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This isn't your dad's recliner: New designs look to attract a wider, younger audience

By Megan Buerger November 23, 2016 



Room & Board's Dalton recliner (\$1,699-\$2,999, roomandboard.com), which sits on wooden legs (or aluminum, if you prefer) and has a mid-century modern look. (Room & Board)

Say goodbye to the dad chair. Today's recliners are slimmer, smarter and more stylish than ever.

Even La-Z-Boy, the 90-year-old brand whose name is as synonymous with classic recliners as Kleenex is with tissues, has updated its product line over the years. In 2010, the company hired actress Brooke Shields as its celebrity spokeswoman to target women ages 35 to 54 and to distance itself from a decades-long association with grandpas, couch potatoes and frat boys who love the lever-lifting footrests and roly-poly cushions.

“I call it Bubba,” Faith Phillips, the company’s vice president of retail store experience, said of the iconic chair. “We love Bubba, and we won’t stop making Bubba, but we wanted to offer more.”



La-Z-Boy’s Midtown low-profile recliner (from \$1,199, la-z-boy.com) is 33 1/2 inches wide and bears little resemblance to earlier counterparts. (La-Z-Boy)

The commercials have been successful: A La-Z-Boy spokeswoman said the company saw three years of double-digit same-store sales growth coinciding with its launch. So last year, the company developed a new retail strategy that puts boutique-style showrooms in cities. About one-third the size of the company’s standard stores, the boutiques feature La-Z-Boy’s Urban Attitudes collection, which offers contemporary pieces in small footprints, and design consultations. The first showroom opened about a year ago in Logan Circle.

“The idea is to make these stores reflect their communities,” Phillips said. “We’re considering adding more in other parts of the country, but it has to be the right fit.”

Kelly Taylor, an interior designer in Providence, R.I., said the generational divide about recliners is as much about size as it is about style.

“Clients who ask for recliners are usually older folks who want a place to kick back and have the space to accommodate a big chair and a big ottoman,” she said. “Younger people in their 30s and 40s are all about small spaces, less stuff, cleaner decor. They’re cool with the single center ottoman.”

They also may not have the “sentimental attachment” to recliners that their parents do, she said, which means brands can’t count on that as a draw. But that’s perhaps where the strategy behind La-Z-Boy’s new showrooms comes into play. By opening up shop in trendy neighborhoods, the company lets customers see firsthand how much recliners have evolved in the past 40 years. The Midtown low-profile recliner (from \$1,199, [la-z-boy.com](https://www.la-z-boy.com)) is 33 1/2 inches wide and bears little resemblance to earlier counterparts.

Other companies have followed suit, of course, and are selling recliners in sleeker silhouettes and modern fabrics. Ikea’s Muren recliner (\$299, [ikea.com](https://www.ikea.com)) is understated with a strip of piping on the trim and could easily be spiced up with a bright throw pillow or fur throw. Room & Board’s Wynton recliner (\$1,799-\$2,699, [roomandboard.com](https://www.roomandboard.com)) is impressively narrow at 30 inches wide; splurge for the leather if you want a classic feel without the clunk.

For a more on-trend look, consider the company’s [Dalton recliner](#) (\$1,699-\$2,999), which sits on wooden legs (or aluminum, if you prefer) and has a mid-century modern look, or Crate & Barrel’s Torino velvet recliner (\$1,499, [crateandbarrel.com](https://www.crateandbarrel.com)).

Most recliners need at least a foot between the chair and the wall to allow adequate space to recline, but that’s changing, too. In September, West Elm debuted its first power recliner, the Henry (\$999, [westelm.com](https://www.westelm.com)), which glides the seat forward into a horizontal position and lowers the back without significantly changing the chair back’s original position.



In September, West Elm debuted its first electric recliner, the Henry (\$999, westelm.com), which glides the seat forward into a horizontal position and lowers the back within the chair's original frame. (West Elm)



Crate & Barrel's Torino velvet recliner (\$1,499, crateandbarrel.com) has an on-trend look. (Janusz A. Gryglak/Crate & Barrel)

To keep up with such technical advances, companies are developing battery packs to allow you to float a power recliner in the middle of a room without the hassle of cords, and outfitting chairs with USB ports so you can charge your devices. Needless to say, most modern recliners ditched the lever a long time ago.

“So long as it doesn’t scream recliner, I like them,” Taylor said. “It’s hard to argue with wanting to put your feet up.”