

MAKING COLLEGE *FEEL LIKE HOME*

By George Zaki



Residence halls in private universities across the nation have a similar goal: providing clean and functional spaces for living, recreation, and studies within residence spaces, while also encouraging a sense of community that makes students feel safe, welcomed, and comfortable.



Ideally, every residence hall will create an environment that encourages meaningful and memorable participation within those communities.

CREATING A COMMUNITY

When choosing a college, students are undoubtedly looking for amenities that they deem essential for feeling comfortable. As students introduce family members to colleges,

those students' parents are also considering the spaces where their children will be living. Certainly, safety is a concern, but attractive and appealing housing options are just as relevant to prospective students and their parents. When college costs are on the rise, the aesthetics of the environment are undoubtedly a factor in deciding where students will eventually enroll.

Designing for the students in and around student activities is sometimes challenging. In

35 years of making residence hall furniture, we have learned that students need to feel at home, though they are away from home.

It takes experience. And being around students does help. For the best results, design teams can visit campuses throughout the nation—from east coast to west coast—asking questions to students and meeting the college and university design teams.

Accommodation and comfort are a “must” when designing new products, especially products that will be used in Residence Halls. Products need to be designed around the existing facility, without compromising style, demand and configuration of the space. Additionally, the furniture should be flexible, reconfigurable, and easily moved around, yet also be sturdy and strong enough to weather a great deal of student activity.

CLUSTER CORNERS AND FLEXIBILITY

In addition to offering many seat widths to appeal to all sizes, the idea of “cluster corners” should be encouraged since the students like to discuss their issues together, relax between classes, and so on.

Furthermore, flexibility is also extremely important, so modular serpentine or geometric configurations and re-configurations should be part of space design.

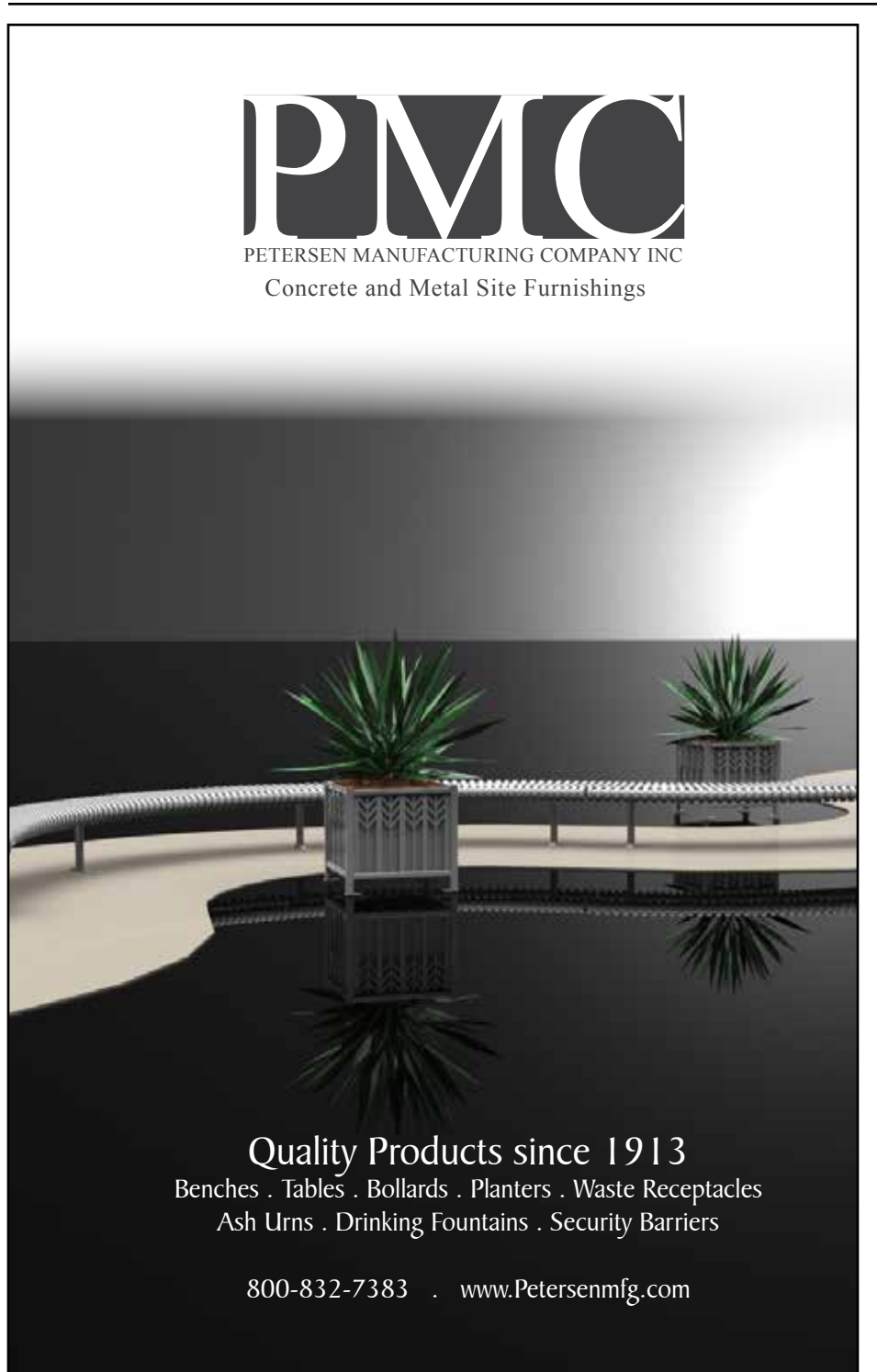
Modular seating also allows for a dynamic space that can be reconfigured to meet the needs of whatever is happening whether large group meetings or smaller groups or individuals.

ERGONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS

Here, we are talking about the actual shapes of the furniture working with the environment and the room to create a natural, free-flowing area where students can enjoy their time and be productive as well. Ergonomic considerations also include the actual furniture itself as far as comfort and how it works with the body to be supportive, natural and inviting. Seat heights and table heights have been standardized to meet these needs to make everyone feel comfortable while working, studying or relaxing.

MAKING SPACE FOR STAYING CONNECTED

When designing space solutions for students, it is vital to remember all electrical data so that



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students are always able to plug in, log on and stay connected with the outside world.

Today, electrical connections are created with USB data capabilities. They come in many design outlets. They need to be incorporated and made part of the space. Obviously, electrical USB ports can be installed and offered as part of the furniture built-ins without sacrificing the design.

Many styles of power and data ports are available, from flush mounted outlets to pop out versions. Additionally, several connections are available as well including AC power, RJ45 data, USB, AV and more—especially as portable technology grows more and more advanced and ubiquitous.

USING GREEN AND SUSTAINABLE MATERIALS

When choosing materials for modern residence halls, obviously all material used needs to be totally green, water-based, non-toxic, stain repellent, with fire and smoke deterrent upholstery. Materials must also pass local codes, and ideally be microbial resistant.

In addition to green concerns, the residence hall furniture needs to be sustainable in strength. All furniture frames are to be made

of hardwood, all bonds to be water borne, and preferably construction will be designed as “tongue and groove” for the best strength.

All frames and layers under upholstery must be glued to the frame, so the upholstery will not tear. Once the upholstery is torn, the only solution is to replace the furniture—which is very costly. Therefore, the solution is easy: making good decisions in spending a little more on better quality furniture will go a long way in saving money and time spent repairing or replacing inexpensive alternatives.

A HOME AWAY FROM HOME

When students leave home for college, and their normal daily routines are exchanged for a new world filled with both academic and social pressures, homesickness is a common result. Homesickness, though a common colloquial term, can lead to serious coping problems when students are in a new and intimidating environment. This anxiety and nervousness can be alleviated, in part, by students feeling comfortable in their surroundings.

Enhancing the student space will only invite the student to be, again, more at home. Clearly, it is an investment worth making. 🍷



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: George Zaki is a mechanical engineer who founded ERG International approximately 35 years ago. From his company’s inception, he’s had a very close relationship with design engineers in Europe who created ergonomics. Zaki has trained in ergonomic design under their supervision, so to speak, and their guidance in design and style has brought ERG International to its degree of national exposure and branding.

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