Vellum and parchment on *furniture*

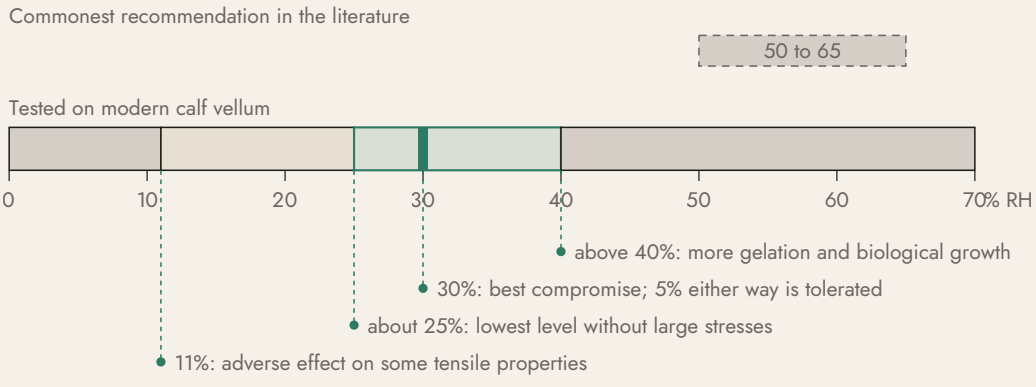
Vellum is parchment made from calf skin: dried under tension, not tanned, so it follows the moisture in the air. This sheet gives the one study we could read, the questions to put to a workshop, and no sizes we cannot source.

AT A GLANCE

Topic	What the source says	What it means for a specifier
What it is	Parchment from young or unborn calf, dried under tension, not tanned	The skin behaves like a sheet of collagen that follows the air's moisture
Water	Takes up water rapidly and in greater amounts than leather	Keep it out of splash zones and away from wet-cleaning regimes
Humidity found best	About 30% RH for the material, a 5% swing either way tolerated	One study of modern calf vellum, aimed at preserving documents, not furniture
Too dry	About 25% RH is the lowest without large stresses; 11% hurt some tensile properties	Winter heating can dry a room: log the real figure
Too damp	Above 40% RH: more gelation and opportunity for biological growth	Bathrooms, kitchens and unventilated rooms
Common advice	The literature most often says 50 to 65% RH, and varies	The sources disagree: do not treat any single band as a rule
Restraint	A skin held rigid builds force as RH falls (measured)	How it is held matters as much as the room
Skin size, thickness, colour	No source read gives figures	Ask the partner for the largest single skin, joins and a colour range
Light and finish	Not covered by the study; no sealing figures found	Ask for the sealing system and its tests on offcuts
Where it suits	Our judgement, not sourced	Low-contact surfaces in stable rooms; mock up before committing

RH is relative humidity. The humidity findings are from one 1992 study of three modern calfskin vellums (Hansen, Lee and Sobel); the rest of the table is our reading or an open question. Nothing here is a manufacturer's figure.

HUMIDITY: WHAT THE STUDY FOUND



Findings of one study of three modern calfskin parchments. Not a rule for furniture: see the text.
Original drawing; the sources are named in the sheet.

Findings of one study of modern calf vellum, aimed at documents. Not a furniture rule.

WHAT TO DO

Log the real humidity of the room across a winter and a summer, write the range into the specification, and ask the workshop to confirm in writing that vellum suits it. Ask for a sample panel built the production way and conditioned over that range, with the sealing system named and tested on offcuts. We found no source for skin sizes, movement per per cent RH, or sealing results, so none are quoted.

SPECIFICATION WORDING

VELLUM PANEL, GENERAL

Vellum (calf parchment) panel to ref [V-01], size [ ] x [ ] mm, skin thickness [ ] mm to be stated by the maker, held by [method to be proposed by the maker with reason]. Design relative humidity range for the room [ ] to [ ] % RH, greatest expected change [ ] % RH in [ ] hours, from logged data supplied by [ ]. The maker is to confirm in writing that the proposed build suits that range before samples are made.

SAMPLE AND APPROVAL

A sample panel of [300 x 300] mm built exactly as the production piece (same skin type, backing, adhesive, holding method and seal) is to be conditioned over [ ] to [ ] % RH for [ ] weeks and photographed before and after. The approved sample is retained by [ ] as the acceptance reference. Colour range across skins shown on [ ] skins.

SURFACE AND CARE

Sealing system [ ] to be named by the maker with test results on offcuts for water, wax, grease and light exposure [ ]. Written care and repair instructions to be supplied with the piece. Not to be used within [ ] mm of a basin, hob or shower unless the maker confirms in writing.

TERMS USED

Vellum
Parchment made from the skin of young or unborn calves (Hansen, Lee and Sobel, 1992).

Parchment
Animal skin dehaired and dried under tension, not tanned; its fibres lie more parallel to the surface than in leather.

Relative humidity (RH)
The moisture in the air as a percentage of the most it could hold at that temperature.

Gelation
The softening of collagen toward a gel in damp conditions; the study found more of it above 40 per cent RH.

Cockling
A wavy distortion of a skin or sheet. We found no primary source for a furniture limit.

STANDARDS AND SOURCES

- Hansen, Lee and Sobel, The effects of relative humidity on some physical properties of modern vellum, JAIC 31(3), 1992, pp. 325 to 342: all figures on this sheet. Read 7 Nov 2026 (web edition, abstract and sections 1 to 2.2).
- No British Standard for vellum on furniture was identified: none was found in the sources read; do not assume one exists.

Full guide: https://makebespoke.com/trade/technical/vellum-and-parchment-on-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.