

Refinishing Saves Money, Extends Furniture Life, Reduces Waste Stream - By Glenn Hasek

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Flat screen TVs are creating quite a dilemma for the lodging industry. Most hotels today have armoires but the new TVs will not fit. One chain is trying to figure out what to do with its 400,000 armoires. Do you throw them away? Give them away? Recycle them?

If Mario Insenga, principal with the ReFinishing Touch had his way, every one of those armoires would be refinished. Insenga's Alpharetta, Ga.-based company has devised a method to convert armoires to useable pieces of furniture. In short, what the Refinishing Touch does is remove the top of the armoire and refinish the remaining chest to good as new condition. It then places a granite top on it. The 'new' piece of furniture works well as a spot for the new flat screen TV.

If the lodging industry needed a wakeup call to the problem of what to do with used furniture, this is it. If just one chain has 400,000 of them, there must be millions of them out there. Insenga says it is time for the lodging industry to think about furniture in a new way-as a valuable asset to be managed systematically.

As long as furniture is managed properly-refinished or reupholstered when needed-its life can be extended for years. A furniture salesman may try to convince you to buy new as often as possible, but the environment will be better off if furniture is treated as a long-term asset. Forests will not have to be cut down, energy will not have to be used to transport it, and landfills will not have to be used to bury it.

Refinishing Saves Dollars

From a cost standpoint, refinishing furniture makes a whole lot of sense. According to the ReFinishing Touch, which won the U.S. General Service Administration's Evergreen Award in 2000, hotels can save upwards of 80 to 90 percent by refinishing instead of buying new.

The Hilton Garden Inn, Owings Mills, Md., for example, spent \$41,648 on an armoire modification program instead of spending \$249,600 on new armoires. The Doubletree Hotel, Bethesda, Md., spent \$79,936 instead of \$432,000.

When refinishing furniture, be sure to select a vendor that uses non-toxic, waterborne finishes. Insenga says because his company uses finishes that do not include volatile organic chemicals, furniture can be refinished in the guestroom without leaving harmful, lingering odors. Not having to haul furniture outside of a guestroom saves labor and energy-especially if it has to be transported off-site.

With furniture being a property's biggest potential disposable asset, it is important to look at its life cycle carefully. Buy quality wooden furniture that will last. Treat it as if it is not a disposable asset. Implement a preventive maintenance (PM) program to protect it. Use one of the several industry asset tracking software programs to track it.

'Did you buy furniture knowing that you would be throwing it away?' Insenga asks. 'There is another way to manage furniture than giving it away or throwing it away.'

The Refinishing Touch estimates it has refinished and/or reupholstered millions of pieces of furniture. What can be refinished? Armoires, headboards, nightstands, side tables, lounge chairs and arm chairs are examples. To be refinished, a piece of furniture must be made from quality wood-not compressed paper or some other type of imitation wood product.

Most of us are familiar with the phrase 'Reduce, Reuse, Recycle.' You may want to remember a fourth 'R' word-'Refinish'-the next time you think about replacing furniture.

This article first appeared on the Green Lodging News website. To sign up to receive the weekly Green Lodging News newsletter, go to www.greenlodgingnews.com. Glenn Hasek can be reached at greenlodgingnews@aol.com.

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