

# Furniture Care and Maintenance

## 1. Introduction

No material is immune from stains or soiling. Following Hightower's general care and maintenance instructions should help your Hightower products have the longest possible life-span and reduce and/or eliminate permanent damage when accidents do occur.

## 2. Preventable Damage

By far the most predominant damage to furniture is caused by misunderstanding the nature of wooden objects and forms. The detailed information below should help to maintain the product and prevent damage.

The major causes of preventable damage are: a poorly controlled ambient environment (storing, light, relative humidity and temperature), rough use, handling and maintenance.

While all things degrade, the process can be slowed through application of principles of care and maintenance based on understanding the nature of wood and artifacts made of wood.

### 2.1. The Environment

There is never a "perfect" environment for anything, as with most materials, however, there is an "optimal" environment that provides the best balance. To achieve this balance, it is important to understand the effects of storing, light, varying temperature and humidity, and potential for damage from use in order to make the best choices to preserve the product.

### 2.2. Storing Furniture When Not in Use

Unpacked furniture needs to be stored "stand alone" not packed in tightly and staged with other items to prevent indentation of the foam or scratches. To relocate, furniture needs to be lifted off of the ground and not pushed across the floor. If the furniture is heavy, please do not lift alone, seek assistance to move.

### 2.3. Light

For the most part, light damage takes the form of discoloration, usually bleaching. Light induces bleaching and degradation in most components of furniture: coatings, whether transparent or polychrome; the wood itself; and especially upholstery textiles. Generally, light damage is cumulative and permanent.

When furniture is in use and in the light, damage can be reduced through common devices like window shades, curtains, and screens for protection from direct sunlight or elevated light levels. Ultraviolet filter films can be used to block the most damaging light frequencies if there is concern over the color of the light, for example light from fluorescent bulbs or ultraviolet radiation from sunlight. For extended periods of non-use, opaque dust covers are recommended.

**2.4. Relative Humidity** Perhaps the greatest environmental damage to furniture comes from wide swings in relative humidity (rh). Wood absorbs and desorbs water as relative humidity rises and falls, and in doing so it swells and shrinks. Making matters worse, it expands and contracts unequally along different grain directions.

As humidity changes, the components of wooden objects are continually pushing and pulling against each other. This pressure often results in parts of furniture no longer fitting together closely or becoming distorted or breaking from their own internal stresses.

To stabilize humidity swings, a dehumidifier in the summer and a humidifier in the winter, are recommended.

**2.6. Furniture Use and Care**

Careless and uninformed treatment of furniture is the second major cause of preventable damage. Here are some pointers for proper use and care:

Protect surfaces from fire and excessive heat, utilize the product only for the purpose it was designed, be careful about what you place on a piece of furniture and avoiding rough use of the product.

Hot items, such as irons, coffee mugs, and steaming tureens can literally melt a finish away. Water from spills and condensation from vases and cold drink glasses can damage and deface coatings through “blooming,” an effect that makes transparent coatings white or milky. Damage is even worse when the liquid itself stains the surface, such as when ink or coffee or tea is spilled, or if the coating is penetrated and the staining liquid enters the wood itself.

Organic solvents, such as fingernail polish and remover, perfumes, and alcoholic drinks can behave as paint and varnish removers on many kinds of coatings. These problems are simple to address. Using coasters, oversized ashtrays, and writing pads can virtually eliminate the potential for this type of damage.

**2.2. Handling and Moving Furniture**

It is important to handle furniture carefully. Safe handling and moving of furniture begins with a basic understanding of how a piece is constructed. It is also important to have a plan in place before moving any product.

**2.2.1. General Concerns**

Before picking up a piece of furniture, determine how it is put together and if any of its parts are removable or detachable. Make sure you know where the furniture is its strongest, generally along a major horizontal element, and try to carry it from these points.

Before moving an item, make sure you know exactly where it goes next. Never hurry when you are moving furniture. Scratches, dents, and gouges from bumps against hand truck, doorways, and other furniture are always more likely in haste.

Make sure you have a firm grip on the piece with both hands. Do not wear cotton gloves. It is essential that hands not slip from a piece of furniture while it is being moved. Never slide or drag furniture along the floor. The vibration can loosen or break joints, chip feet, break legs, etc., and also cause damage to the carpeting or finish on the floor. Whenever possible, use trolleys or dollies for transporting heavy pieces. The following sections offer suggestions for moving specific types of furniture.

### **2.2.2. Seating**

When lifting a chair, remember that the seat rail is its strongest part, not the chair back. Frequently lifting by the back, especially the crest rail, will eventually result in breakage. For small chairs, lift by the side seat rails, one hand near the front on one side, the other near the rear on the other side.

When lifting a large chair or sofa, the principles are the same. Grab underneath the side frame, making sure to lift with your legs rather than your back. For upholstered chairs or sofas, place your hands underneath the frame to avoid touching the upholstery. For chairs with slip seats, remove the slip seat and wrap and move it separately to prevent its being soiled or falling out during the move.

Never try to move a large piece by yourself. A heavy chair or sofa piece requires at least two people. It is better to move the piece on a dolly or hand truck. A dolly or hand truck makes the move safer for both the movers and the object.

### **2.2.3 Tables**

The strongest part of a table is generally the apron. Whenever possible, lift the table carefully from the apron, never by the top or legs. Lifting on the top rather than the apron may break the glue-blocks that hold the top to the frame or strip out the screws that hold the top on.

Grabbing the legs, particularly tables with long, unsupported legs, will cause unnecessary stress on the leg and the joint connecting it to the apron. Whenever possible, wrap padding around a table's legs before moving it to prevent chipping or breakage during the move.

## **2.2. Furniture Maintenance**

If furniture is used wisely and handled carefully, it will need very little in the way of routine maintenance. Here are some tips for best practices:

### **2.3.1. Cleaning Surfaces**

For the most part, maintaining furniture simply means keeping it clean, carefully. Wood furniture usually needs to be cleaned only when there is a buildup of wax or dirt. Only unfinished wood, painted wood, or wood with a sturdy finish should be cleaned.

The finish on giltwood is often applied with a water-soluble size, or adhesive; it should be carefully dusted, not cleaned, or cleaned only by a professional.

Dust can be removed with the careful wipe of a damp cloth. Oily dirt or waxy residue can be removed with a mild detergent and water solution or with mineral spirits. However, it is vital to make sure that the cleaning solution does not affect the underlying surface. Even when you determine a cleaning method that works successfully, proceed cautiously.

For finished wood, dampen a cotton cloth with the solvent or cleaning solution, and gently rub over a small area at a time. Avoid using too much liquid, as they can cause damage. Then, wipe the cleaned surface with a clean dampened cloth to remove any cleanser residues, followed by a dry soft cloth. For stubborn stains, use PH-neutral detergents only. Direct exposure to sun can alter the original color.

Following simple cleaning, further protection and aesthetic enhancement can be obtained through the application of a stable, hard furniture polish, such as a hard paste wax. The hard-wax surface can be dusted more easily because it will be smoother, and the dust will not be imbedded in it as it would in an unwaxed surface. Waxing too often can result in a built-up, clouded surface.

**2.3.2. Cleaning Upholstery**

Follow textile manufacturer's guidelines.

**2.3.3. Metal with Finishes**

For cold rolled steel with coating like powder coating, bright chrome and blasted chrome, clean with a soft damp cloth and dry immediately. In case of stubborn stains, use specific products for metal only. Do not use very wet mops or abrasive cleaning products (bleach, ammonia, etc.) to avoid corroding the steel.

**2.3.4. Glass Boards**

Under normal use, clean with Windex and soft cotton cloth.

**2.3.5. Four Cast**

To clean the polyamide shells on Four Cast stack chairs, wipe the shell with a clean cloth wrung out in hot water with a neutral cleaning detergent. Afterwards, wipe the shell with a clean, dry cloth to avoid blotches/stripes. Difficult stains may require a more powerful detergent or solvent. Prior to cleaning, always test the detergent in a hidden spot (we recommend under the chair seat) to ensure that it will not damage the surface of the shell.

**3. Summary**

By adopting informed practices regarding the use, care, and maintenance of furniture, the odds are far greater that it will reach our successors intact and in good condition.