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## The \$30,000 bed

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GLORIA KIM

*Boomers used to laugh at those infomercial 'luxury' beds for old folks. Now they're getting out their wallets.*

When Fran Lebowitz said that life is something that happens when you can't get to sleep, she wasn't reckoning with Massachusetts Institute of Technology professor Ted Selker's prototype multimedia bed. A special infrared camera above the bed follows the movement of your retina and cornea so that a fluttering of your eyes in the morning signals the alarm to go off and shutting the eyes lets the computer know you'd like more sleep. The bed can even sense if you've stopped breathing and send off an alarm.

It's not sleep that's the new sex, as everyone says now -- it's beds. Gone are the days when an expensive model was the domain of the elderly and your only "luxury" option was the Craftmatic adjustable bed of infomercial fame. Now even people like former swimsuit model Kathy Ireland (with her Kathy Ireland Home brand) are in the high-end-bed business. And your options are myriad. There are beds with temperature-cooling fabrics, beds with TVs, and beds made of foam developed by NASA. There's even something called the Ammique bed, made of plastic rods topped with small plastic domed caps -- 7,800 of them for the king size, to be precise -- that contour to the body and allow free flow of air so the entire bed (there's no mattress) can be steam-cleaned and vacuumed. The price? A cool \$30,000.

"We're seeing an increasing number of people spend \$1,500 or more on a new mattress and box spring," says Dave Friesema, a vice-president and general manager of Sleep Country Canada. The International Sleep Products Association in the U.S. has found that luxury bed sets over the \$1,000 mark accounted for about 25 per cent of the market in 2004, compared to about 15 per cent four years ago. The surge in popularity is due in large part, it seems, to the aging boomer population. "Baby boomers believe in fitness, health and wellness, and a good bed is a big part of that," says Karl Kunkel, 56, senior editor of North Carolina-based Home Furnishing News. "And because we have tremendous buying power, a lot of mattress manufacturers are marketing to us and offering high-tech beds."

High-end hotels have also become savvy about the needs of their wealthy boomer clientele and have begun stocking better and better mattresses. Starwood Hotels &



Resorts Worldwide were the first to roll out high-tech models in 1999 with the Heavenly Bed, developed with Serta for their Westin hotels. Some months after the beds started appearing, several NBA basketball teams found out the Westin they were staying in didn't yet have the new beds, and threatened to move to another hotel. The beds are now for sale on the hotel group's website, and Starwood has designed and stocked other luxury beds for their Sheraton and Four Points hotels. Meanwhile, two boutique hotels in Britain, Cotswold House and Bath Priory Hotel, have shelled out for the astronomically pricey Ammique beds.

But it's not just boomers or the wealthy who are buying. Julianna Choi, a 33-year-old Toronto teacher, just bought herself a new Tempur-Pedic bed with the space-age NASA pressure-relieving foam. "All my friends were buying these new pillow-top mattresses, and once I tried one, I couldn't go back." What did she end up spending? "Well, I got a bit of a deal at \$2,600, but I still spent double what I meant to spend." She shrugs. "I figured having a good night's sleep is a basic need, and I thought I'd cut back somewhere else."

It's perhaps not surprising that more people are paying attention to sleep. The Better Sleep Council Canada, a not-for-profit mattress-industry group, has found that one-third of Canadians stay awake at night at least once a week due to job stress, and more than a third average less than six hours of sleep every night; one in 10 Canadians routinely has trouble falling asleep. "There just aren't enough hours in the day to do everything we want," says Dr. Richard Leung, director of the Sleep Laboratory at St. Michael's Hospital in Toronto. "A significant number of my patients don't have sleep disorders but are simply sleep-restricted. They'll tell me 'Oh, last night I only got six hours but it was an unusual night,' but when they start to examine it, every night is an unusual night. Lack of sleep has become normal."

But do you need an expensive, high-tech bed to get a good night's sleep? "There's no real proof that it's money well spent," says Leung. "These new memory-foam-style beds are good for patients who are immobile or who have circulatory problems because they distribute pressure more evenly, but there's only been one good study done on mattresses." That one, he says, was published in the journal *The Lancet* in 2003: "And that just said that medium-firm mattresses might be better for you than hard ones if you had lower-back pain." If you have trouble sleeping, Leung suggests, you might want to first follow a few simple rules. Don't stay up too late, go to bed at a regular time every night, and wake up at the same time every morning. Consistency is key, and it will not only improve your quality of sleep but also save you thousands of dollars.

But then, where's the sex in that?

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