

# Alstons

Sofas for Living





# Sofas for Living

Our sofas are made to be more than just beautiful; we make them to withstand all the demands of life. Why? Because Alstons understands that sofas are at the centre of the home. They're the focal point around which life moves, the place where families and friends come together, day after day – the spot where people choose to spend their precious free time – and we think that's a powerful thing.

We believe a truly great sofa is attractive and comfortable and demands to be used every day: a sofa that is made for living. Alstons has dedicated the last sixty years to manufacturing sofas that meet this ideal: sofas that are beautifully designed and upholstered, and built with expert skill from high quality materials.

Our commitment to quality in all stages of our manufacturing process means that our sofas are great looking, comfortable, affordable and ideally suited to everyday life. Our extensive range includes models to appeal to a wide range of customers, from couples investing in their first sofa to families looking for something new. Which is excellent for our clients, of course.

What's more, at Alstons we do everything we can to make sure our clients' lives are easy. We know that when one of our sofas is on a shop floor it's not only a reflection of us, but also a reflection of that client and their business. That's why we go out of our way to provide not only an impeccable product but also an incredible service to our clients – with dedication to making their lives trouble-free.





# History

We are proud of our heritage. Alstons is a family that has been in the furniture trade for the last 150 years. Back in 1860, two youthful brothers, William and Ambrose Alston, opened a furniture shop in Sudbury's North Street instead of following the family line into the weaving trade.



*Leslie Alston c. 1932*

Master cabinet-makers by trade, the brothers were craftsmen before they were businessmen. Nevertheless their shop quickly prospered, with loyal customers spreading the word about the brothers' charming, well-made cabinets. Towards the end of the century they were able to move to Sudbury's bustling Old Market Place, where they opened up a larger shop with cabinet and upholstery making workshops located behind.



*Official opening of the Gosbecks Road factory in 1964*

Around the turn of the century William's sons, Percy and Hammond, joined the business. They were responsible for opening one of the UK's first all-electric cabinet making workshops, and the business was able to start manufacturing furniture on a commercial basis.

Percy's son Leslie joined the business in the early 1930s and transformed it into a manufacturing business. Initially the business relocated to Long Melford but following a fire during the war the business moved again to Nacton Road, Ipswich. On this new site an entire production cabinet factory was steadily created to follow a perfectly linear layout.

It was in 1950 that Leslie decided to establish an upholstery manufacturing business on the back of success he had had with upholstery in their original Old Market Place workshop in Sudbury. The factory moved three times within Colchester before settling in Gosbecks Road, where Leslie's son Alan was tasked with building a new factory on a greenfield site.

Over the next three decades the business expanded under Alan's leadership. During that period it established itself as a major producer of well-engineered upholstery. The business grew steadily and by 1980

it was occupying a number of satellite factories in addition to its Colchester base.

Today the fifth generation of Alston brothers, John (Chairman) and David (Managing Director), run the family business. Whilst mechanisation has been a major change keeping Alstons at the forefront of the industry, some things haven't changed since the days of William and Ambrose. The Alstons values are still the same as they always were: excellent quality, British-made products and steadfastly impeccable service.

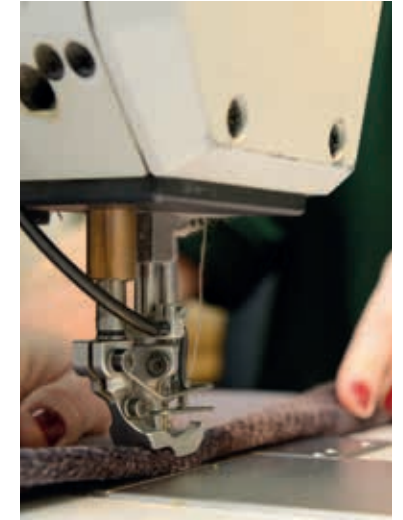


*Alstons sales meeting c. 1955*



# Design

We celebrate thoughtful design. When we sit down to draw, sketchpad open and pencil in hand, we're thinking about lots more than just creating a great-looking sofa.



We're thinking about what our retail clients want for their range, and what their customers want to buy. We're thinking about the shapes, sizes and fabrics which are coming into fashion, and those which will always remain classic. We're thinking about quality, and we're thinking about value for money. We're putting ourselves in your shoes and thinking: will this sofa sell? And it's not just while we're designing we think about sofas – at Alstons sofas are part of everyone's everyday lives.

Part of our success has been down to our continual determination and focus on creating Sofas for Living. We take our design inspiration from exhibitions, galleries, textile mills and anything in the world around us that provides us with creative ideas. All of which is channelled into commercial designs with a recognisably British twist.

We have a broad range of clients and an equally broad range of sofas. In our Loft, Transitional, Heritage, Modern and Classic collections we offer everything from affordable, traditional-style armchairs to high-end contemporary grand sofas, which means you are certain to find something to suit your market.

Alternatively, if you have a particular style in mind for your range we would be delighted to discuss this with you and design to a brief.



# Manufacturing

At Alstons we believe strongly in the importance of British manufacturing. Our philosophy is quite simple: quality comes first. We are and always have been dedicated to our craft and, like many people who make things for a living, we take immense pride in our work.



All our sofas are made-to-order at our factory in Colchester by our team of highly skilled frame makers, upholsterers and sewing machinists. These are men and women that know their trade inside out: most have trained and worked together at Alstons in small, close-knit teams for years, sometimes even decades. Our low staff turnover stands testament to this: at last count we had fifty members of staff who had already been with us for more than twenty years!

We construct our frames with FSC® certified wood; cut, planed, notched and bore holed using only the best industrial equipment and technology. All joints are glued and screwed together to ensure a strong, long-lasting frame that won't break or buckle. We also use cold-cure moulded foam for all of our seat cushions. They might cost us a bit more, but they're the only cushions we'd like to sit on – and for your customers they come with a ten-year guarantee.



The skill of our people is something of which we're incredibly proud. We also think our lead times are something to shout about, because – even with our extensive range – we can guarantee delivery in just three weeks on all of our sofa beds and many of our sofas.



# Quality Control

We know that our commitment to quality in all areas of our business is one of the main reasons our clients stay with us for as long as they do. In the six decades that we've been mass-producing sofas, we've developed a strict Quality Control system that has been instrumental to our success.



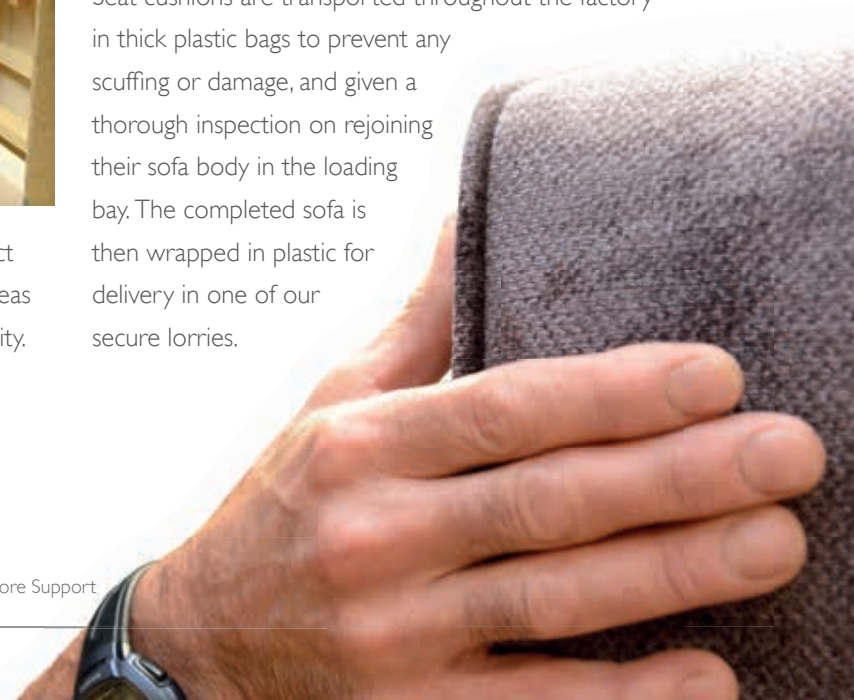
As soon as an order is placed, each individual sofa component is given a unique identification number, allowing it to be monitored as it moves through the factory. The fabric sections of each sofa are cut together, meaning every sofa is upholstered with fabric from the same roll and so colour and texture is continuous throughout.



The frame of each sofa is carefully constructed to exact specifications, with hardwood used for load-bearing areas and copper wash seat springs fitted for greater durability. Once upholstered, the body of each sofa is given a thorough inspection by our Quality Control staff.



Seat cushions are transported throughout the factory in thick plastic bags to prevent any scuffing or damage, and given a thorough inspection on rejoining their sofa body in the loading bay. The completed sofa is then wrapped in plastic for delivery in one of our secure lorries.





# Fabrics

We wouldn't be exaggerating if we said that we search the length and breadth of the continent for new and beautiful fabrics. Working closely with our suppliers, we have access to some of the finest textile mills in Europe.

These mills produce everything from simple, modern cotton weaves to luxurious velvets and chenilles, in a wealth of styles and patterns. What we look for are innovative fabrics that combine attractive design, rich colours and soft textures with a superior quality. We often work with our suppliers, sometimes from scratch, to develop ideas that meet the fast changing fashions. Each fabric is chosen with a particular Alstons model in mind to create a profile that fits perfectly with that sofa's curves, depth and defining features.

As a matter of course, all our fabrics are approved for flame-resistance and domestic use. We work with UKAS to ensure these fabrics exceed British standards for wear, colour-fastness and performance, so that they remain looking their best for years to come.

Perhaps because we love variety, or simply because we love fabrics, our fabric collection currently contains over six hundred different fabrics. This gives our clients an unrivalled choice of styles ranging from light and minimalist to rich, patterned and multi-textured.

Once an order has been placed we cut the chosen fabric using our state-of-the-art automated cutting system, which can process over 20,000 metres of fabric a week. Not only does this system reduce wastage to a minimum, it also enables us to produce perfectly matched sofas when using patterned fabrics.





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# Service & Instore Support

In the same way that you judge yourself on the satisfaction of your customers, we judge ourselves on the happiness of our clients. Great service is one of our fundamental values, guiding everything we do, right down to the timely delivery of your order by our friendly and helpful drivers.

Unlike most of our competitors, we have our own fleet of lorries and a team of dedicated drivers who deliver up and down the country, seven days a week. This means you will only ever deal directly with Alstons employees who want to ensure your delivery goes smoothly. Our drivers are proud of what they do, and we are proud of them.



Our commitment to great service doesn't just end with delivery. Alstons' customer service team is there to help you whilst our sofas are on your shop floor and long after, whether that means working out logistics or advising on sofa specifications. Many of them have



been working with the same clients for years, becoming friends as well as account handlers, and it's these strong bonds that form the foundation of our business.

We're not just on the end of the phone, either; if our clients need us we're there to help instore. We are happy to provide training for our client's employees, even if that's in something as simple as how to dress a sofa beautifully. Sofas are our passion, and inspiring that passion in your employees is part of our service to you.

# Green Credentials

At Alstons, energy efficiency and waste recycling is high on our priorities, from recycling cardboard and plastics used in the supply and delivery of our raw materials, to the recycling of the wood waste which is a by-product of our wood mill. This is stored in a silo and burnt in a bio-mass boiler, generating low pressure hot water, which we use to heat our factory site.

Optimising raw materials, whether wood or fabric, is a major concern to us here at Alstons. This is why we have invested heavily in CNC controlled machinery with technologies to eliminate waste in these areas, but still maintain our excellent manufacturing standards. Of the waste we do generate, a large proportion is recycled which ensures it does not go to landfill. We are always striving to become greener and more efficient and our goal for the future is to recycle 90% of our waste.

Alstons is committed to reducing its energy consumption, in turn cutting our CO2 emissions. This has been achieved by investing in an energy efficient lighting system with intelligent controls which minimise energy waste in unoccupied areas.

Installed and operating on a section of our factory roof is a 50 KW photovoltaic system (Solar Panels). This generates electricity for our own use and also generates an income through the FITS scheme (Feed in Tariff).

The Soil Association Woodmark and the Forestry Stewardship Council® have recognised our efforts to achieve the highest possible environmental standards in our work practices. We have FSC® accreditation, which means our sofas are made with FSC certified wood.



# Accreditation

Putting our clients' needs first is both in our nature and part of our system, but you needn't take our word for it – we have an ISO 9001 accreditation that shows our commitment to quality and continued improvement. ISO 9001 is a quality management system based on a set of eight principles that guides the way Alstons is run, one of which is a strong focus on the client. As well as having systems in place to ensure our clients' satisfaction, ISO 9001 pushes us to try and exceed their expectations.

Our other accreditations include the Manufacturing Guild Mark, a badge of distinction in the furniture industry. The Guild Mark is awarded to furniture makers who show integrity and care in their craft, innovation in design, commitment to British manufacturing and excellent service to their customers – in fact, all the things that we pride ourselves on.

We are passionate about design excellence and we show our collections at a number of exhibitions each year, including Interiors UK at Birmingham NEC and the Longpoint Exhibition. In 2013 we were again voted 'Upholstery Supplier of the Year' at the AIS Awards and at the same time presented with the Upholstery Gold Standard award for achieving a high level of quality and service.

At Alstons we believe in supporting causes that matter, especially those close to home. That's why we sponsor a wide range of local charities whose work we admire. We are also proud to have donated to the Essex & Herts Air Ambulance Trust.



Registered Charity Number 1108989







The commitment and loyalty of our workforce is the cornerstone of the company's success. Our philosophy is simple:  
“treat others as you would like to be treated yourself”.

*David Alston - Managing Director*

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