

Hidden Under The Bed

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[CBS] This story was written by CBS News correspondent Mark Phillips.

Frankly, the story didn't seem all that interesting when it first came around. Somebody higher up the editorial food chain had come across an article in one of the British Sunday papers about a bed that was selling for £14,000, an eye-watering \$25,000.

Could I please (they almost never say please, but what the hey, it's that generous time of year), could I please turn the bed into one of those gee-wiz, end pieces that newscast producers think people talk about around the water cooler the next day?

Now, \$25,000 is a lot of money for a bed and the capacity of the rich for self-indulgence can be modestly entertaining and even enlightening in a perverse sort of way. "Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous" was, after all, a nice little earner for years.

But once you get beyond the sticker shock, what do you say next to fill up the two or so minutes of story time? It turns out, rather a lot. I hate it when editorial upperlings are right.

The pricey bed turned out to be just the key that unlocked the story. What people were willing to spend previously unheard of amounts of money on wasn't so much a bed, as sleep. Sleep, those who know say, is the new sex.

It's supply and demand. When a desired commodity becomes scarce, the price goes up. And, whether for reasons of aging, having children later in life or general anxiety, sleep has now become so precious it's become a sellers' market. Apparently, we're buying.

Who, exactly, is "we"? It is professional couples who have put off starting families until well into their 30s — or even later? Or it is couples who may have had their children earlier and who are finding that, once the chicks have left the nest, the blissful eight hours of shut-eye they once took for granted has gone with the years? And so money is being thrown at the problem.

The people who track consumerism — the so-called trend analysts — have been following this shift in spending for years. Where once people spent money on bigger and bigger houses or on their living rooms and kitchens, or on their cars — generally in ways in which they could show off their wealth and taste — they're now spending it on their bedrooms.

The amount of money going into bedroom furniture, appliances and other doo-dads has risen almost 40 percent, faster than any other sector of the market in the past five years.

Some of that is going on high-tech flat screen TVs and entertainment centers, built in fridges to chill the requisite designer drinking water (or something stronger, one hopes) and automatic fragrance dispensers. But a lot of it is going on spectacularly expensive beds.

In some cases the price reflects technology ... reclining beds, heated beds, cooled beds, vibrating beds, alarm clock beds. But in at least one case the technology had gone into the bed itself.



The bed that launched this road to discovery is made by a company in the English West Country that claims to have reinvented the mattress by eliminating the mattress. Instead of working with soft materials like padded fabrics and foam, which they say you can't really engineer, they've designed what looks like a bed of plastic-tipped nails, which they say you can. Beneath the plastic is a complex mechanism of interconnected rods and springs that conform to the body's shape.

It is, I can report, exquisitely comfortable and people can decide for themselves whether it's worth the money — the thought of the price would keep me awake. But the Ammique bed has become something of a phenomenon.

Luxury hotels around the elegant tourist center of Bath have installed the bed and report people booking that particular suite because of the sleep they hope to get in it.

Maybe it's all clever marketing and the bed would be getting less attention if it weren't so expensive. But the fact that people are prepared to pay large wads of cash in the hope of sleep is something.

The market analysts have another theory — the Big Bad World Theory. Beyond the issue of age and sleep is the issue of threat and vulnerability. The bedroom has become the final refuge, the ultimate sanctuary in a post-9/11 world. It's the equivalent circling the wagons or pulling the covers over your head.

Money is not just being spent on luxury for this inner-sanctum; it's being spent on security as well. Panic rooms are frequently attached to the bedroom or the room itself fortified.

The intent seems to be to buy not just comfort, but peace of mind. Sleep tight.

By Mark Phillips