

**S.A. "Sam" Jernigan  
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## **S.A. "Sam" Jernigan: Drip-dry decorating — Part II of II: Fabrics and furnishing solutions that hold up to the elements**



Furniture-loving Fidos are just one of the challenges for upholstery in today's busy homes — careful planning will ensure your new sofa will still look good years from now as not all fabrics are pooch or muddy-boots friendly.

Whether it's kids, dogs, or a family member with a messy profession or hobby, sometimes it's best to just give in and work around these built-in challenges.

In fact, it was adjusting to life with a new 15-year-old stepson many moons ago that inspired me to coin the phrase "drip-dry decorating"

when having to do just that myself.

After all, we want to enjoy our homes — versus being enslaved to their upkeep, right?

## Fabrics

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This is when you learn to fall in love with synthetics.

Polyester, in particular, is so rugged when it comes to virtually any form of human, canine or feline indiscretions.

As a man-made fiber, one of its best properties is its ultimate colorfastness — as the color is integrated into the threads themselves (solution dyed) unlike inks which are topically applied onto natural fibers like cotton or linen. This means you can sponge-clean polyester till the cows come home and the color will not lift — but don't try this with a screenprinted cotton!

Especially if rubbing aggressively with a damp cloth, you can burrow right through the typical Teflon-type coating on printed cottons and actually lift dye, resulting in blotchiness.

In fact, a key element to focus on is how heavily a given piece of upholstered furniture is used and select fibers and fabrications designed to perform accordingly.

Polyester can have a sheen or be low-luster, convincingly mimicking silk or raw silk among other looks.

It resists pilling from abrasion and is highly durable overall.

That includes being fade-resistant, so it will hold up beautifully when the sun returns from its current hiding place — as UV rays are also a concern for furnishings placed in proximity to windows/skylights.

Microfiber is the most rugged of synthetics typically.

That's because it's a blend of polyester and polyamide and visually mimics suede — soft to the touch, this selection makes for a cozy couch indeed.

As microfiber is water-resistant, most spills simply bead up and can be blotted quickly away.

There are some rather startling ways to clean polyester and microfiber including alcohol — either rubbing or a clear option like vodka (!) — and there are also special microfiber cleaning products.

The latter is good to know as, like most manufactured items, not all microfiber fabrics are created equal either.

However, oils may stain either polyester or microfiber and it's important to always check the fabric care instructions on a given piece of furniture for the manufacturer's specific cleaning recommendations.

A good natural fiber option for upholstery in an active household is wool, often blended with a synthetic to enhance cleanability.

Wool retains dye well, is fade resistant, and typically handles proximity to muddy shoes pretty graciously.

The overall best-performing natural fiber in terms of wet conditions is Ramie, which is eight times stronger than cotton and is actually at its strongest when wet.

While leather is often the most costly upholstery option, how it performs when exposed to a pair of soggy socks and other unwelcome sources of moisture can vary depending on the grade and whether the upholstery is “protected” or “not protected.”

You may also find a vinyl that effectively mimics leather and typically performs brilliantly.

Good news: the U.S. Fabric Wearability Code takes the guesswork out of selecting fabrics for upholstery by assigning ratings:

HD — Heavy Duty, MD — Medium Duty, LD — Light Duty and DD — Delicate Duty.

These appear on sample swatches. If you can't find the code, ask your retailer.

Specific fibers to avoid are: rayon, acetate and low-quality acrylics, which can also pill.

And then, of course, there are the styling and color considerations for selecting upholstery fabric — but that's a topic requiring a whole 'nuther article.

### Solid surfaces

When it comes to other aspects of feathering one's nest with unwelcome bits of Mother Nature arriving indoors on the bodies and paws of the household, think of non-wood options for tables and other high-traffic area accessories.

That includes wipeable surfaces made of glass, enamel, acrylic and metal — especially with rust finishes(!)

Pre-dinged vintage items are ideal when a bit more abuse simply adds to their charm.

Painted wood surfaces are also pretty forgiving when exposed to grimy teenagers and the rest of the brood.

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