



FORM MEETS FUNCTION

Chairs and sofas help create an important overall impression on guests.

Choosing furnishings is a big decision. It's more than a matter of meeting budget or filling space or matching décor. Furniture plays an integral role in the overall impression your property makes on guests.

"As a hotelier, you have so much invested in the guest experience," says David Ali of Faveri's Wood Furniture. "This is not just about the customer service; it also is in the details."

Details like furniture.

"Designers are working hand-in-hand with architects so the furniture has just as much a story to tell as the building itself," says Wayne Melamed of Global Furniture

Group. "Lines, details, finishes, etc. coordinate between the furniture and architecture and vice versa, each influencing the other."

He adds that in the new open-concept hotel room or lobby, today's furniture provides a place for the user to touch down with a platform for peripherals and access to power and technology often built right in.

"As the space around us becomes more synergistic and open, the furniture must be able to adapt," says Melamed. "Design trends in shape and function still allow multiple components to come together or be reconfigured to allow for casual meeting areas,

collaboration, and semi-private 'me' spaces."

And therein lies the challenge for hoteliers.

"Furniture must embody that durability of commercial grade with the styling of residential flare — "resimercial" as we refer to it," says Melamed.

There's a payoff for achieving that balance.

"Staying in a hotel that has fine quality, comfortable furniture makes people feel right at home during their visit," says Ali. "A hotel that gives an emotional experience through visual and tactile design will bring people back and inspire positive reviews."

First, you may want some guidance.

Calling in the Experts

Randy Friesen, president of Art Upholstery, says they work with all channels of the hospitality industry, including design and architectural firms, purchasing offices for franchises, and brand designers. Projects with independent hotels typically proceed in one of two ways.

"If [hoteliers] know exactly what they need and they've kind of gone through the process already, then we will help them with the selection of the product," says Friesen.

Alternatively, for more comprehensive projects, which may include details like matching window coverings and paint, Friesen says they make designer recommendations.

"We'll get designers involved who can help [hoteliers] pull the package together and then we'll help them with the furniture specs," says Friesen. "It depends on how much they need and where they are going with the whole project."

Raymond Berube of RHB Enterprises says that while they often work directly with hoteliers, usually the first step is contact with the designer.

"The designers may put together a spec sheet and ask for quotes on manufacturing, including a quote on how much material is



Furnishings are a big decision for any hotelier and play an integral role on the overall impression of guests.

needed if the customer is providing that," says Berube. "Or the designer may specify certain products, whether our products or a competitor's products or something they seen in the industry. There are so many factors to consider that it is usually best handled by someone with expertise."

Berube suggests paying attention to the spec sheet and asking for quotes that list manufacturing separately from fabric cost. "Often, it's not the chair cost but the fabric cost that is skewing the high price on it."

And pay attention to how much fabric is needed, says Berube. One quote might come in lower, but require more fabric, so the end price will be higher. Other spec-sheet tips from Berube include asking about the warranty and checking what he calls "the freight factor" — how much it costs to bring your new furniture in.

"It's nice to keep it local, as much as possible, even if just to save on freight," says Berube.

Keeping it local was an important part of the decision for Nick Karas, CEO of Wynd-



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ham Garden Calgary Airport. He says about 85 per cent of the furniture and fixtures for his 156-room new build were sourced in Canada, and a key factor in his decision to choose RHB Enterprises as his supplier.

"We are a big believer in supporting our local and Canadian manufacturers rather than importing everything, and I think at the end of the day it is better for everyone," says Karas.

Something else to consider is how you will use the product and what will help you get the best use out of it, a conversation Tom Enns, sales manager at Art Upholstery, has with clients at the beginning of a project.

"The investors always ask, 'What's the upfront cost,'" says Enns. "Well, let's take it one step further, and let's look at the longer term use of the product, because sometimes a lower upfront cost is more expensive long term, if you're having to replace the product sooner."

While some hoteliers may update prior to a property sale, in which case a long-term view is less important, investors planning to keep a hotel want furnishings with a long lifespan.

"They'll spend a little extra money to make the furniture last a bit longer, because they have a more long-term view of what they're doing," says Enns.

While we don't mind if our furniture at home has a few wrinkles after years of constant use, that doesn't work in a hotel.

"In a hotel, because you've got a new guest every night or every couple of nights, you want that room to look as new as possible for as long as possible," says Friesen.

As Melamed points out — furniture is an investment that pays back with increased guest experience and satisfaction.

But while return on investment is reason alone to call in an expert, there are other reasons.

Components and Construction

Style and design aside, it is important to consider materials.

"The fabric is one of the most important factors in selecting your chairs and sofas," says Zakus. "The durability and abrasion level of the fabric is key to lower maintenance and longer-lasting upholstery."

Zakus adds that location and frequency of use need to be considered, for example, high-traffic public areas where spills are common. "Soil- and stain-resistance fabrics are highly recommended as they can be more easily

cleaned," says Zakus, adding that a Crypton-type fabric does not absorb any liquids, stains, or odour. "Although a higher cost, the longevity and appearance are worth it."

Berube stresses the importance of using commercial fabric. "There are a ton of commercial materials out there, and it can be scotch-guarded," says Berube, adding that a lot of hoteliers are looking at vinyl for longevity.

Fabric costs can range from \$7 to \$10 a yard on the lower end all the way to "the sky is the limit," says Berube.

Friesen says each fabric has its character-

istics and cost usually drives the decision.

"If we're dealing with a budget hotel, we have budget fabrics and vinyls that can provide the price that they need. If we're dealing with the mid-service hotel, we can step it up into better fabrics and vinyls," says Friesen. "If we're dealing with a more premium hotel, we step them into more premium fabrics and vinyls and sometimes even leather."

How the product is being used influences fabric. "If you're putting a custom bench in the corner of the foyer that gets sat on once a week, then you can put a less expensive cover on it," says Friesen. "If you're



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Art Upholstery Ltd., established in 1948, specializes in custom upholstery, including a wide range of soft seating products and services, as well as a unique product line for the hospitality industry, featuring contract seating from banquettes to sofa beds and chairs. All products are made-to-order, customizable, and of consistent high quality and craftsmanship.



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Canadian Focus

RHB Enterprises Inc. provides made-in-Canada products to the Canadian hospitality industry. Committed to providing excellent customer service and follow-up, RHB offers competitively priced, quality products manufactured by reputable contract furnishing companies, including multiple vendors of soft seating. Their knowledge of brand and industry standards facilitates projects from conception to inception.



Competitive Prices

Established in 2001, Matrix is a one-stop shop for custom-made hospitality furnishings. With a dedicated manufacturing facility and an expert fabrication team, Matrix offers hoteliers the promise of excellent product quality with short turnaround times and extremely competitive prices. Matrix also offers lease-to-own furniture for \$1.49 per day/room!



Top Quality and Affordable

Whiteshell Chairs is a family-owned, custom-furniture manufacturer providing premium-quality, injection-molded chairs for the hospitality and foodservice industry. Whiteshell Chairs is committed to manufacturing the highest quality products at affordable pricing. Bar stools, dining chairs, and banquet/meeting hall chairs, all made in Manitoba.



going to put something in the room and that room is sold out every day, you have to put something a little bit more high wear on it."

Construction is another critical consideration. It is very important to choose products made for commercial use.

"People often look at the cost and not the structure. You have to ask the questions when you're looking at furniture: 'How is it built? What are the weight qualifications?'" says Berube, adding that hotel patrons can weigh anywhere from 50 pounds to 400 pounds, which makes a big difference, especially with stools and chairs.

"Pay a little more for well-constructed, sturdy, commercial-grade furniture that will withstand multi-use and accommodate various sizes and weights," says Zakus.

Solid-wood construction contributes to product durability.

"A well-built chair, for example, will be durable for mixed use by different people with body types, and have a longer life than composite materials," says Ali. "Using handcrafted, well-made North American wood products will outlast the alternatives, give the furniture stability, and can handle repeated use."

Melamed points out that types of construction can also add strength and value to a product.

"It's so important to know who's making your product, what it's been tested to, what certifications it holds," says Melamed. "All of this raises your return on investment, cuts down on liabilities, and increases guest experience and satisfaction."

Something else to consider: the environmental impact.

"Materials that are environmentally conscious such as those from FSC Certified sources usually carry, as part of the parcel, a greater degree of quality versus those that don't," says Melamed. "Oftentimes, cheaper wood species, like fir or rubber from China, don't hold up to the rigours of a North American climate and are riddled with environmental and health hazards like high formaldehyde content."

Ali promotes the use of solid wood products for today's health-conscious market.

"[Solid wood products] look and feel better, and when finished with eco-friendly products, are healthy for the guests and staff, with no off gassing or chemical odours," says Ali.

Bar Stools, Dining and Banquet Chairs

In restaurants, lounges, bars, banquet rooms, and VLT and slot seating, comfort is the top consideration when it comes to choosing chairs.

"The design trends for chairs that we see for the facilities we supply include increasing demand for ergonomic features such as contour-

Wyndham Garden Calgary Airport had furniture supplied by RHB Enterprises and wanted to source Canadian manufacturers rather than imported their furniture.



molded foam seat cushions, lumbar support systems, and flexible backrests,” says Terry Clark of Accro Furniture Industries. “These features contribute to guest comfort that encourages longer playing time and repeat visits.”

Design must also be functional for the host facility with dependable quality for long-term, low-maintenance performance.

“Welded steel frames provide the dependable durability that inspires confidence with facility owners and their guests, as opposed to mechanically fastened metal or wooden chair and stool frames that require regular checks by maintenance staff to ensure the various fittings are secure,” says Clark.

Materials have broadened to include more vinyl fabrics. This trend is partly due to smoking cessation in public areas.

“Cigarette burns on vinyl were not repairable and a woven textile was often viewed as more forgiving in those circumstances,” says Clark. “The new vinyl patterns often have the appearance of woven textiles, have better breathability than the vinyl of a few years ago, and tend to be lower maintenance than woven fabric.”



Design must be functional with dependable quality.

Whiteshell Chairs is another Canadian company that specializes in chairs for dining areas, banquet halls, bars/lounges, and meeting rooms.

“We have a very high-end product made right here in Manitoba, and it is a family-owned company with family employees,” says Walter Gross, Whiteshell Chairs. “These aren’t just regular slabs of foam. We make mold-injected chairs. They are a nice shape and more comfortable, and they last longer.”

Gross says they work with designers and directly with hotels and recommends planning ahead. “We have a three-month waiting list now.”

Sofa Beds

Berube says even hotels that change their furnishings every five to seven years tend to keep sofa beds for as long as 12 years. Sofa beds

tend to be sturdy and are not always the most comfortable to sit on.

“It’s not like something you’ll sit on at home. Normally the sofa bed, in a commercial grade, has a higher foam density and it’s harder,” says Berube, explaining that the softer the foam, the faster it breaks down and the sooner it looks ragged.

It also depends on how often sofa beds are used.

“Some [hotels] have sofa beds in their rooms that open once a year, so we will recommend them to stick with a standard sofa bed because cost wise, why spend the money if it’s never used?” says Enns.

Moreover, guests using sofa beds are often more concerned with budget than comfort.

“People who are using sofa beds aren’t looking for the most comfortable sleep in the world. They’re looking for a bed,” says Berube.

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Style and Design

While trends come and go, consider some basic guidelines.

- ▶ "Stick with the classics as they are longer lasting versus trendy pieces that lose appeal and are quickly out of style," says Julie Zakus from Hospitality Designs.
- ▶ If you are worried the classics don't make enough of a statement, add colour.

"Lounge chairs typically go from simple, neutral colours with accent pillows for that trendy splash of colour or they are your centrepiece that can be like a work of art," says Zakus.

▶ **Keep choices in perspective.**

"Seating should be comfortable, but be sure to select the appropriate size for your property," says Zakus. "For smaller spaces, consider using a slipper chair without arms as it takes up less space and lends to the flow of the room so it doesn't feel crowded."

According to Sunny Rizvi for Matrix Hospitality Furniture, hotel design trends for 2017 include living room-like public spaces, elimination of traditional front desks, self-check-in kiosks, dual colour tones, and designs centred

on hotel culture and theme.

"On a structural level, we could see the retro look make its appearance in the commercial sector," says Rizvi, naming '60s- and '70s-inspired furniture items, especially accent pieces, in both star properties and budget locations. "Especially in the case of the latter - with a focus on the bottom-line - 'simplicity of shape and form' in everything from soft to casegoods will be the official mantra."

▶ **The new designs aim to appeal to a growing new market.**

"The brands are all focusing on the Millennials and are all coming out with their modern spin on hotel décor," says Tom Enns, sales manager at Art Upholstery. Randy Friesen, president of Art Upholstery says even the more traditional brands are adopting a mid-century modern look.

"The Millennials are looking for something a little bit more funky, fresh, upbeat," says Friesen. "The designers also want to make a statement, so there seems to be a bit of openness from the hotel industry to let the designers be a little more creative, especially in lobbies or common areas."



▶ **Finishes and Upholstery go**

Rizvi says we will see a preponderance of dual and saturated tones. Wood as a base component will stay, he adds, but hotels could experiment with more exciting stains, like slate grey and metallic finishes, and colours and shades mimicking natural elements.

"Upholstery will continue to be split between natural and man-made fabrics, depending on the size and positioning of the property and the use the furnishing is intended for," says Rizvi. "What will be interesting to watch is the emphasis on 'natural' shades and colours that will be much in evidence within



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the hospitality sector. Also, busy upholstery patterns of the past will give way to textures that play better with the guests' senses."

► **Blending individual comfort and convenience with the new retro trend.**

At the same time, each hotel has its own style and place within its setting. David Ali of Faveri's Wood Furniture suggests using regional wood products to help make a hotel more a part of its location. "This practice helps to give an individuality to each hotel location based on its regional influences," says Ali, adding that regional wood better handles that climate and, thus, product longevity. "If it grows there, it goes there."

"Somewhere to sleep and keep their cost down by having four people in a room instead of two."

Often that's where the kids sleep. Putting two adults on a double-sized mattress doesn't work as well. Most hoteliers want double sofa beds, but occasionally, they ask for queen sofa beds. However, hoteliers need to measure elevators, as well as door-frames and room space, as these beds are much longer.

That said, in some hotels, sofa beds are used every weekend, for example, if they frequently serve groups attending sports tournaments. A higher-end sofa bed may be a consideration.

Enns says there are two types of sofa beds in the industry, one he calls the "canvas deck," the type that has been in the industry for decades. The other is newer, and Enns describes it as better constructed with a premium mechanism and grid system that creates a box spring effect underneath a memory mattress.

"It's very comfortable to sleep in, and it's also a better quality bed that will last a lot longer," says Enns, who adds that they have been getting rave reviews for its comfort, construction, and ease of maintenance.

Take the Time to do it Right

The most frequently repeated tip for hoteliers considering new sofas and chairs is to allow adequate time.

"I always tell the designers and architects and hotel, we can do anything if we have time," says Enns. "The quality of the outcome is always determined by the amount of time we have to pull off what the property wants."

For example, for a 150-room hotel, if new chairs are wanted for every room, Friesen recommends allowing 12 to 16 weeks from the first of the conversation.

Smaller properties take less time because often everything needed for a smaller number of items is available. At many hotels, changes take place in stages.

"If it's a chain and they just want to substitute out a couple of pieces in 20 rooms, we could turn that around in, say, four to six weeks or maybe even less depending on our own situation and the quantities," says Friesen.

But whether you are buying 150 chairs or 20 or even just one special piece for your lobby, if you want to make a smart decision and make the best possible impression on your guests, have a seat and think it through. ●



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