# The Daily Telegraph

**FINAL** No. 44,527 **Britain's biggest-selling quality daily** Friday, August 14, 1998 **45p**

**How Emma Thompson cured her insomnia**

**Wellbeing, Page 14**

Can a good bed cure insomnia? **Judith Woods**, a very light sleeper, tries out a heavenly affair

# Sweet dreams are made of this

Picture: TONY STONE

**Lie back and enjoy it: a Savoir mattress contains 864 pocketed springs, cotton, fleece and plenty of horsehair**

COMING from an Oscar-winning actress accustomed to the most chi-chi establishments, Emma Thompson's eulogy after a night at the Savoy was praise indeed. The bed, she gushed, was "like sleeping on a cloud". She promptly spent £4,000 on an identical cumulus.

Having previously been plagued by insomnia, Thompson declared her money well spent; she had not suffered a sleepless night since making her purchase.

Liza Minnelli, The Aga Khan's family and the Rothschilds have all been similarly taken with the Savoy's beds. King Hassan of Morocco was so rested after a night at Claridge's – part of the Savoy Group – that he furnished his palace with 24 bespoke beds. Minnelli, meanwhile, opted for the 6ft 6in square American king-size, made to order by Savoir Beds, based in west London, which has supplied the Savoy since 1905.

Alistair Hughes, director of the company, says that the secret of a Savoir bed lies in its soft-but-firm mattress, containing 864 pocketed springs, cotton, fleece and plenty of horsehair. More important still, is the divan or base, in which the heavy-gauge springs are lashed together for added stability. The mattresses come in standard or firm versions, but for a generation accustomed to sleeping on vogueish wooden-slatted pine beds, it is the support of a well-sprung divan that makes for a truly nocturnal revelation.

The only proper way to test a bed, according to Mr Hughes, is to sleep in it, so I took myself off to the Capital Hotel in Knightsbridge – another client with cumuli. As bed-testers go, I am perfect material: I am a featherlight sleeper with permanently pricked ears; better still, I am a fussy, fractious Princess-and-the Pea sleeper who can detect a lump in a mattress before my legs have so much as swung off the carpet.

In hotels, I seldom sleep a wink. I invariably fret at the thunderous reverberations of the air conditioning, and lie resentfully listening to somebody tinkering with the Corby trouser press three floors below. I have been known to retreat to the bath, trailing a duvet behind me, rather than endure the horrors of a lumpy, sub-standard mattress. Even a cloud, then, seemed unlikely to soothe my egregiously restless slumber.

The bed was a generous 6ft wide and a yielding-but-firm sort of affair. I suspect that Emma Thompson had a softer model than mine; for if she bedded down on a cloud, I can liken my experience only to being draped across an enormous, well-toned pectoral.

There was *give*, but not too much; there was *take*, but not to excess. It was slightly bouncy, but taut; springy but supportive; and above all, gloriously, *narcoleptically* comfortable. Feeling cosseted and blissfully free of Corby trouser press distractions, I drifted into sleep lying straight across the bed.

I was astounded by the quality of my night's sleep, and were I a film star, I might well have leapt up in the morning and suavely ordered a bed-to-go on room service. Sadly, my credit card could not quite run to the £3,850 needed for the mattress and divan.

Mr Hughes, however is unapologetic about the cost: "It's a lot of money, of course, but people are quite happy to spend a few grand on a sofa which they will probably sit on for little more than an hour a day. But you sleep in bed for at least six hours every night. If you work out that one of our beds will last 30 years, that's 50p a night! That's less than 10p an hour."

It actually works out at 37p a night, and 6p an hour, so his logic does make sense. Truth be told, most of us are more concerned with the aesthetics of the headboard than the longevity of the mattress. Worse still, we commit the cardinal sin of bed use on a daily basis.

"You should *never* sit on the side of a bed to put on your shoes", says Mr Hughes, fixing me with a reproachful gaze. "That places too much pressure on the springs." To counter such human frailties, Savoir beds are reinforced round the edges with a horsehair roll.

But, back to matters more celestial. It appears that clouds are particularly *au courant* in the bed world. Even the futon, with all its connotations of hard-floor asceticism, is moving in the general direction of fluffiness. The Original Futon Factory in north London is about to launch the Cloud Nine model, which features a second mattress comprising nine layers of lambswool.

Boris Becker is an aficionado of the standard Japanese futon, as are Martin Shaw and Annie Lennox. The rather austere attractions of sleeping on what to many minds is a glorified sleeping bag, are well documented; surely, inserting an extra mattress is cheating? Dennis Groves, proprietor of the Original Futon Factory, concedes that an additional 3in of lambswool might be considered a luxury by purists. But there are other considerations that make modern futons rather more complicated than the original three layers of cotton laid out on a tatami mat of rice straw.

"The tatami mat absorbs moisture from a thin futon," says Groves. "But if you have a thick futon, you really need a ventilator base underneath to allow air to circulate."

Thus, far from floating free, a Cloud Nine is supported on a pine base, with Indonesian rubberwood legs. Then comes a 5½in mattress of cotton and coir and finally the lambswool. The cost for a kingsize is £570.

"A futon is definitely superior to most beds," says Grove. "I wouldn't criticise a well-sprung bed, but I can guarantee that my futon is as good as any £4,000 bed.

"Essentially you need to sleep on something horizontal, and to equalize the pressure on your pressure points. Six inches of cotton and coir won't sag and it is enough to give you the comfort you need."

But back at Savoir beds, the appliance of science is rejected in favour of a personal touch that borders on the intimate. Not only will they make your bed – they will gladly lie in it as well.

"I've got a client who has bought a mattress and divan from us, and wants another one exactly the same," says Hughes. "So I'm off to Maida Vale to have a bounce."

☐ *Savoir Beds: 0181-838 4838*
☐ *Capital Hotel, London SW3: 0171-589 5171*

## Don't rush your choice... have a lie down in the shop

**As a general rule, a bed should be renewed every 10 years or so – sooner if you find yourself rolling unintentionally towards your sleeping companion. According to Dr Christopher Turner of the British Chiropractic Association, if you pay less than £300 for a bed it will last you for four years at most. He recommends spending at least £1,000 per person; you will, after all, be spending around 29,200 hours in it over the course of a decade.**

**Don't rush to choose a bed. Take time to test it; a reputable shop will be quite happy for you to lie down for about 20 minutes (Dr Turner advises patients to take a book). Sleeping companions should test a bed together.**

**The term "orthopaedic" is purely marketing hype used to sell firm beds, so ignore it. A bed should be neither too firm nor too soft, but should support the body.**

**Couples should buy as wide a bed as they can afford, as this will mean increased comfort. Where sleeping companions are of considerably different weights, they should also consider buying two mattresses of differing firmness, which can be zipped together.**