

Anatomy of a Mattress

NEWARK, N.J.-BASED SHIFMAN MATTRESS DEMONSTRATES OLD-SCHOOL BED MAKING.

■ **By Howard Whitman**

From time to time, the Home Furnishings Business team gets the opportunity to peek behind the curtain and gain insight on how the products you sell in your retail establishments are actually made. We recently were able to tour the factory of speciality bedding manufacturer Shifman Mattress. Here's what we saw.

In the heart of downtown Newark, N.J., just a stone's throw from the Passaic River and a quick commute to New York City, in an industrial building that could house anything from a warehouse to a meat packing plant, something unusual is happening: Beds are being made. One by one. By hand.

This is unique in an age when beds are often mass-produced on a production line. But Shifman, which was founded in 1893, still does it the old-fashioned way. More than 50 employees are involved in the production of a Shifman Mattress, working in departments throughout the company's manufacturing plant.



1. Stitching and other finishing touches are implemented to the fabrics used on the tops of Shifman beds in the company's sewing department.



3. Elsewhere in the building, boxsprings are prepared, combining frames built from Canadian Spruce wood (from sustainably managed forests) and hourglass-shaped steel upholstery-grade coils (used for better responsiveness to sleepers' bodies). The frames and coils are joined with Italian twine using Shifman's eight-way, hand-tying system.



2. These fabrics are then carefully inspected and prepared for joining with the finished mattresses.



4. Shifman beds use all-natural cotton—lots of it—in the making of each bed. The in-house Garnetting machine (an old warhorse textile machine) combs the cotton, picking out impurities such as seeds and refining it into thin layers that are joined into thick layers called laps. Eight to 10 laps (around 65 lbs.) are used in each Shifman mattress.



5. The cotton fill is placed upon both sides of a mattress as it is prepared for its final stages.

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6. Layers of refined cotton are added to the bed top, along with the fabric that will cover both sides of the mattress and come in contact with sleepers' bodies.



7. Finally, the layers of cotton and upholstery are joined when a craftsman, using a lot of physical strength, locks down all of the elements securely in place by hand-threading a twine through the layers using a large needle. The finished bed will be about 2 feet in thickness. This hand-tufting process has been in use since around 1920, when customers sought an alternative to the then-popular button tufting. The hand-stitched tufting, popularly known in the early 20th century as "Sani-Tuft", replaced the button with a less-noticeable stitch.



8. Finished mattresses are taken to Shifman's in-house storage and shipping area, where they are prepared for their journey to furniture and bedding retailers throughout the U.S.