Leather for furniture: *categories*, *finishes* and tests

Aniline, semi-aniline, pigmented and split leather, and the tests to ask for. BS EN 13336:2022 gives recommended values, not end-use grades; BS 6608 was withdrawn in 2014.

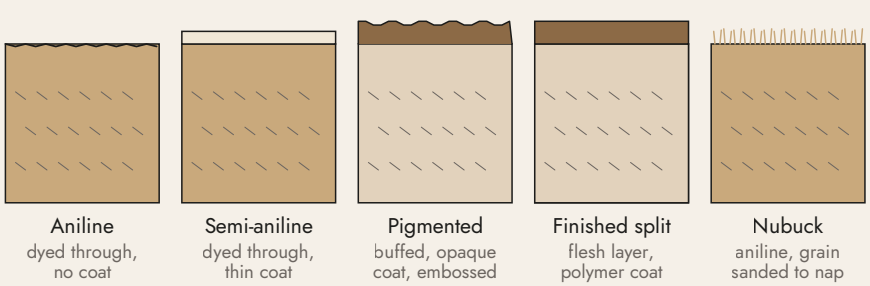
Compliance guidance. Guidance only. BS EN 13336:2022 was not read, so no recommended value is quoted: ask a test house. Hide sizes are suppliers' statements, not a standard. Claims such as 'chrome-free' need a certificate.

AT A GLANCE

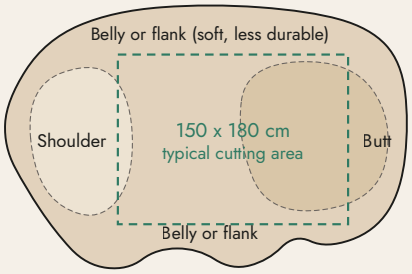
Type	The surface	What FIRA says	Use (our reading)
Aniline	Dyed through, no colour coating on the surface; premium hides only	Soft and the most expensive; more susceptible to light and to liquid; slight colour variation across the hide	Low-use pieces
Semi-aniline	Dyed through with a thin surface coat, designed to imitate aniline	Light fastness improved, colour variation reduced, still easily damaged by spillage and soiling	Domestic and lighter use
Pigmented	Surface buffed if needed, then an opaque coloured polymer coat, embossed to a grain	The most durable and the most used upholstery leather	The usual choice for hospitality and heavy use
Finished split	The flesh layer of a hide with a polymer coat made to look like grain	Weaker than grain leather: low-stress applications only	Light, low-stress use
Nubuck	Aniline whose grain surface is lightly sanded to a velvet finish	Absorbent: soft but susceptible to spills and contamination	Surfaces touched little
Oil or wax finished	Aniline with an oil or wax top treatment	Becomes worn-in looking; lightens where used hard, such as seats; scuffs easily	Where a worn-in look is wanted
Bycast	A split with a polyurethane film rolled onto an adhesive layer	Variable quality; lightens when stretched; scuffs; FIRA advises testing before use	Only with test results
Full-grain, top-grain, corrected grain	Trade terms for how much of the natural grain remains; definitions vary	FIRA's pigmented entry includes buffing to reduce scarring	Ask the supplier to define the term in writing

The first three columns follow FIRA's pages on leather types (12 September 2022), summarised in our words. The last column is our reading of FIRA and of our materials page, not a source's verdict, and a partner upholsterer confirms it for each leather.

Surface at the top. Schematic, not to scale, after FIRA's descriptions.



Five leather surfaces in section, after FIRA's descriptions. Schematic and not to scale. Original drawing by Make Bespoke Studio.



What one supplier publishes
Average whole hide 58 sq ft (5.4 m²)
Typical cutting area 150 x 180 cm = 2.7 m²
That rectangle is half the hide
Longest cut about 250 cm
Waste: the rest, mostly edges

Another supplier, 50 to 59 sq ft:
at least four clean 686 mm panels
cut area 100 to 250 mm in from the edge

Zones after FIRA. Sizes are two US suppliers' published figures, not a standard. Outline not to scale.

A hide with its zones after FIRA, and one US supplier's published typical cutting area. Schematic and not to scale; sizes are suppliers' statements, not a standard. Original drawing by Make Bespoke Studio.

SPECIFICATION WORDING

THE LEATHER

Upholstery leather: [bovine] grain leather, [pigmented / semi-aniline / aniline] finish, [name, colourway], [ ] mm thick, hides averaging [ ] m² from batch [ ], described in the terms of BS EN 15987:2022 [edition to confirm]. Finished split, bonded and polyurethane-film leathers are not accepted [unless stated].

TESTS

For the colourway and batch supplied, supply a report from a laboratory accredited for the methods, stating each method and edition, giving: tear (ISO 3377-1), flex resistance (BS EN ISO 5402-1) [dry and wet], adhesion of finish (BS EN ISO 11644), colour fastness to rubbing dry and wet (BS EN ISO 11640), colour fastness to light [method named by the laboratory], and [perspiration (BS EN ISO 11641), soil resistance]. Results to meet [the recommended values in BS EN 13336:2022 for the use / the values agreed in writing with the client].

APPROVAL, FIRE, QUANTITY AND CLAIMS

Fire performance is that of the finished composite, not the leather alone (clause [B2]). Approve a production sample cut from the batch, not a swatch; natural variation between hides is accepted within [the approved range]. Hides are inspected by [ ] before cutting. Customer's own leather: hide area [ ] m² each to BS EN ISO 11646; quantity as the upholsterer's confirmed cutting plan. Any claim such as chrome-free or vegetable-tanned is supported by a certificate naming the standard or scheme, the product and the batch.

TERMS USED

Aniline leather

Leather dyed through with no pigment coating, so natural marks show and it feels soft. It marks and fades easily, so it suits low-use pieces more than busy venues.

Pigmented leather

Leather with a coloured polymer surface and usually an embossed grain. It is the toughest and most widely used type for furniture.

STANDARDS AND SOURCES

- BS EN 13336:2022: guide to methods and values; BSI: current, 31 Aug 2022.
- BS 6608:1985: withdrawn 30 Sep 2014 (BSI).
- BS ISO 16131:2012: current, under review; a 2026 draft record exists.
- FIRA: leather types; specifying leather: 12 Sep 2022.

Full guide: https://makebespoke.com/trade/technical/leather-for-furniture. Make Bespoke Studio coordinates manufacture through its partner workshops. Figures are guidance only and your specification governs; some may be superseded, so contact the studio to verify.