

Beautiful Banquet Rooms Drive Sales



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Banquet rooms must always look beautiful, yet still be able to withstand the rigors of exceptionally heavy use. An event planner will never select a banquet room as a meeting location if it looks worn out. “Meeting planners select the hotel, to a large extent, for its **ability to provide complete meeting facilities**, which, in turn, sells large blocks of guest rooms,” says Rutes, Penner and Adams in *Hotel Design Planning and Development*. When it comes to keeping banquet rooms in top-notch condition, there are three areas that require the most attention: **chairs, fabric, and carpet**.

1 Chairs

Chairs are a major capital expenditure that come with many choices. First is lifecycle. “We want chairs that last 10 years,” says Scott Bruce in the Design and Construction Department of IHG, Atlanta, “that is the lifetime of a color trend.”

Other important things to consider when evaluating chairs start with the facility itself. Questions related to how much volume the banquet business generates. Do the chairs get stacked and un-stacked several times a day or only a few times a week? Will chairs be used for dining only or will meetings take place as well? How much space does the facility have for storage? Will the furniture fit in the area in which it must be stored? Banquet room chairs are made out of three different types of material: steel, aluminum, and wood. Each has its pros and cons.

Wood stacking chairs are often recommended for upscale facilities, such as country clubs and historic properties, that do not reconfigure rooms very often. They create a warm and inviting space, but require greater maintenance than their aluminum or steel counterparts.

Banquet chairs as we think of them today were first invented in the early 1950's. These simple forms have stood the test of time for several reasons, including low unit cost and the need for compact size so that 10 chairs can fit around a 60-inch table. **The ability to stack tall and straight is important for storing large numbers of chairs in a compact space, and stability when stacking is critical for a safe environment.**

Through the last decade, banquet chairs made from aluminum have gained popularity. While generally more expensive than steel, aluminum usually offers a lower weight solution, contributing to efficiency in banquet room set up and tear down. The average steel chair may weigh 22 pounds, whereas an aluminum chair weighs around 15 pounds. Stacked 10 high, it's easy to see how 70 pounds per stack in saved weight adds up across a large room. If you have any concerns





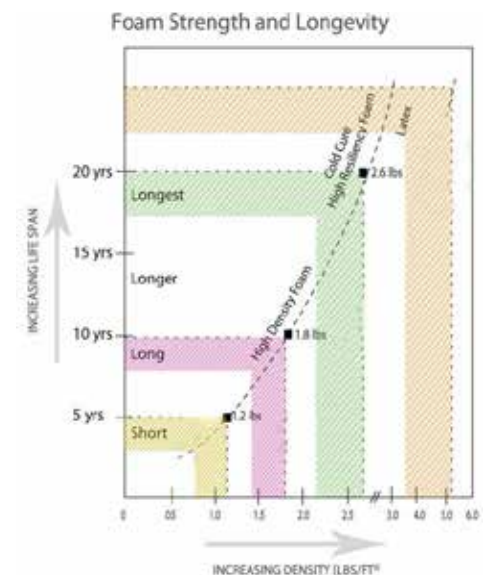
about weight related injuries and workman’s compensation claims then it is worth considering aluminum chairs.

In addition, both steel and aluminum chairs are now made with articulating backs, which add to guest comfort. This is important to clients, especially if guests will be using the chairs for several hours. “Overall, we want chairs that are durable, functional, look good and provide guest comfort,” says Brenda Hall, president of HDB Design Group, LLC, Daytona Beach. “Aluminum chairs provide all of that.”

One common component on all banquet chairs is foam.

Good quality foam is critical for comfort and durability but, because it is hidden from view, is often given scant attention. Foam is measured by two factors: density and compression (ILD/IFD). Density is the measure of cubic weight. It is as simple as how much one cubic foot of foam weighs. Density is a measure of quality. The higher the weight the better the quality. Weight difference is created by the ratio of air to material. Commercial high-density foam carries a minimum standard of 1.8 pounds but better quality foam can be as high as 2.8 pounds per cubic foot. The softness of the foam comes from ILD, which is the reflex of the foam when compressed 25 percent. Commercial foam seats range between 30 and 75 pounds. Depending on the company, different combinations of materials create different comfort levels.

There are several other features to consider. **Stacking bars**, which prevent the seats from compressing under the weight of the chairs stacked above. The **chair glides** are often overlooked, that is until they fail in use. Quality glides will have a spring clip, which holds the glide in the leg and will withstand the wear and tear of chairs being dragged across the floor. Be sure to purchase a chair **cart or dolly** from your chair vendor. Failing to use the correct dolly can damage the chair frames or fabric, and can nullify the warranty.



2 Fabric

Fabric is a critical component to delivering furniture that creates a good-looking banquet room, and there are a number of considerations in making the right choice.

- **Minimum abrasion rating:** Wyzenbeek abrasion rating is a fabric's ability to withstand surface rubbing, the industry standard is 15,000 double rubs. Many manufacturers offer ratings that are significantly higher than the standard. "We prefer to choose fabric rated for 40,000 to 50,000 double rubs," says Hall which provides greater assurance that the fabric will retain its look.
- **Stain blocking:** Soil and stain resistance is a compelling component in protecting your furniture investment. According to Michael Dobin, owner of Valley Forge Fabrics in Pompano Beach, Florida, stain blockers are finishes that are applied to fabric after it is woven. His firm automatically offers a non-branded backing and stain finish on every product, and clients have the option of choosing a branded stain blocker.

"It's one of the more important decisions," confirms Bruce, who describes a specific stain blocker called Nano-Tex, which creates a barrier against liquids, protecting both the fabric and the foam beneath it. Liquid and oil-based spills, such as wine and sauce, bead up and roll off as opposed to soaking in. "It's a neat thing to see but, more importantly, it works," he sums.

- **Fiber content:** The right fiber content makes a positive contribution to fabric's wear and tear. "We prefer to choose a blend of polyester and nylon," says Hall "which is a practical approach that ensures the fabric looks great now and four years from now. We try not to use too many natural fibers because they don't seem to hold up as well, even though you can get some nice product."

Dobin adds that 100-percent polyester is most commonly used, "because it's traditionally the most durable fiber for a banquet chair's price range. It also offers beauty and cleanability. Nylon is even more durable, but it's a lot more expensive so it's usually not in the budget."

Yet another option for high-use banquet facilities is coated fabric. "This is a generic term for polyurethane, vinyls, and silica," says Roseanne Veljkovic, director of Northeast sales for Irvine, California-based Momentum Group. "It looks like vinyl. It is the highest-performance fabric you can choose, and it cleans easily with soap and water and almost any cleaner, per the manufacturer's instructions."



- **Pattern and Color:** Pattern and color is imperative to creating a great-looking banquet room, and there's more to it than one might initially believe. First, consider the scope of the project, including the banquet room's theme: Is it traditional? Transitional? Contemporary? Next is pattern, with some opting for small patterns that help hide dirt and stains. "I like to mix patterns for stain forgiveness that a solid color doesn't provide," says Hall. "And I like to keep patterns clean."

Finally, there is color, and Hall admits that it can be a fine line:

“I like to use a combination of mostly neutral colors with little pops of color, opting to stay away from lighter tones that aren't forgiving, yet there must be some lighter tones so that the overall design isn't heavy.”

Dobin agrees, indicating that, if you have a fabric that's nearly 100-percent stainproof, you can safely choose light or dark fabrics. However, a medium-colored, print fabric is best for hiding stains, especially if the stain proof value is in the middle range.

3 Carpet

While a banquet room's carpet is mostly hidden once it's set for an event, and even more so once filled with guests, it's still a vital element in the overall room design. Take the following factors into consideration.



- **Your standard:** "Every hotel has a brand standard," says Mark Page, senior director of Color & Design, Hospitality for Dalton, Georgia-based Mohawk Industries. "Within that standard, they tend to operate on a seven-year replenishment cycle for most things, certainly carpet." For example, for their meeting rooms, Best Western specifies 32-ounce face weight per square yard with a high-density pad or 36-ounce weight without a pad, 100 percent solution dyed nylon in a minimum eight-inch pattern repeat. Similarly, Hampton requires Axminster for its public areas and ballrooms; either wool/nylon blend or 100 percent nylon; and with a yarn count of 2/46, tuft density of 70 per square inch, pitch of 7, pile height of .250 to .270, 10 rows per inch, and total pile weight of 36 to 44 ounce per square yard.

In creating a standard, the goal is to specify carpet that lasts for the desired life cycle, in that it hides dirt, retains its beauty when maintained as specified, and holds up to traffic. To that end, "Of the three most commonly used fibers (nylon, olefin, and polyester), nylon is by far the most expensive fiber and the best all around performer," notes Michael Hilton in the *Carpet Buyer's Handbook*. It has excellent abrasion resistance, and good to excellent soil and stain resistance.

- **Color and pattern trends:** Because carpeting is cycled out approximately every seven years, the color chosen will not become terribly obsolete before it's time to be replaced. After that, says Page, "I'm looking for a pattern that will help sell the banquet room but also help mask spills to make the space look clean longer between wet cleans."

Another color and pattern consideration is that some banquet rooms are designed with retractable walls that divide the main space into smaller meeting rooms, requiring a carpet design that

works for the main space but also continues to fit each smaller room. Similarly, Hall looks for patterns with some lineal aspects to them so that furniture can be quickly set up using the pattern as a point of reference. "These little things are often overlooked," she points out, "but they make a big difference in making a space look orderly."

- **Maintenance:** Worn or dirty carpeting strongly detracts from a banquet room's appearance and simply can't be hidden. Once the right product is chosen, keep it looking beautiful by maintaining it per the manufacturer's directions in terms of dry vacuuming and wet cleaning. In addition, Page advocates for spot cleaning between recommended cleanings.

“In all but the smallest properties, function space is an essential ingredient of the successful hotel,

says Rutes, Penner and Adams. For banquet rooms to drive success, they must be kept in top-notch condition by paying continual attention to furniture, fabric and carpet. A beautiful banquet room requires careful consideration in all aspects of design, planning, specification and purchasing. But experienced owners understand that these efforts are well worthwhile and that beautiful banquet rooms create memorable 'first impressions', on guests and visitors alike, and generate significant sales. ■

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