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# bed FELLOWS

Feizal and Farhan Chatur  
make mattresses fit for a queen

BY SOPHIE LEES

This past January, during a nine-day trip to the United Arab Emirates, I began to understand the value of a well-made mattress. The UAE is best known for its high-rise haven of Dubai, the self-proclaimed capitalist centre of the world. There, luxury is afforded not only to the wealthy, but also to the far less-than-wealthy, like me. There, I revelled in a good night's sleep - not one, but nine nights of blissful, deep sleep, after which I sprung from bed fully recharged. Each hotel bed I slept in, I felt like Goldilocks; it was just right.

"This," I thought, "is what real sleeping is."

In Edmonton, back to tossing, turning and fighting my spouse for every inch of space on our sagging, too small, innerpring mattress, I began to wonder why I considered sleep such an extravagance. Could it be that a comfortable, well-designed bed was not a luxury item, but simply a good investment for my well-being? After all, we spend a third of our lives sleeping. If you live to 80 and sleep an average of eight hours per night, you'll count sheep for nearly 230,000 hours - that's about 26 years in bed.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOHN GAUCHER

Aramco Inc. CEO Feizal Chatur (right) and president Farhan Chatur





Hypnos beds have many handcrafted features and the materials used are all natural. In addition, to the Queen, Luciano Pavarotti, Vladimir Putin and Oprah Winfrey are all confirmed devotees.

More than 500 beds are manufactured daily in the 75,000-square-foot \$7-million factory in Edmonton.

With this concept at its core, Araam Inc., the brainchild of brothers Feizal and Farhan Chatur, has successfully entered the competitive realm of mattress making. And they're in the right business at the right time. As consumers learn more about the health benefits of good sleep, they're willing to pay more for mattresses. The Chatur brothers know this: since January 2003, their company has grown exponentially, with revenue increasing more than 100% annually. Last year, it produced 200 to 300 units a day; now it's up to 500. The number of employees has also increased, from a couple dozen to 95 across the country. Three distribution centres have opened – in Calgary, Mississauga, Ont. and Richmond, B.C. – and the volume of sales in the east will spawn a new Ontario factory within the year. But the heart of Araam's growing stake in the mattress business remains its \$7-million, 75,000-square-foot factory in west Edmonton.

Araam makes a range of mattresses, from simply well crafted to the utmost in luxury, beds literally fit for a queen. Its two lines are Sova, its proprietary brand, and Hypnos, the most exclusive of all brands. Indeed, becoming Canada's sole licensed manufacturer of the British brand was a huge marketing coup for Araam. Hypnos comes with two royal warrants issued by the Queen and the Queen Mother, meaning that both royal households have used and endorsed Hypnos.

The Aston Martin of beds, these top residential (as opposed to commercial) mattresses retail for more than \$13,000 – the king-size version, that is. The base model starts at about \$3,500. Although the price may seem exorbitant, the beds have many handcrafted features, and the materials used are all natural fibres such as cashmere, wool and silk. It's no surprise, then, that in addition to the Queen, Luciano Pavarotti, Vladimir Putin and Oprah Winfrey are all confirmed devotees. Before Araam could begin manufacturing Hypnos mattresses, the company had to send five employees to England for a six-month, rigorous, hands-on training process.

Climbing the stairs to reach the offices of the Edmonton facility, I was struck by a restful feeling. It seemed to emanate from the austere, spacious design and the absolute lack of excess. There was no clutter, not a stray piece of paper or fabric to be found, just a sense of



1. An Araam employee uses a quilting machine to create a sewing pattern for a mattress cover;  
 2. Spools of thread are stacked and ready. Behind, an employee makes pillow-top mattresses;  
 3. After being assembled in the factory's wood shop, box springs are ready to be upholstered;  
 4. One of the last steps in mattress manufacturing is tape edging, which essentially seals the mattress;  
 5. The finished products are wrapped in plastic and ready for distribution.

Araam makes a range of mattresses, from simply well crafted to beds fit for a queen. In fact, both the Queen and the Queen Mother have endorsed the Hypnos bed.

calm purposefulness. This tranquillity remained with me throughout my visit, even when I toured the busy factory. It was no surprise to me, then, when my guide, elder brother and CEO Feizal Chatur, explained that the word "araam" means "rest" in Hindi.

The Chatur brothers started Araam while still in their 20s, each fulfilling distinct roles. As CEO, Feizal oversees the business operations; Farhan, serving as president, does the marketing and deal making. Making mattresses may not have been a burning desire for either

brother, but as their entrée into the business world, there was no better choice. The sons of Edmonton businessman Barkat Chatur – whose ventures include technology solutions company Acrodex and furniture distributor Ezta Furnishings – had the advantage of family capital, a network of supportive business associates, and a father determined to see his sons set up a business together.

Making mattresses made sense because the product could be distributed through Ezta's established channels. And because most goods move from east to west in Canada,

Edmonton was an ideal location, with shipping companies looking to fill their trucks for the trip back east. Back hauling means a considerable saving on shipping.

Once they decided to start Araam, the brothers dove into the mattress manufacturing industry. Experts were hired to train the Chatur brothers and consult on their state-of-art facility and equipment. While their factory was being built, a five-month project, they went to the United States to gain expertise. They toured several factories, and in Florida they trained on the quilting machines and

sewing machines they now use for production. "We can roll up our sleeves," says Feizal Chatur, "and make any of the mattresses we produce."

Hypnos aside, their Sova brand is rapidly establishing an identity by incorporating new technologies into its 25 different lines. Sova, the Swedish word for sleep, uses innovations such as the pocket coil, in which each coil is contained in separate pockets of fabric, allowing for better "contouring" than other innerspring mattresses. Latex is also available in some Sova mattresses. Besides being hypoallergenic, latex encourages proper spinal alignment and reduces stress on joints. It's ideal, says Chatur, for people who suffer from arthritis and back pain. "I've had numerous customers who have had their back problems resolved," he says, "by investing in a new bed."

Some Sova mattresses are sold to individual buyers by retailers; others are marketed commercially, for everything from oilpatch work camps to hotels. The hotel industry's new commitment to so-called "better sleep programs" has been a boom for mattress manufacturers, boosting sales significantly. The "Big Three" manufacturers – Sealy, Serta and Simmons – have tapped into this trend. In November 2004, Sealy introduced its luxurious Stearns & Foster Hospitality Collection at the International Hotel/Motel & Restaurant Show. Simmons has made its beds chain's guest purchase program. And Serta claims to be the hospitality industry's most popular brand, supplying their Serta Perfect Sleeper to chains such as Hilton, Marriott and Holiday Inn.

Like most market trends, the stronger relationship between the hospitality industry and mattress manufacturers is driven by the customer. As people buy higher quality bedding for their homes, they expect hotels to do the same. "Hotels are realizing customers don't come back for the exquisitely designed lobby," says Chatur. "Really, what they sell is sleep. And a good sleep is why customers return." Although Araam doesn't sell its mattresses through hotels, because it doesn't want to compete with the conventional retailers that carry its products, it does provide beds for some Sheratons and Best Westerns.

Mattress manufacturing is part of the residential furniture industry, which contributed \$2.6 billion in gross domestic product to the Canadian economy in 2002. It's an industry that is experiencing steady growth, around 3.6% a year for the past few years. In the U.S., industry experts attribute the growth to several factors: the robust housing market, the increasing square footage of new houses, and greater consumer awareness – trends that are also strong in Alberta.

Chatur credits the end consumer, whose awareness of the value of a good night's sleep by the Better Sleep Council, an organization supported by the mattress industry, 90% of respondents reported that a good mattress was essential to health and well-being. Moreover, higher disposable incomes combined with higher societal stress levels have created an environment in which personal comfort is increasingly becoming a justifiable expense.

Araam certainly appears to have found a niche, but can it compete with the Big Three? According to the U.S. census bureau, there are 500 conventional mattress manufacturers, but Sealy, Serta and Simmons account for 59% of all sales. All three have factories and distribution centres across Canada. And yet, if the Furniture West awards are any indication of Araam's potential, Sova may become the fourth "S." For two years running, Araam has been awarded Furniture West's gold medal

As consumers learn more about the benefits of good sleep, they're willing to pay more for mattresses.

many manufacturers, including Serta and Simmons.

When Araam was established, the Chatur brothers used their father's company to distribute about 90% of their product. They weaned that down to 10% and then dissolved the arrangement about a year and a half ago. Feizal Chatur may now be an independent businessman, but his father will always remain his guide. "My father taught me that a successful business is built on ethics," he says. "Money is meaningless if you compromise your ethics. This is the most important thing my father taught me."

And I've learned an important lesson, too. Although I haven't purchased a new bed yet, it's comforting to know that I don't have to travel halfway around the world for a good night's sleep. *AV*

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## Mattresses 101

### Main Types

Aero mattresses use air as the primary means of support, with specially designed air chambers. To add comfort and support, some air mattresses include a built-in top layer of memory foam.

Innerspring mattresses are the most common and traditional bed. They use a system of metal springs or coils, cushioned between layers of padding.

Latex foam mattresses are like memory foam mattresses, but use latex, instead of polyurethane.

Memory foam mattresses use two or three inches of high-density polyurethane foam over a firmer foundation.

### Mattress Parts

Ticking is the protective cover that encases the support system, upholstery and quilt in a durable fabric. The outer shell, it matches the bed foundation or box spring.

Quilt, made of fibres or foam, is the first layer beneath the ticking.

Upholstery sits between the support and quilt layers and is made out of different materials, such as fibres, foam and felt, depending on the type of mattress.

Support system is the structural element of the mattress: innersprings, foam, or air.

Foundation is the base that supports the mattress. It absorbs the weight and pressure applied to the bed. Most commonly, the foundation is a box spring made from wood and springs. —SL