

## The Art of Custom Upholstery

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One of Louisiana's leading upholsters had humble beginnings in a one-room shop.

Twenty-five years after launching his business, Leonel Valladares is now poised as New Orleans' most popular craftsman, with clients ranging from the Windsor Court Hotel to the Royal Sonesta and Ralph's On the Park. Leonel's Fine Upholstery and Furniture, located in Kenner, creates outstanding pieces of furniture for some of the most luxurious homes, restaurants, and hotels in the state.

Born in San Pedro Sula, Honduras in 1953, Valladares learned the skill of upholstery in his homeland. He immigrated to New Orleans at the age of 17 with his father, who played in a band in the Crescent City. But there were no upholstery jobs available at the time so the young artist moved to New York City in the early 1970s and honed his upholstery skills in several manufacturing shops. Weary of the cold weather and missing his family, Valladares moved back to New Orleans in 1979 and began working for Interiors and Extras, but this limited his style so he decided to start his own upholstery company in his apartment.

Leonel's Fine Upholstery and Furniture offers the kind of unmatched quality and craftsmanship, customer service and attention to detail that has attracted major clients. "We did the Windsor Court hotel in 1991. We did the lobby, the suites, and now we are starting 100 rooms this year," Valladares says. "We do the sofas, chairs, vanities, and ottomans. They order the fabric from me and then I design it. They ask me to pick out the colors and everything." Other clients have included Ralph's On the Park. "We made the booths for them, and also for Bourbon House. We did 300 chairs for them. For the Royal Sonesta, we did most of the furniture for the rooms. At One River Place, we did all the furniture for the lobbies on the first and second floors. We work with many interior designers in New Orleans."

Leonel's Fine Upholstery and Furniture also does beautiful work for home owners. "We charge \$75 for an estimate. We stop by their house, and we deduct the \$75 after we do the job. We do sofas, chairs, custom headboards, plus we do a lot of re-upholstery too." The re-upholstery jobs include love seats, club chairs, daybeds, ottomans, sofas, dining room chairs, wing chairs, and chaise lounges. Custom upholstery jobs include club chairs, wing chairs, chaise lounges, beds, sectional sofas, love seats, headboards, and footboards. A large emphasis is placed on customer service.

"Many people send me a picture in an email, and it makes it a lot easier," says Valladares. "We can give a price by phone also."

Leonel's has thousands of designer fabrics to select from. They will do alterations to existing furniture, create custom down and feather cushions, bolsters and pillows, and do reparations to antique furniture in addition to their exclusive custom made residential and commercial upholstery. Leonel's strives to create outstanding pieces of furniture that will not only entertain guests but will also become a true reflection of the owner.

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