

REST EASY

The nuts and bolts—or lack thereof—behind a local factory's greenest mattress. BY ANNE VICKMAN

The sounds of pounding, stapling, and shearing fill the air at the 115,000-square-foot Simmons Bedding Company factory in Agawam—one of 17 in the U.S.—as workers cobble together what amounts to thousands of beds a week. But the most interesting mattress here is constructed in a more serene manner—and a more environmentally responsible one at that. »

Simmons's Natural Care line, locally manufactured in Agawam, was designed to be as eco-friendly as possible.



I'm here to witness the making of a Natural Care bed, one of the most eco-friendly models in the industry and Simmons's first "green" mattress line. Created in partnership with Danny Seo—the quick-witted environmental lifestyle expert and former HGTV host with an inexhaustible enthusiasm for saving the planet—these mattresses are made with as many renewable components as possible, including natural latex, sustainable wood, and soybean-enhanced foam. No springs are required—instead of steel coils, the company uses thermoplastic glue to bind parts together.

The Natural Care concept came to be in 2006, after Seo was unable to find an environmentally sound mattress without ordering online. "I wanted something that I could touch, feel, and try before I bought it," he says. Unlike many celebrities

who endorse products, Seo doesn't just want his face on the line—he wants his hands all over it. He spent more than a year working with Simmons's product development team to source materials, which were selected for their combination of eco-friendliness and durability.

Seo and I watch as workers cut, glue, and cover Natural Care's top-of-the-line, queen-size "Salathe" mattress with Tencel, a fiber that's soft, hypoallergenic, and biodegradable, unlike the synthetic polyesters found in many other beds. After the mattress is flipped and all 183 pounds slam back down onto the table, another employee uses an industrial sewing machine to close up the fabric. While a regular spring-coil mattress can take hours to make, the Salathe comes together in less than 30 minutes.

1 Workers sew exterior fabric pieces together with care. **2** Strong Kevlar-based thread is used to stitch up the mattress. **3** It takes an employee about two minutes to finish this job using an industrial sewing machine. **4** A tension device prevents skips and runs in the thread during the sewing process. **5** The latex layers are attached using thermoplastic glue—no coils.

The argument for buying a green mattress is two-fold: It's healthier for the environment *and* for consumers. According to the Product Stewardship Institute, millions of mattresses end up in landfills and incinerators each year, and the average mattress can take years to break down, if it does at all. The components of the Natural Care line, however, are largely biodegradable. What's more, many standard mattresses contain synthetic latex—often made from petrochemicals—as well as polyurethane foam, which can release toxic compounds over time thanks to a cocktail of fire retardants and other chemicals. Natural Care's latex is made from rubber-tree sap treated with a salt-based rather than a chemical-based fire retardant; it also repels both dust mites and mold.

And these mattresses are built to stick around. When »

100 percent natural latex proved to biodegrade too quickly, Seo commissioned a blend of 65 percent natural and 35 percent synthetic foams to guarantee the beds will endure for 20 years.

Several retailers now stock the Natural Care line, but Jordan's Furniture is the only one that carries the "Salathe" model, which ranges from \$2,247 to \$2,947. Definitely pricier than your basic mattress (around \$660, according to the International Sleep Products Association), but Seo argues that the cost is worthwhile considering most of us will spend a third of our life sleeping. "I sleep on [this bed] every night," he says. "[The difference] is like night and day." ■



Above, a close look at the Tencel fabric with ultrasuede piping. Below, a worker positions a layer of latex foam into place.

