

HOSPITALITY CONSTRUCTION

Outdoor furniture can be a good investment with the proper care

By William Bongaerts

In the past decade, restaurants, cafes, hotels and clubs have begun to embrace the concept of outdoor living. Customers want to relax outdoors, away from the stress of technology that occupies a large part of their lives. Patrons expect to find outdoor seating when they go out in the warmer months. But since dining al fresco has become the norm, restaurants and lounges must find a way to distinguish their properties from their competitors.

There has been a significant increase in the demand for out-

door hospitality furniture to keep up with this increasing trend. And manufacturers have taken notice. No longer is outdoor furniture relegated to ugly vinyl strap chairs – there’s a vast selection of attractive materials, designs and colors, ready to take on the outdoors.

But for hospitality owners, therein lies a new challenge: how to effectively clean, care for and maintain outdoor furniture. Customers have been groomed to expect cleanliness from quality establishments, and there’s no exception.

The ideal time to think about care of outdoor furniture is at the time of purchase. Materials such as aluminum, wrought iron, steel, wicker, granite, wood and polypropylene all work well outdoors, but each requires their own type and level of care to ensure it maintains its good looks.

- **Aluminum, Wrought Iron and Steel** – Metal furniture is strong and withstands heavy abuse. Quality metal furniture designed for use outdoors should have a smooth, sleek design, free of sharp corners and unwanted nooks that can harbor fungus and bacteria. The furniture should be sealed as well. While aluminum can be more expensive than some other materials, the lasting value and minimal care may justify your investment.

- **Wicker** – Wicker furniture comes in two types: traditional wood and all-weather wicker, which is made from polyvinyl chloride or recycled material. A variety of patterns and colors make this a popular option.

- **Granite** – Granite tabletops are beautiful, sturdy and stain resistant. Because they are made of a natural material, they hold up well outdoors.

- **Wood** – Teak and cedar



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woods work well outdoors and can be used year-round. They are designed to weather naturally and last for years, but they can be costly. Other woods are more affected by wear and weather and require more maintenance to retain their appearance.

- **Polypropylene** – Today's furniture made from synthetic materials like polypropylene is attractive, colorful, versatile, easy to store and almost indestructible. These pieces are highly resistant to water, sun, and sharp objects – which makes them good choices to battle the outdoor elements – or destructive customers.

Once you've purchased your furniture, implement a regular plan to keep it looking new. Here are a few tips:

- 1. Ask questions** – A quality furniture manufacturer will provide you with instructions on

how to best care for your outdoor furniture. By following the manufacturer's care instructions, you also maintain any warranty on the product.

- 2. Spring cleaning** – At the beginning of each outdoor season, dust your furniture and then wash with a solution of mild soap and water. Dry thoroughly. Check nuts, bolts and screws, and tighten anything loose. Replace any broken or rusted fasteners. Lubricate all hinges and wheels (if applicable) with silicone, not oil, which cakes and attracts dirt. Natural wicker furniture frames may benefit from light sanding and re-varnishing once a year with any commercial outdoor spray lacquer. Metal furniture may be lightly waxed to prolong their appearance. Furniture polish or oil may be used on wood furniture.

- 3. Monthly cleaning** – Each month, inspect all furniture and clean with soap and water. A pressure washer may be used, but be sure to use a low setting (1200-1350 psi). This removes grime, mildew and other substances that can build up and cause permanent damage to the furniture or breed bacteria and disease. Any chair that needs repair should be taken out of service immediately to avoid further damage.

- 4. Beware of the enemies** – As a rule, outdoor furniture does not mix well with certain plants and chemical substances like suntan oil and chlorine. Take care to keep

furniture away from plants likely to stain. Require sunbathers to place towels on chaise lounges and other furniture near the pool. Do not throw patio or pool furniture in the pool.

- 5. Cushion care** – If your outdoor furniture has cushions, remove them before cleaning the frame. Spot clean cushions if necessary, then rinse with clean water and allow them to dry completely. Never wrap cushions in plastic to store, as they may mildew. Outdoor cushions will likely need to be replaced frequently, as they can be difficult to clean and to keep clean.

- 6. Put it away** – Outdoor furniture is designed to withstand normal wear-and-tear under normal conditions. Outdoor furniture should be covered and stored away during the winter and ideally, during any inclement weather conditions. No outdoor furniture is designed to be thrown or jumped on, or to withstand a hurricane, tornado or ice storm.

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