

About Leather

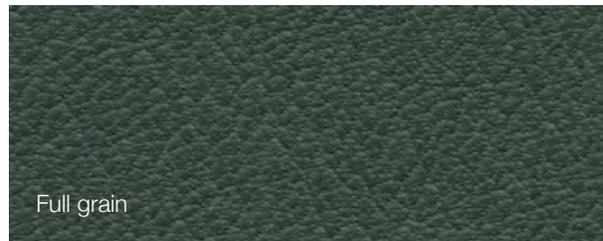
Types of Leather

Leather is an ancient, durable material created through a process of tanning animal rawhide to preserve it and make it pliable when dry. Many features of natural leather make it superior to synthetic products including durability, comfort, beauty, suppleness, and resilience. Plus, leather's ability to patina and absorb body oils continues to enhance the leather's appearance and makes it more beautiful over time.

Leather can broadly be divided into full grain, enhanced grain, corrected grain, top grain and split leathers.

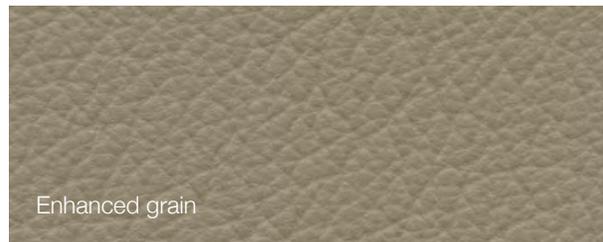
Full Grain Leather

Full grain leather has no surface alterations. The hide's natural pores and grain textures are intact and it will develop a patina over time. The tiny pinholes dotting the surface indicate the hide's open hair follicles. The presence of these hair follicles demonstrates a high quality surface which has not been altered to conceal flaws. This full grain surface breathes. It keeps the user comfortable as it adjusts to body temperature. Full grain leather is the highest quality, most beautiful, and most comfortable leather available.



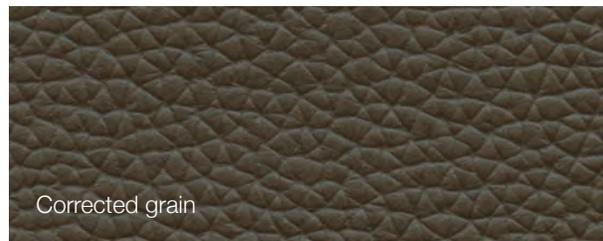
Enhanced Grain Leather

Enhanced grain leather is a full grain with an artificial grain embossed over the natural grain. Enhanced grain leather has the same comfort and breathability of a full grain, but the surface has received minor alteration to improve grain appearance.



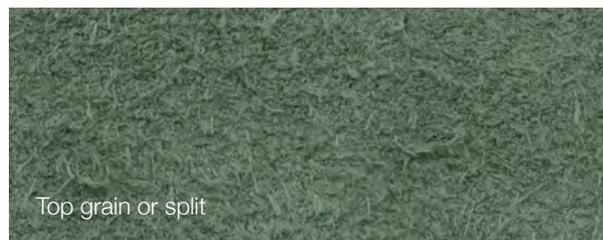
Corrected Grain Leather

Corrected grain leather is produced from the upper portion of the hide. The surface is lightly sanded or refined then embossed with an artificial grain texture. Corrected grain leathers have a more consistent appearance across the entire surface.



Top Grain or Split Leather

Top grain leather is produced from a split. Split leather is leather created from the fibrous part of the hide left once the upper portion of the rawhide has been separated from the hide. Unlike full grain leather, a top grain product begins with an inferior raw material. Its grain surface is removed and an artificial grain pattern applied. Top grain leather has to be heavily pigmented and heavily altered in order to compensate for imperfections and lack of natural fiber structure.



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Full Grain versus Top Grain Leathers

Spinneybeck full grain leathers are superior to top grain leathers.

They are stronger. Full grain leathers have greater tensile strength and are less likely to ‘puddle’ than leathers which have lost the surface layers. Top grain leathers have had the upper portion of the dermis removed therefore losing the strongest, tightest, and most dense part of the hide. They are not as strong as full grain leathers and will permanently stretch over time. Whereas properly maintained full grain leather will never look worn and will outwear textiles and top grain leather many times over. Since fabrics are woven, changes in their appearance from age and use detract from their beauty. Leather will absorb body oils during use and enhance the leather’s appearance over time. This improvement in appearance is called patina and it’s a unique characteristic of natural leather.

They are more comfortable. Full grain leathers breathe and ventilate body heat away from the body, allowing them to remain cool and comfortable in summer while not becoming cold and rigid in winter. Conversely, top grain leathers have their surfaces clogged with heavy applications of finish and will not wick away heat. In addition, they feel artificial as silicone-based fillers are used to patch holes and deep barbed wire scars and does not adjust to your body temperature nor wick away moisture.

They are more beautiful. Full grain leathers produced from the highest quality of raw materials have depth of color and require less finish, allowing their natural markings to show. The light, natural finish will not crack or peel and will develop a beautiful protective patina over time.

They are more supple. Full grain leathers are natural, supple, and provide a robust hand. This natural characteristic adds to the luxury, value, and comfort of the leather and is not evident in lower grade top grain leathers.

They are longer lasting. Full grain leathers, which have all of their natural properties intact, will breathe and will maintain high moisture content and a proper pH balance. Top grain leathers receive heavy applications of finish which seal the surface. The pore structure is removed preventing the leather to breathe.

They have a larger hide yield. An average of 80–90 percent yield per hide provides a lower waste factor than top grain corrected material meaning less square footage is required and a lower waste factor for cutting patterns.



Full grain hide

Characteristics of Full Grain Leather

No matter how advanced the tannery, each and every piece of leather produced is unique in character. A quality hide’s natural origins are displayed on its surface. Look for these essential characteristics of full grain quality:

- Fat wrinkles or growth lines: subtly shaded bands on the grain side of a hide
- Natural variations in grain texture and shading.
- Small scars: on a quality product they do not render large portions of the hide unusable.
- A similar shade of color on the suede side: this demonstrates superior base dye penetration.
- The depth and shading of color on the grain side is comparable to that of a transparent color stain on a piece of fine hardwood furniture

Choosing full grain leather is the smart, long-term solution if comfort, quality, and durability are important.

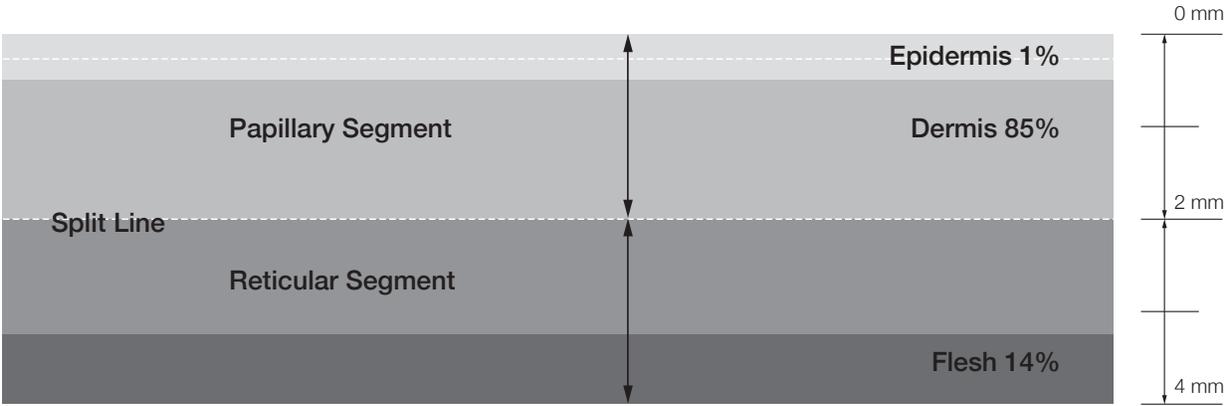
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Hide Cross Section

When Spinneybeck hides are split, the bottom segment of the hide is sold to tanners who process suede or reticular leather. Spinneybeck does not produce any products from the reticular portion of the hide.

The fiber structure is tightest at the uppermost layer of the hide. Leathers commonly referred to as top grain have the epidermis and the upper portion of the dermis removed, resulting in products which have lost the ability to breathe because they are heavily pigmented with finish applications which color the surface, protect the leather and mask imperfections.

Spinneybeck uses only the finest bovine raw material for production of full grain leathers. Old world craft combined with premium select raw materials provide the following features: specialized retannage, a luxurious suppleness of hand, a full, rich base dye, color clarity, and a breathable protective finish.



Cross Section of Typical Bovine Hide
Not to Scale

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Glossary

Leather is not a generic product and leather terms are not widely understood or standardized. This brief glossary includes the most important terms used within the leather industry to help evaluate leather qualities.

Altered leather: Leather that has had the original surface of the skin removed (usually due to imperfections in the original surface) and a new grain embossed into the leather. This is also called corrected grain. Most top grain leathers have altered or corrected grain surfaces.

Aniline: A colorless, oily liquid made from coal tar used in making dyes and resins in organic synthesis

Aniline dye: Any dye produced synthetically from coal tar products

Aniline dyed or aniline leather: Leather that has been dyed in a dye bath with some level of dye penetration

Bark tanned: Leather which has been vegetable tanned mainly by means of tannins contained in the bark of trees

Base dyes: Common (usually lower grade) dye colors used in custom colored leathers which are quickly made;—hides are dyed in advance awaiting the spray application of custom colors

Blues: The state of hides which have been tanned once using chromium salts—these hides are light blue in color

Bovine: An animal belonging to the cattle or ox family

Breathability: An important characteristic of a full grain leather. Due to its intact grain and pore structure, full grain leather breathes which means that the leather adjusts to temperature and wicks away moisture and body heat, making it very comfortable to sit on.

Brush coloring: The process of applying dyestuff to the leather by means of a brush where the dyes are not saturated into the hide

Buffed leather: Leather from which the grain is removed by an abrasive or bladed cylinder for . altered or corrected grain leather

Chrome tannage: Leather tanned with chromium salts resulting in soft, mellow hides receptive to excellent color variety

Combination tannage: Leather which receives chrome and vegetable tannage producing suppleness and body in the hide

Corrected grain: Commonly referred to as top grain leather—lacks an intact full grain surface and is usually heavily pigmented

Cowhide: Term specifically applied to leather made from hides of cows, although the term is sometimes loosely used to designate any leather tanned from hides of animals of the bovine species

Crock: The transfer of color from the leather surface; more commonly found in naked leathers.

Degrained leather: Leather from which the grain has been removed after tanning, by splitting, abrading or other processes.

Drum dyeing: The application of dyestuffs to leather by the immersion of the leather in a drum that is tumbled—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 leathers are embossed to make them appear to be another leather, such as embossing an alligator pattern into cowhide.

Enhanced full grain: Full grain leather which has received minor surface alteration to improve grain appearance

Fat wrinkle: Wrinkles in the grain of leather caused by fat deposits in the animal, that create beauty in the leather—not visible in imitation grain leather

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

Full grain: Leather in which the grain layer or dermis (which gives each type of leather its distinctive appearance) has not been removed

Full hand: This defines leather which is full bodied and robust; also called round hand or full round hand

Grain (leather): The outside of the hide or skin consisting of the pores, cells, wrinkles and other characteristics which constitute the natural texture of the leather

Grain character: The natural markings on the surface of the leather

Grain, embossed: An artificial grain pressed into the surface of top grain leather from which the original grain has been removed

Grain sueded: A buffing process to raise the fibers on the grain side of a hide or skin to produce a velvet-like effect—also known as “nubuck” leather

Hand: A leather industry term used to describe the feel, i.e. suppleness or fullness of upholstery leather

Heavy leather: A somewhat indefinite term, generally understood to include vegetable tanned sole, belting, strap, and mechanical leathers manufactured from unsplit cattle hides

Hide: The pelt of a large animal

Kip: The hide from a grass-fed, immature bovine

Leather: An animal hide which has been preserved and dressed for use

Leatherette: A manufactured product which imitates leather

Liming: This process includes removal of the hair, preparing the hides for the tanning process

Matte finish: A flat or dull finish

Milling: A process which produces suppleness in hides

Naked leather: A dyed leather which has received no topical application that may mask or alter the natural state of the leather

Natural grain: A leather which retains the full, original grain

Nubuck: A brushed, grain-sueded leather

Oak tannage: 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

Overtannage: See Retannage

Papillary: The upper portion of the hide which has been separated from the reticular or split layer

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

Perforated: In leather, this is the process of die-cutting small holes to form a pattern. The holes can vary in size, density, and pattern

Pigmented: Leather that has been sprayed with a pigmented, opaque finish

Rawhide: Untanned or partially tanned cattle hides

Reconstructed leather: Material composed of collagen fibers, obtained from macerated hide pieces, which have been reconstructed into a fibrous material

Retannage: A modifying secondary tannage applied after intermediate operations following the primary tannage to further enrich and enhance the quality of the leather; all leathers are not retanned, however, Spinneybeck leathers are always retanned

Round hand: A full-handed leather, usually slightly swelled through tannage and fat liquoring

Saturation: Full saturation of tanning, fat liquors and dyes are essential in the production of fine leathers

Shrunken grain leather: A full, natural grain leather which is shrunken to enlarge and enhance the grain character of the leather

Side: Half a hide cut along the backbone

Side leather: Hides which have been cut in half, forming two “sides” in order to better accommodate small tannery equipment

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

Skive: The shave, slice or divide; to peel into a thin layer, or to reduce leather to a specific thickness

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

Snuffed: The grain surface is abraded with brushes, emery wheel or sandpaper; leather is snuffed for the purpose of removing defective grain or sueding the surface of the leather

Split leather: Leather made from the bottom split, or reticular layer of the hide, which has an imitation grain embossed into a heavily finished pigmented surface to simulate papillary leather

Splitting: Cutting leather into two or more layers preparatory to tanning

Strap leather: Heavyweight, vegetable tanned leather used for industrial purposes or to support seats and backs on certain types of seating

Suede: A fibrous leather, typically made from the reticular part of the hide

Sueding: The process of raising fibers on the grain side of a hide or skin to give a velvet nap effect generally referred to as “nubuck” or “grain sueded”

Table dyeing: The application of dyestuff to leather with a brush; the leather being laid on a table. Also called brush coloring

Table run: Leathers which are not graded

Tannin: Any various solvent, astringent substances of plant origin used in tanning leather

Top grain: An over-used term commonly used to refer to corrected grain leather—see Corrected Grain

Trim: The removal of the outer edges of the hide not suitable for making leather

Unfinished leather: Normally defines aniline dyed, naked leathers with no additional application intended to finish, color or treat in any way that would alter the natural characteristics of the leather

Upholstery leather: A general term for leather processed for many uses, including furniture, automobiles, aircraft, architectural applications, etc.

Vegetable tanning: The conversion of raw hide into leather by use of vegetable tannins which produces leather with greater body and firmness than the more general method of chromium tanning

Weight: The weight of leather is measured in ounces per square foot—Spinneybeck upholstery leathers range from 2.5 ounces per square foot (763 grams per square meter) to 3.5 ounces per square foot (1068 grams per square meter)

Wet blue leather: Leather which after chrome tanning has not been further processed and is sold in the wet condition