

# Five questions for furniture surgeon 'Dr. Sofa' Max Bar-Nahum

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Sometimes, sofas have to be taken apart and reassembled to fit through doorways. (Enid Alvarez/News)

Next month marks the start of moving season in [New York](#), when hundreds of thousands of people play musical chairs with their apartments.

But if your sofa is too big to go out the door – or worse yet, gets jammed in the elevator – the music will come to a screeching halt.

So who do you call when that happens? Dr. Sofa!

[The Bronx](#)-based furniture assembly and disassembly company has performed life-saving surgery on many a stranded couch or outsize chest of drawers.

Here, the firm's controller, Max Bar-Nahum, 64, aka "the chief anesthesiologist," invites you into its operating theater.

### **1 This is the beginning of your busiest time of year. Why's that?**

Things really heat up in the spring and early summer. It's the traditional time for leases to end and people to move. The warmer, less rainy weather makes it a more comfortable process than over the winter. Plus, they usually like to be installed in their new homes before their summer vacation. Our phones have been ringing off the hook.

### **2 Why is moving furniture such a big problem in [New York City](#)?**

There are a lot of older buildings with narrow hallways and stairwells, especially former tenements that have been converted into modern apartments. Maybe a landlord has down sized a formerly spacious apartment into two or three units. Perhaps an elevator has been redesigned and, though you easily got your sofa into your apartment a few years ago, now it doesn't fit.

Meanwhile, furniture styles have gotten bigger – for instance, people are investing in

giant wall units and sofas or they'll inherit the family's outsize couch – but the corridors and corners you need to get them past are the same, awkward size and shape they were a century ago. Since space is at a premium here and tenants must utilize every square inch, they'll pay for a service to get the furniture to fit correctly.

### **3 What kind of emergencies do you handle?**

We've had desperately panicked calls from clients because their movers have wedged a sofa in a stairwell and it's stuck fast. Nobody can get past in either direction. If you don't want to break it up for firewood, the only solution is to get a specialist like us to take the furniture apart and reassemble it. Regular movers just don't have the same training and knowledge. Other times, a piece can be stuck outside on the sidewalk and it's about to rain.

We recently had a case of a heavily pregnant woman who'd remodeled the second bedroom in her apartment into a beautiful nursery. She'd forgotten that the contractors had altered the size of the door, and, two days before she was due to give birth, she couldn't remove a huge sofa bed to make space for the crib. She was in a terrible state and couldn't stop crying. Luckily, we managed to complete the job in a few hours. She was so grateful that the tears started again.

### **4 How do people react when they see their beloved furniture taken to bits?**

I usually tell them not to look. Especially women, who can get quite emotional because moving is usually a stressful time anyway. I advise against watching. After all, you wouldn't want to observe a member of your family having open-heart surgery. It's too disturbing because of the blood and guts. We often have to dismantle the back and sides of a sofa.

Seeing it in a crippled state isn't pretty. Bits of stuffing often comes out, and, if they see

that, people can get hysterical. They can't imagine the end result and fear the worst. It's far better for them to wait until we're completely done and they can see their old friend back in one piece.

People often attach special memories to furniture – maybe it's been in their family for generations – and they don't like the thought of it being hurt! I assure them that we only use tools like a saw as a last resort. We rarely have to cut off the legs of a sofa.

But when the operation is over, the customers are always so happy. Our technicians often have to act more like psychologists or counselors to assure them that everything is going to be okay. It's important to have a good bedside manner, so to speak.

### **5 How long does it take to disassemble and reassemble a typical sofa?**

It varies. Sometimes 45 minutes, sometimes six hours. We usually charge between \$250 and \$2,500. The time, effort and strategy depends on the manufacturer and model. Store-bought furniture is generally more straightforward but, if it's custom-made – an Italian leather sofa, for example, which the makers swear can't be taken apart – it can be more complex.

But we've never been defeated by a job. That wouldn't happen. We never give up on our patients! One of our most challenging tasks was a high-end, 120-inch-long white leather sofa worth \$22,000. It had [Swarovski crystal](#) accents, which were very fancy. We ended up doing most of the surgery in our workshop in the Bronx because the process was so painstaking and drawn out.