

Handle With Care

Appropriate Care Ensures a Solid Return on Investment

By Shelby Williams Staff



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HOSPITALITY FURNITURE

New furniture! You can't help but be excited about how it will support your marketing message – your brand. How will you keep it looking great and serving your customers for years to come? Here's a three pronged approach that ensures a safe and attractive environment, avoids the disruption caused by defective product and delivers a solid return.

1 Invest in a High-Quality Product

Purchase a high-quality product which is easier to maintain than lower-quality furniture. You'll find high-quality furniture, at a variety of price levels, from a well established company with a good reputation. "Learn the history of the company from which you want to buy," says Steve Walker, assistant director of North Carolina State University's (NCSSU), Furniture Manufacturing and Management Center (FMMC).



There are four things to take into account when investing in high-quality furniture.

- **Choose the Right Product for the Application:** Different applications require different products, so the way you operate your business should determine the furniture selection.
- **Ensure Furniture Is Tested to Standards:** The Business and Institutional Furniture Manufacturers Association (BIFMA) (bifma.org) has a series of widely recognized tests for seating. “The tests are thorough,” says Walker. “They’re based on real-world experience. If you purchase BIFMA-passed products, you will have as good a result as you can.”
- **Request a Furniture Sample:** “Any furniture manufacturer worth its salt will gladly provide a sample,” says Michael G. Steger, director of Facilities Management for National Management Resources Corporation at Palm Beach Atlantic University (PBAU) in Florida. “It allows you to confirm that the product is as high quality as it is portrayed.”
- **Consider Your Brand’s Environmental & Social Reputation:** Environmentally responsible solutions such as Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)-certified wood (<https://us.fsc.org/>), bio-based foam and formadahyde-free finishes are very typical today. These are all great features; however, buying good quality furniture that performs well for many years might be the ‘greenest’ action of all, as it means less furniture goes to the landfill.



2 Implement a Furniture Maintenance Program

Different kinds of furniture require different maintenance procedures. The key to success is to create a standard protocol based on expert advice and implement it effectively. Keep accurate records of inspection and repair so as to not void warranties and to protect against a liability lawsuit.

Here are some general maintenance guidelines for types of furniture commonly found in hospitality environments.



WOOD CHAIRS



METAL CHAIRS



FABRIC



TABLES

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Mortise and Tenon Joints



Clean the frame finish



Corner Block System with Center Lag Bolt and Hardened Screws



WOOD CHAIRS

Perform a regular visual inspection, looking for loose components, torn fabric or damaged wood finish. Inspect the chair as it sits on the floor and then turn it upside down to expose the hardware; you will see screws located in the corner blocks, back legs and possibly the stretcher system. Chairs are glued in place before being screwed together. However glue will lose adhesion over time, leaving only the hardware to keep the chair sound. Inspect screws four times a year at least, and more often in a high traffic environment. Tighten the loose ones with a hand screwdriver to avoid over tightening. Many chairs have seat boards that are attached to the frame by screws underneath the seat; check that these screws are tight.

While the chair is upside down, inspect the glides. Your chair may have metal or plastic glides or,

possibly, no glides at all. Uneven wear prevents all four legs from touching the floor, which places tremendous stress on the joints at the seat level and on the back of the chair. Chairs that are placed on high coefficient tile or concrete floors actually wear the glides down to the wood frame within a few months. In this case, watch for exposed nails that could damage the floor.

The frame finish protects the chair from moisture, hand acids and cleaning chemicals. Warm water and a very damp cloth will clean most dirt and grime from a wood chair finish, but use water sparingly. Cleaning solutions are not usually needed. If you prefer to use a cleaner, choose something gentle, such as Murphy Oil Soap and avoid cleaners containing bleach, wax-based or petroleum-based products, which can damage the finish. Occasional polishing with a non-silicone polish

enhances the finish's beauty.

The wood finish on chairs will eventually become worn, chipped and scratched. If cared for, this wear can add beauty to the chair. To touch up the finish first dip a cloth into a harmonizing stain and rub the damaged section so the stain coats the wood. Allow the stain to sit for 30 seconds and wipe it off. Touch-up markers are an excellent choice for small scratches. Apply a coat of paste wax on top of the repair and its adjacent surface for an even sheen.

Remove from service any chairs with cracked legs or back supports, or with excessive play in the frame structure. Also remove from service any chairs that are otherwise showing signs of structural failure or abuse.

For more information, visit the American Hardwood Information Center at hardwoodinfo.com/.



METAL CHAIRS

Commercial indoor metal chairs require the same type of inspection as wood chairs but generally have welded frames for greater durability. Check that the seat and back hardware and glides are tight.

Clean metal chairs with a damp cloth. If you prefer to use a detergent, choose a hand dishwashing detergent or denatured alcohol (methylated spirits). Remove cleaning residue with hot water. Wipe dry to prevent water spots. Do not clean with abrasive cleansers, pads or brushes, as those items scratch.

Remove from service any chairs that are bent or otherwise showing signs of structural failure, loose or missing parts, abuse or instability.



FABRIC

Many chairs have fabric coverings that require regular care, which keeps them looking great and extends their serviceability. Spills should be cleaned immediately, when they're easiest to remove. A regular schedule of cleaning should follow the manufacturer's directions. Note that some fabrics can be cleaned only with water-based cleaners, while others can be cleaned only with water-free, dry-cleaning solvents. Be sure to read information supplied by the manufacturer.

For cleaning, gently scrape excess solid matter or liquid using a dull-edge tool, like a spoon. Pretest the cleaner



in a hidden area, looking for faded colors, shrinkage or rings that indicate incompatibility. If possible, place a white cloth under the area to be cleaned, like the inside of a seat cushion, to absorb the soil. Apply cleaner to a soft white cloth and, beginning at the edge of the area to be cleaned, blot toward the center. Don't rub, as this can wear the fabric and leave it looking faded. Finally, using a dry cloth, brush the edges of the cleaned area back and forth and dry with a fan to prevent ringing.

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Tables are made from many different materials. Because of the sheer variety, we'll break this into maintenance of bases and tops.

When it comes to bases, as with chairs, begin by conducting a visual inspection – both right side up and upside down – searching for loose components or damaged finishes. If you turn the whole table upside down please have someone help you do this and protect the top so you do not accidentally damage it. Tighten any screws that attach the base to the top, as well as nuts or bolts that hold the base together. Nuts or bolts also respond well to Loctite, which binds the threads, reducing the risk of the nut coming loose. Keeping nuts and bolts tight and replacing worn glides or knobs on table feet reduces wobbles which cause spills, trip-and-slip hazards and customer discomfort.

For cleaning table bases, use a commercial cleaner and polish on chrome, a hand dishwashing cleaner on wrought iron and a wood cleaner (such as Murphy Oil Soap) on wood.



Table tops are made from many different materials, including, but not limited to: butcher block, solid wood, granite, laminate, molded, stainless steel, glass, marble and polyurethane. Follow the manufacturer's care and maintenance procedures appropriate for your top's surface, keeping a log as previously mentioned. Use liquid cleaners and waxes appropriate for the top's surface material. Wood tops should be coated with a hard wax paste every three to four months during the first year of use and less frequently in following years.

3 Limit Your Liability

All furniture will eventually wear out and will need to be replaced but maintaining your furniture will extend the life of the product and will protect your business from liability risk. Timothy Palumbo, managing partner in the Chicago law office of Kopka Pinkus Dolin and Eads, notes that the first priority is to purchase a quality product, appropriate for the application, from a reliable manufacturer.

Next, ensure the manufacturer provides you with sufficient information regarding product care and maintenance, such as literature (print or online) and labels. "It is the manufacturer's responsibility to inform the purchaser how to inspect, maintain and care for the product," says

Palumbo. "Once the product is in your hands, you have exclusive care, custodial responsibility and control, not the manufacturer."

Finally, inspect and maintain the furniture as recommended by the manufacturer, as well-maintained furniture offers less risk for malfunctions and lawsuits.

"We believe in a regular schedule of furniture inspection and maintenance," says PBAU's Steger, "which is built into our routine maintenance program so it can't be overlooked. It not only helps our furniture last longer, it also stretches our tight replacement budget. Every business should do the same, even if it's something you implement one step at a time."





Shelby Williams is a leader in the commercial furniture industry, focusing on the hospitality and foodservice markets, offering both a substantial catalog of products and custom-designed products to meet your unique requirements and with the capacity to manufacture large projects with relatively short lead times.

Shelby Williams is a member of the CFGroup.

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- Steve Walker, Assistant Director of North Carolina State University's (NCSU), Furniture Manufacturing and Management Center (FMMC).
- Michael G. Steger, Director of Facilities Management for National Management Resources Corporation, Palm Beach Atlantic University (PBAU) in Florida.
- Timothy Palumbo, Managing Partner and Product Liability Attorney, Kopka Pinkus Dolin and Eads, Chicago, IL

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