

Shelby Williams®

DESIGNING DINING ROOMS FOR SENIOR LIVING

WHITE PAPER





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The residents, especially those with ambulatory and diminished faculty or mobility issues, must feel comfortable and safe when using the furniture.”

Leah Bauer, Allied Member ASID, Associate IIDA, associate and senior interior designer in the Omaha office of Leo A Daly.

UNDERSTANDING THE UNIQUE DINING ROOM REQUIREMENTS OF SENIOR LIVING

Selecting optimal tables and chairs for senior living dining areas requires careful consideration of several key factors.

DINING ROOM CHAIRS

Durability is paramount. Consider the frequency of use and whether the space serves as a formal dining room or a multi-purpose area requiring frequent reconfiguration, as usage directly impacts wear and tear. To ensure longevity and mitigate liability, address the following points.

CHAIR FRAMES

The selection of durable and supportive chairs is critical in senior living. While global manufacturing employs diverse wood types (oak and maple in the U.S., rubberwood in Asia, beech in Europe), maple and beech are often the preferred choices for their strength, natural antimicrobial qualities, and ability to accept resilient finishes.

Chairs should feature sturdy mortise and tenon joints and a strong substructure with corner blocks to ensure stability over time. Recognizing the preference for easy access, armchairs are often favored by senior residents. The most robust arm attachment typically integrates the arm with the front leg, although securely bolted side arms can also be suitable. Designs where the arm attachment is hidden should be avoided to allow for necessary maintenance and tightening.

FINISH

The frequent use of skin lotions by residents and the demands of regular cleaning necessitate durable wood finishes in senior living environments. Fortunately, several robust commercial finishes are available, with conversion varnishes, UV-cured coatings, and polyurethane being the most common.

While polyurethane is a popular option, Sickeler advocates for natural wood finishes, noting that polyurethane can be susceptible to damage, particularly from sunlight. Furthermore, wood possesses inherent antimicrobial properties, offering an advantage over plastic and metal in terms of hygiene.

FABRIC

The selection of durable and easily maintainable fabric is paramount in senior living dining environments. Key considerations include:

- **Wear Resistance:** Aim for a Wyzenbeek abrasion rating of 40,000 to 50,000 double rubs for optimal longevity
- **Stain Management:** Fabrics should feature robust soil and stain-resistant treatments to handle spills and incontinence.

Technologies like Nano-Tex® provide a barrier against liquids.

- **Fiber Performance:** Durable blends of polyester and nylon are recommended for long-term wear. 100-percent polyester is also a strong contender for dining chairs due to its resilience and ease of cleaning. Coated fabrics (polyurethane vinyl) offer the highest level of cleanability for high-use areas. Designers will often specify a chair with a vinyl seat and a fabric back.
- **Aesthetics and Practicality:** Pattern and color choices should align with the dining room’s theme. Small patterns and mixed patterns can aid in concealing stains. While color preferences vary, medium-colored prints are generally the most practical for hiding spills.



SENIOR LIVING DINING CHAIRS

ESSENTIAL FEATURES



DIMENSIONS

Optimal chair selection for senior living dining areas balances safety, comfort, and functionality. Designs should feature soft, rounded edges and dimensions accommodating smaller individuals, with a recommended minimum seat width of 19.5 inches (including bariatric options) and a seat depth of 19-20 inches.



CASTERS

Regarding mobility, front-leg casters offer a controlled solution for residents moving at the table, mitigating the fall risk associated with fully mobile chairs, especially on hard surfaces. Perkins Eastman advises caution with casters on hard flooring, potentially requiring a client disclaimer.



SUSPENSION SYSTEMS

For superior and lasting comfort, spring seat suspension systems are recommended over elastic webbing or basic foam. Specifying high-quality, commercial-grade foam (minimum 1.8 lbs/sq ft) with appropriate Indentation Load Deflection (ILD) for desired softness is crucial for resident well-being and accurate cost comparison.

SENIOR LIVING DINING TABLES

ESSENTIAL FEATURES

Beyond Durability: Four Essential Considerations for Senior Living Dining Tables

SIZE

To balance individual needs and group activities, many senior living facilities choose 42-inch square tables. Resident safety and comfort are prioritized with radius corners or bullnose edges. Adjustable-height tables help accommodate wheelchairs and chair arms. When selecting tables, it’s crucial to account for the dimensions of commonly used armchairs, avoiding designs with deep aprons that may restrict access. Durable designs, such as those without sharp edges, contribute to the longevity of the furniture.

BASE

In senior living dining spaces, pedestal tables are particularly popular due to the ease of access they provide for residents using chairs or wheelchairs, eliminating potential knee bumping, and helps pull in more people for socializing. To ensure stability and prevent tipping, table bases made of cast iron or steel

are highly desirable, provided they are correctly proportioned to the tabletop.

MATERIALS

For beautiful, durable, and low-maintenance surfaces, consider laminate or laminated wood veneer options like Veneer-Art® by Lamin-Art®. Unlike natural wood, which requires regular upkeep and should be shielded from direct sunlight, these alternatives offer ease of care. Assess your facility’s willingness to commit to natural wood maintenance before investing.

MULTI-PURPOSE FOLDING TABLES

Increasingly popular for their adaptability, flip-top or folding tables with rolling capabilities are essential for multi-purpose spaces. To maintain a non-institutional aesthetic and ensure safety, opt for tables with wider pedestals and a mechanism to conceal the wheels when in use.

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Beautiful, comfortable, and safe furniture speaks volumes about quality, especially in senior living where dining is a central part of the day. “A dining facility is a place to nourish one’s body and soul.”

Amy Sickeler IIDA, AAHID, LEED AP BD+C
LEED AP, design principal and principal in the Atlanta office of Perkins+Will





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Shelby Williams®

Shelby Williams is a leader in the commercial furniture industry, focusing on the hospitality and food service markets. Shelby Williams offers a substantial catalog of products in a wide variety of styles as well as more than 60 years experience in custom design. Shelby Williams has the capacity and experience to meet your unique needs and can manufacture large projects, here in the USA, within short lead times. Shelby Williams is a CFGGroup brand.'

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