

## Guide to Leather Terms

**Altered Leather** – Leather that has had the original surface removed (usually due to imperfections on the original surface) and a grain embossed into the leather. This is also referred to as corrected leather.

**Aniline Dyed or Aniline Leather** – Leather that has been dyed in a dye bath with some level of dye penetration.

**Bark Tanned** – Leather vegetable tanned mainly by means of tannin contained in the barks of trees.

**Blues, in the** – The state of hides which have been tanned once using chromium salts. This results in hides that are light blue in color.

**Bovine** – An animal belonging to the cattle family

**Breathability** – An important characteristic of full-grain leather due to its intact grain and pore structure. This means the leather adjusts to temperature and wicks away moisture and body heat, making it extremely comfortable.

**Brush Coloring** – The process of applying dyestuff to the leather by means of a brush. This is a cosmetic process. Dyes are not saturated into the hide.

**Buffed Leather** – Leather from which the top surface grain has been removed by abrasive or a bladed cylinder; or less generally by hand. In the case of upholstery leather the buffing process is invariably carried out by machine though sometimes incorrectly described as “hand buffed”.

**Chamois Leather** – Leather made from sheep or lambskin whose grain has been removed in the tanning process using oils.

**Chromium Salts** – Minerals used in the tanning process to make the leather supple and durable.

**Chrome Tanning** – Leather tanned either solely with chromium salts or with chromium salts together with quite small amounts of other tanning agents used merely to assist the chrome tanning process, and not a sufficient amount to alter the essential chrome-tanned character of the leather. Chrome tanning results in soft, mellow hides receptive to excellent color variety.

**Combination Tanning** – Leather which receives chrome and vegetable tanning producing suppleness and body in hides. Some tanning agents can penetrate notably but not necessarily into the interior of the material.

**Corrected Grain** – Commonly referred to as top grain. Lacking an intact full grain surface. Usually heavily pigmented or of another surface appearance which has been built by various finishing techniques.

**Curing** – Tanning process of cleaning the leather – consists of soaking, liming and fleshing.

**Degrained Leather** – Leather from which the grain has been removed after tanning, by splitting, abrading or other process.

**Dressing** – Term used to describe the post-tanning processes which influence the color and handle of the leather prior to the surface coating and finishing process.

**Drum Dyeing** – The application of dyestuffs to leather by the immersion of the leather in a drum that is tumbled. This process allows full dye penetration into the fiber.

**Embossed Leather** – Usually corrected grain, in which a pattern is applied by extreme pressure in a press to give a unique design or imitation of full grain characteristics. Sometimes embossing emulates other leathers such as alligator.

**Fat Wrinkle** – Wrinkles in the grain of leather caused by fat deposits in the animal that are part of the beauty in leathers. Fat wrinkles are not visible in imitation or inferior leathers.

**Finish** – Generally defines a surface application on leather to color, protect or mask imperfections. More specifically it refers to all processes done to leather after it has been tanned.

**Full Grain** – Leather bearing the original grain surface as exposed by removal of the hair and with none of the surface removed by buffering or splitting. This grain is what gives each type of leather its distinctive appearance and style.

**Glazed Finish** – A glossy, smooth, sheen imparted to leather by polishing with a glass or steel rollers.

**Grain** – The pattern characterized by the pores, cells, wrinkles and other characteristics which constitute the natural texture of leather.

**Grain Character** – The natural markings on the surface of the leather.

**Embossed Grain** – An artificial grain pressed into the surface of the top grain leather from which the original grain has been removed.

**Grain Layer** – The portion of a hide or skin extending from the surface exposed by removal of hair or wool.

**Grain Sueded** – A buffing process to raise the fibers on the grain side of a hide or skin to produce a velvet-like effect. This is also known as “Nubuck” leather.

**Hand** – An industry term used to describe the feel and suppleness of a fabric or leather e.g. the soft feel of leather is known as soft hand.

**Hand Antiqued** – A two-toned aged or antique appearance created either by rubbing off a dark contrast coat to reveal a lighter base shade; or by rubbing in dyes or pigments into a natural dyed leather. Hand antiqued finishes are used mainly for more traditional furniture.

**Hide** – The outer covering of a mature or fully grown large mammal.

**Hide Split** – Any leather made from cutting/slicing of a hide horizontally.

**Leather** – Hide or skin which retains its original fiber more or less intact. The hide is then treated and colored to enable it to be a covering for furniture, walls or floors. The hair or wool may or may not be removed. In the case of the “hair on hide”, typically it is referred to as fur.

**Liming** – The process of removing the hair from a hide to prepare hides for tanning process.

**Metalized Leather** – Leather given a metallic luster by application of metallic foils or powders.

**Matte finish** – A flat or dull finish.

**Milling** – A process which produces suppleness in hides by rotating them in tanning drums.

**Mineral Tanned** – Leather that has been tanned with mineral salts such as aluminum, chromium or zirconium salts.

**Napa** – Soft full grain gloving or clothing leather made from unsplit sheep or lambskin or kid-skin. It is usually tanned with alum and chromium salts and dyed throughout the substance.

**Nubuck** – Cattle hide leather buffed on the grain side to give a velvety surface; white or colored.

**Oak Tannage (Oak Bark Tanned)** – Originally the tannage of leather was almost entirely with oak bark. Later the term applied to tannage with a blend containing oak tannin. Now, it is loosely applied to any tannage of heavy leather with vegetable extracts.

**Oil Tanned** – Leather tanned with oil. Primarily used on sheepskin to produce chamois leather.

**Parchment** – Translucent or opaque material with a smooth surface suitable for writing, bookbinding and other purposes. It is made from the hides of sheep or goatskin by drying out the limed material without applying tannage. The material being thoroughly cleansed and degreased and smoothed during the process.

**Patent Leather** – Leather with a glossy, impermeable finish produced by successive coats of drying oils, varnish or synthetic resins.

**Patina** – A natural characteristic that develops on full grain leather through normal use over a period of time. Another term used interchangeably is “weathering”.

**Pearlized** – Colored leather which results in a pearlized or soft sheen luster.

**Perforated** – Small die-cut holes that form a pattern. The hole size and pattern may vary.

**Pigmented Finish** – Leather whose surface has been sprayed with an opaque finish.

**Plated Leather, Plating** – Pressing leather with a heated metal plate under high pressure to cover imperfections.

**Printed Leather** – Leather which is either embossed or silk-screened.

**Pull-Up** – Full grain leather that derives its color from dyes. When leather is pulled, the oils or the waxes in the leather cause the color to dissipate and become lighter in areas which are pulled tight.

**Rawhide** – Partially or completely untanned leather.

**Rough Tanned Leather** – Leather, which after tanning, has not been further processed but has merely been dried out. The term “rough tanned” is chiefly in connection with vegetable- tanned hide leathers.

**Sauvage** – The two- tone effect with a mottled appearance that adds depth and character to the leather created two ways: by blending similar colors during the dyeing process or by a mechanical process during finishing.

**Selecting** – The sorting or grading of hides and skins using predetermined criteria such as area, thickness, grain quality.

**Semi-Aniline Leather** – The term is used to describe aniline dyed leather which has only a small amount of clear or pigmented finish. Leather whose surface coating only partly obscures the natural grain.

**Shave** – Hides are shaved to a particular thickness after tannage by a large shaving machine. The excess is removed from the bottom of the hide.

**Shrunken Grain** – Leather specially tanned so as to shrink the grain layer and resulting in grain surface of uneven folds and valleys, sometimes referred to as “drawn grain”. This process is used to enhance the grain character of the leather.

**Skiver** – A thin, soft leather made of the grain side of a split sheep or goatskin.

**Split Leather** – Leather made from the bottom split. By and large these splits are embossed to emulate hide grains.

**Strap Leather** – Heavyweight, vegetable- tanned leather usually for industrial use.

**Suede** – Velvet-like nap finish produced on leather by abrasive action. This is generally called Nubuck or grain sueded.

**Tannin** – Any various solvent, astringent substances of plant origin used in tanning leather.

**Tanning** – Processing whereby raw hide and skins are converted into leather.

**Tipped Leather** – Leather which has a contrast color coat (either lighter or darker than the base shade) applied by a roller to the tips of an embossed grain.

**Top Grain** – An overused term commonly used to refer to corrected grain leather.

**Trim** – The removal of the outer edges of the hide not suitable for making leather.

**Top Finish** – leather which has been given a final coating of a finish to confer special properties such as gloss, color level, fastness to wet and staining.

**Vegetable Tanned** – Leather tanned exclusively with vegetable tanning agents, or with such materials together with small amounts of other agents used merely to assist in the tanning process. Vegetable tanning is principally used to produce firm, non-stretchy leather for shoe soles, belts and other leather goods.

**Wet Blue Leather** – Leather, which after chrome tanning, has not been further processed and is sold in wet condition.

**Yield** – The amount of useable area after all waste and imperfections have been discarded.