

HOME & FAMILY

To Sleep, Perchance to Find a Perfect Pillow

By NANCY MATSUMOTO

In the competitive world of online retail, customization is king. The latest vendors to offer fully customizable products: makers of down pillows.

Take a standard-issue product, throw in the expertise of a chiropractor and variable sizes and shapes, add some secret density formulas, and you have a niche market. We tested four services, including a do-it-yourself option that had us do everything but wrestle geese to pluck their soft feathers.

The Pillow Bar has online and in-store options. For the experience of watching our pillow being

stuffed before our eyes, we headed to a

home-furnishing store in suburban Chicago that had a special kiosk. A salesclerk showed us sample pillows and explained that the 650 fill, 100% Hungarian goose down contains no pointy quills to disturb our sleep (fill, or fill power, refers to how many cubic inches one ounce of down will "loft" or fluff up to). We were offered the choice of a back-, stomach- or side-sleeper, each varying in firmness. The stomach pillow was flatter to prevent our neck and spine from bending out of alignment. A boomerang-shaped pillow for side sleepers, designed to fill the gap between neck and bed, was the firmest.

Each pillow comes with a sachet (a choice of two scents) and a monogram. We opted for a mixed herb scent called "Martini Dream".

Then we watched the five-minute display of goose down being stuffed into a pillow. Similar to the stuff-a-bear kiosks found in malls, this one looked like a giant snow globe, with fluff whirling around madly en route to the pillow cover. We wavered between a back and a side pillow, so the clerk offered to let us feel the pillow as it was being stuffed to determine the firmness.

We woke the next morning convinced there was something narcotic in the sachet because we slept so well.

My Ideal Pillow touts itself as the "World's 1st computer-



attractive piping. Our test sleep was dreamy: On our back, our head sank just the right amount; on our stomach, it was soft enough to bunch up; on our side, it supported our head at the perfect angle.

At the United Pillow Web site, we liked the fact that users can customize rectangular or round pillows of any size—not just the usual standard, queen and king sizes. The site offers a choice of four down-to-feather ratios (the higher the down content, the better). Standard, queen and king-size pillows are available, plus choice of fill power, pillow-cover thread-counts and soft, medium or firm densities.

We chose a standard-size 100% goose-down model with 600 fill power (800 is the highest) and a 440 thread-count ticking. Our sleep during the test run was comfortable, although having selected a firm pillow, we found it better for side rather than back sleeping. United co-owner Mark Rodriguez told us our pillow will soften somewhat during the first six months.

Foamorder is the place for do-it-yourselfers to go for bulk down feathers and all-cotton down-proof ticking by the yard. A brief conversation with a salesman gave us pause, though. He advised donning a face mask and draping furniture with a drop cloth to ward off rogue feathers.

We forged on anyway, ordering two pounds of bulk 50-50 gray duck down, the highest quality offered, and four yards of the 180-thread count ticking. We stitched up a pillowcase using a sewing machine and instructions on eHow.com. Then we sequestered ourselves in a bathroom and stepped inside the tub to fill our pillow. After 45 minutes and lots of feathers flying, we had the finished product. Cleanup wasn't difficult, and sleeping on a freshly stuffed pillow was highly satisfying. The loft was superb, allowing it to bunch up comfortably on either side of our head when we lay on our back, or, with a punch, transform into a denser package for side sleeping.

—Stefanie Ilgenfritz and Lori Barrett contributed to this article.

COMPANY	CUSTOMIZING OPTIONS	FEATURES	COST OF A STANDARD PILLOW	COMMENT
The Pillow Bar (thepillowbar.com)	Five sizes, with different densities for back, stomach or side sleeping. Choice of monograms, two sachet scents. Comfort quote' option allows addition of embroidered saying.	300-count cotton sateen zippered protector with satin cord trim.	Online, \$195 to \$295 plus shipping, in stores \$185 to \$225.	You pay a premium for the high-quality down, the show and the extras such as monogramming and sachet.
My Ideal Pillow Inc. (myidealoillow.com)	Stomach, side- and back-sleeping styles, all Standard size. Pillow customized to your height, weight, mattress density, and in some cases, chest size and pillow support preference.	Baffle paneling and piping give pillows a finished look.	\$87 plus shipping.	The back sleeper is in the process of being fine-tuned. Some confusing gaps in info, but quick response to phone queries.
United Pillow Manufacturing (unitedpillow.com) 877-3pillow	Four standard sizes, or customized dimensions as long as the pillow is rectangular or round. Four down-to-feather ratios, four fill powers, three densities and two thread counts.	Maker ships direct from its factory in Miami, will refill pillow after 10 years for just the cost of the return shipping.	\$51 plus shipping. Custom size pillows cost 15% to 20% more.	Shipped factory direct, the no-frills bargain of the group.
Foamorder.com (foamorder.com) 415-503-1133	For the D-I-Y option, Choice of three grades of down filling.	Offers down pillows in different sizes and shapes, including spheres, cylinders, or triangles.	\$69.50 plus shipping. Labor not included.	Only for the die-hard do-it-yourselfer, but if you are looking for a fun challenge, this is it.

ized pillow fitting system." We were asked to choose between back, side or stomach sleeper. The back sleeper featured a "tri-chambered" design with firmer outer zones for neck support and a softer middle zone to cradle our head.

We followed the instructions to input our age (because age-related bone loss can alter the amount of neck support needed, according to the site), gender, and primary sleep position: back, side or stomach. Next, we were asked to input

our height (which correlates to neck length), weight and mattress density all of which will affect pillow density. Stomach sleepers are asked to input their chest size (small, medium or large), which, the site explains, can help determine the neck support needed. Side sleepers are asked to input chest or jacket size in inches (to determine the distance of the head from the bed), and to choose softer or firmer support.

Only after selecting the

side-sleeper position did we read that this is the preferred choice for combination sleepers, a fact that would have been helpful to know at the beginning. And despite the site's assurance that the company could customize child-size pillows, when we input the measurements of our 10-year-old son, the results seemed to be simply a standard back-sleeper.

We called the company, and got a call the next day from owner Mark Hooper, who is a practicing chiropractor. He

verified that each pillow is engineered to fit the personal measurements of the customer and that our son would get a pillow proportionate to his size. The company limits details given online to avoid revealing proprietary information about its formulas, Mr. Hooper said.

We ended up ordering the side-sleeper with soft-medium support. Our standard-size pillow looked exactly as advertised, with a "baffle" panel insert on each side and

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