happy to show you what these indications of quality look like first-hand.

## Material

If you want quality, you want solid wood. Unfortunately, most modern furniture is made utilizing a veneer - a flimsy material that is about 1/8 inch thick. Because veneers are so thin, they will not display the wood's beautiful and unique grain that can only be obtained by slicing through the growth rings of a tree at a certain angle.



### High quality Amish-made furniture will have:

Solid wood pieces that are at least 1-inch thick

- As much continuous wood as possible
- For example, high quality chairs will have arms and legs or backs and



legs made from a continuous piece of wood

- Pieces that are leveled with the floor to prevent wobbling.

### Will not have:

- Plywood, particle board, - fiberboard or press board (except potentially inside upholstered pieces, and even then should be minimum 12-ply)

## Joints

Joints are one of the best indicators of determining the quality of a piece of furniture.

### High quality Amish-made furniture will have:

- Dovetail joints
- Look for the dovetailed joints on the front and back of drawer boxes which should be solid wood throughout (no plywood)
- Corners of tables, chests and other pieces should have dado, dowel or mortise and tenon joinery. No screws or nails except on reinforcing blocks.
- Reinforcing blocks attached at an angle should be used on corners

### Will not have:

- Joints that are nailed, stapled or glued
- Weak butt joints glued together at a 45 degree angle instead of joined with dado, mortise and tenon or dowel





- Dining table undersides will be finished to prevent snags to clothing as well as warping and cracking
- Similar grain patterns and coloration on all doors and drawers that have been well blended
- Sealed edge grain to prevent moisture and warping

## Hardware

Furniture hardware are products used to support the look, design and durability of the furniture.

### High quality Amish-made furniture will have:

Full extension drawers on metal ball bearing slides that allow the entire drawer to come out and be stopped at the end of its track

- Soft close doors and drawers (prevents slamming as the hardware mechanism slows the close a few inches from the cabinet)



- Self storing or butterfly table leaf mechanisms with leaf locks to keep them in place when being used
- Bed frames connected with non-glued dowels and heavy steel bolts
- Reinforced chair joints

### Will not have:

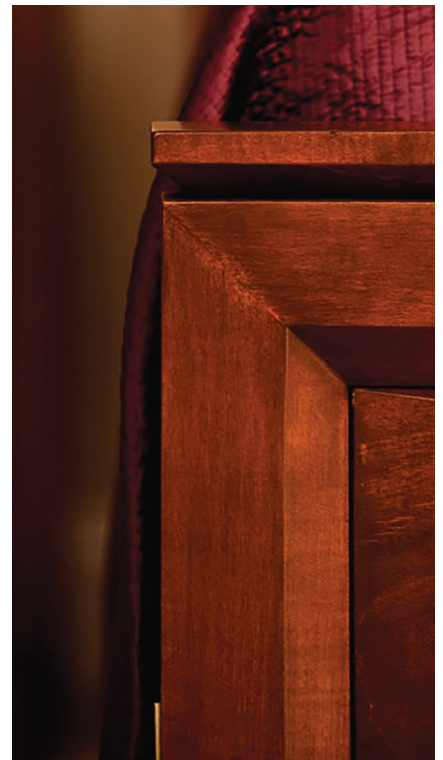
- Staples holding pieces together
- Drawers in which the side pieces are butted up against the front and back (typically held together by glue)
- Short half-open slides
- Wood on wood sliding drawers
- Plywood drawer boxes

## Finish

The finish is just like it sounds — the last touch put on a furniture’s surface to be extra sure it stands the test of time.

### High quality Amish-made furniture will have:

- A buttery soft finish that indicates the surface has been fully sanded – a sign of extra time and labor
- Post-catalyzed varnish which has greater resistance to damage over time than lacquer



### Will not have:

- Cracks or bubbles on the surface from application of the finish
- Streaks or areas where excess finish has collected
- Visible space or filler material in joints

## Warranty

Bottom line - the better the warranty, the better the quality. A good warranty will mean the difference between buying with confidence and taking your chances.

Most, if not all, Amish crafted furniture dealers will provide the consumer with a lifetime warranty against any defect in construction like wood splitting or failing joints.

***If a lifetime warranty is not offered, you might want to rethink buying from that dealer.***

Keep in mind that many warranties only cover the original buyer. Also be sure to understand which performance aspects are not guaranteed by the warranty such as alterations and accidents. If in doubt, your furniture dealer will be able to give you more information.

## Before You Go...

Because Amish furniture is not mass-produced, you have a lot more say in what the finished product looks like. There are a lot of decisions you get to make and it's easy to feel overwhelmed.

This guide and the exceptional team at Modern Bungalow will be here for you as you go through the process. We are available to discuss ideas and answer all questions in person, by email or phone. We know you won't be disappointed with your decision in choosing Amish made furniture and are excited to be a part of your journey!

