

How to Know When to Replace, Refinish or Touch-up: A practical guide

Bob had a problem. As a GM for a Hilton-branded property his research for ownership revealed that replacing his case goods was going to cost about \$728,000. This was not good news, but his options were limited because the brand was unhappy with the condition of the furniture, and his guest satisfaction scores were suffering.

Does this sound familiar?

What are the options for owners and operators in this situation? There are basically four: Replace, Complete Refinish and Color Change, Refinish in Same Color, or Touch-up. How do you determine which is the best for your situation?

Let's look at each in detail.

1. Touch-up:

Touch-up is a short term but important solution. From Day 1 after installation, the scratching and damage begins on the furniture. It is important to include stain pen touch-up in any PM program. In-house engineers, with a little training, can usually do an adequate job keeping up with the normal scratching and damage, at least for the first few years.

When the wear and tear get beyond the ability of engineers to keep up with, an outside vendor can be contracted to touch up all the furniture.

Cost: \$75 to \$125/room

Benefit: short term solution to appease brand for QA or PIP

2. Refinish and Color Change

Complete refinishing that strips the original finish before applying a new finish. This is often done to completely change the color of the wood finish, as in taking a light oak finish and changing it to a dark mahogany. Typically:

- This usually is done in conjunction with a renovation that completely changes the style and look of a room.
- The amount of work to accomplish this is considerable: blocking off entire floors at a time, safely removing debris and venting toxic fumes, etc; which means absorbing the cost of the refinishing and feeling the pain of diminished RevPar.
- Depending upon the number of pieces and work involved, this will run about 20-50% of replacement costs.
- The like-new quality extends the useful life of the furniture for many years.

This option is usually chosen after using the original furniture for 10+ years.

Cost: \$500 to \$1500/room depending on the number of pieces in scope of work

Benefit: Long-term solution that can include complete color change in furniture.

3. Refinish in Same Color

Refinishing that keeps the original finish and blends scratching and damage into the color and tone of the original. Typically, the following is true of this option:

- It will slightly darken the original finish to achieve a uniform glow and tone to the wood.

- It can be done in the room without blocking off floors.
- There are no toxic fumes, so it can be done without disrupting guest experience.
- Rooms are released back into inventory the same day, or within 24-hours.
- Depending upon the number of pieces this will run about 2-6% of replacement costs.
- Combined with replacement of hardware this can dramatically alter the look of a room, although not to the extent of full refinishing.
- This provides like-new quality, extending the useful life of the furniture for many years.

This option is usually chosen in the following situations:

- Deterioration. Where the condition and look of the furniture has deteriorated more rapidly than expected. For example, in many properties the battle with the brand about the condition of the furniture begins far too soon (sometimes as early as year 4 or 5) to justify replacing the case goods. This option satisfies the brand (and guests) with like-new quality and extends the useful life of the furniture for many years.
- Refresh the appearance. In some properties where there is no design imperative for change, this option is often chosen when case goods are looking worn and tired. It will renew their useful life while keeping the same basic look.

When this is done along with the replacement of hardware, it can dramatically improve the look and feel of the room. For example, solid, classic furniture with old-style brass Colonial hardware can be refinished with a more modern style of hardware to achieve a more contemporary look.

Cost: \$165 to \$225/room

Benefit: Long term solution that keeps the furniture in the same color.

These options save ownership from the cost of the final consideration...

4. Replacement

Eventually, all furniture gets replaced. The decision to replace case goods often follows these scenarios:

- The style is hopelessly out-of-date and needs to change.
- The case goods are falling apart structurally and need to be replaced.
- The style is tired compared to new properties opening nearby. The brand is not mandating change; but falling RevPar means something must be done for competitive advantage.
- The property is switching flags and the design imperatives of the PIP are paramount.

Cost: \$3,000 to \$10,000/room depending upon tier

Benefit: Completely new look and design

As our industry recuperates from the pandemic and awaits a return to normal travel and associated revenue increases, owners are looking to save money. As we have seen, avoiding the cost of replacing case goods does not mean simply resorting to the short-term solution of touch up, or having to replace the furniture.

Remember Bob? Like many GMs, he had instituted PM procedures that had kept the property relevant and viable for many years. And as in so many hotels, his engineering staff could not adequately maintain the furniture at the level needed for the brand and guest expectations.

Fortunately for Bob, his case goods were structurally sound and their classic look enabled him to choose refinishing in the same color, saving his owners about \$665,000.

The moral of the story? If the case goods are structurally sound, the aesthetic problems posed by the damage and wear to the original finish can be solved, returning the case goods to like-new status and enabling ownership to get many more years of use out of this valuable investment.

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