



# CUSTOM FURNITURE

for Libraries & Media Centers:  
**BENEFITS, COSTS, PROCESS & SCHEDULING**

by Bill Huston

Designing for the way we work, the rhythms of our daily routines, and the needs and comfort of our guests creates spaces that are efficient, comforting and inspiring. This attention to detail is cast when libraries are designed: spaces are created for varied purposes, lighting is selected for mood and productivity, and materials are chosen to make statements about what is important to a community.



The considerations so directly translated into a library building design should follow through to the items we touch and use every day: desks where we work, tables for study, seating areas where we hear stories, and quiet places where we reflect, relax, or catch up with the world.

By choosing custom furnishings that work with us, which are specifically designed to reflect the sensibilities of our unique spaces, we not only create a more efficient workspace, but a more inviting community center too. By choosing furnishings that will last for generations, we impart a sense of permanence, a sense of stability in a fleeting world, while demonstrating our commitments to sustainability and less waste for our community and our planet.

Because custom furniture isn't ordered from a published catalog, many "first-timers" have concerns about the process, costs and scheduling involved with custom furniture. Ordering furniture that is built specifically for your space and to suit the functional needs of your library isn't scary or overwhelming. Most custom furniture-makers work hard to make this process easy and comfortable for their clients. We've gathered

some of the most common concerns that project teams have regarding custom furniture, and provide you with some guidance.

### The Many Benefits of Custom Furniture

- Furniture that is designed for your specific needs helps you to be more efficient in your workplace, creating greater productivity, less frustration and less stress.
- Custom furniture can be designed to incorporate architectural elements and materials that are found in your space, providing a unified look throughout. This cohesive aesthetic is comforting, and lends an air of tradition and permanence.
- During the custom furniture design process, the future needs and uses of the furnishings are taken into consideration. This results in furnishings that will last for many, many years, reducing waste and unnecessary expense in the future.

- The most obvious and simplest benefit: with custom furniture you get what you need and want, not a catalog piece that is a compromise in some way.

### How Custom is Custom?

The design of custom furniture is an open book. If you can imagine it, it can be done. Sometimes all that is needed is a simple tweak to a standard design or a slight change in dimension. In other cases, furniture is designed from the ground up to reflect a specific characteristic or to fit in an unusual space, or solve a unique problem.

Making tables and carrels accessible to a person with disabilities, creating imaginative children's furniture, utilizing every inch of space in a reference desk: these are some of the more utilitarian reasons to consider custom.

Architects work long hours to design unique and useful spaces that will make communities proud. Furniture designers do the same. They approach furniture design with an open mind. They listen to their clients' needs, hear their aesthetic preferences, and work to create interesting, useful furniture that brings clarity and cohesiveness to a space.

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**You might consider custom furniture for a variety of projects:**

- a reference desk for a library
- a unique display to house interactive technology for an academic center
- transitional workspaces for a media center that will evolve with technological changes
- cases to display a special collection

## Is Custom Furniture Expensive?

It is common for prospective clients to think of custom furniture as being expensive and out of reach. It doesn't have to be. Companies that make production furniture don't like variations to their standard products which create time consuming and costly diversions in their manufacturing process. The custom changes are marked up dramatically to cover those disruptions.

At a custom furniture shop every piece of furniture is custom and a welcome challenge that the furniture makers are efficient at creating. There is no disruption, no efficiency lost, no dramatic mark-ups. Choices in wood types and materials used can affect price. These options along with design details and engineering changes can be tweaked during the custom design process to work within a budget.

Another very important consideration is that furniture that is built to heirloom quality doesn't need to be replaced multiple times over a lifetime, yielding extremely good value and saving you, the client, considerable money over time.

## Is Custom Furniture Difficult to Order?

It certainly shouldn't be. With a reputable furniture builder, the process of having custom furniture designed and built should be simple, straight forward and rewarding. You and your project team work directly with the furniture designer to develop design direction. Cost quotes are based on specific designs and are adjusted up or down as changes are made to the furniture designs. Be sure your custom furniture builder offers the following to ensure an easy, comfortable collaboration:

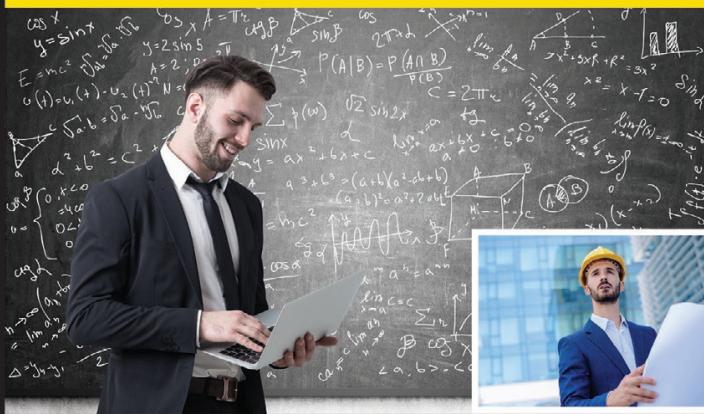
- communication can be done in person, by phone, or by email
- initial concepts will be sketched and shared, leading to scaled drawings for your review

- changes can be made as necessary until the final design is reached
- everything is approved by you, the client, before any work begins in the workshop
- your furniture builder will work with your schedule (and the shipper) to provide a seamless delivery & installation
- many custom furniture builders do not charge for design work; ask about this before you begin the process

## Accommodating Orders of Any Size

Custom furniture is suitable for orders of any size. Orders of a single custom table or desk are common, and welcome. Orders large enough to furnish an entire library or academic building are welcome too and will be built to the same exacting quality, working with the client's budget and project schedule. A custom furniture workshop is not a factory. There is no "production line." Instead, custom furniture is usually built one piece at a time. And yet, when a larger order is placed, the furniture

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builders gain some efficiencies which make those projects ease through the workshop smoothly as well. It is also quite common to combine unique pieces of custom furniture with stock items from other suppliers. This can be a great way to draw attention to a special collection, or to differentiate spaces.

**Custom furniture is suitable for orders large and small:**

- A suite of furniture for an academic library including the special collections room, the library director's office, teaching rooms, reading & study tables, computer stations, atlas stands, bookcases, display cabinets and chairs.
- A fun, unique table for a community room or children's room in a library
- coffee tables and end tables for a public space or lounge area
- a custom podium with a university seal

**At What Stage of My Project Should I Begin to Consider Custom Furniture?**

Furnishings specifications often come toward the end of a project, when budgets are narrowing and project managers see the end of their timeline looming. Decisions are then made in haste and furniture is often chosen based on lead times and bottom lines, rather than quality, longevity or a cohesive environment.

We recommend that furniture be considered early in every project. As the use of space is determined with the architect or project manager, the furnishings needed in those spaces should be discussed. Needs for custom designs should be noted, and the process of designing those pieces should begin right along with the design of the space. As the budgets are created for the building envelope and the interior construction, the furnishings should be discussed and a realistic furniture budget should be established.

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## Does Custom Furniture Take Forever to Build?

It certainly shouldn't. A reputable furniture builder can complete an order of furniture in about 10-12 weeks. Even the largest orders, to furnish entire university libraries, should generally be built in 12-15 weeks, once the designs are finalized. If that seems like a long time, consider this: if you shop at a reputable furniture store for a new sofa for your home, and you opt to choose the upholstery instead of buying the showroom model, you'll likely wait anywhere from 6-10 weeks for your sofa to be delivered. Custom furniture for a school or library is similar. As long as you don't wait until the last minute to consider furnishings for your project, your custom furniture can fit right into your schedule.

At home we customize our kitchens to suit our exact needs because we are in our kitchen every day. We choose the materials and appliances that make us most comfortable and efficient. In our fast-paced world, our libraries and work spaces need to work with us just the same and our community centers need to welcome our community. Every customization we can make to this end is to our benefit.



**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Huston & Company designs and builds custom furniture for libraries, schools, colleges & universities, as well as corporate spaces and private residential homes. Huston & Company has been building custom furniture for over 30 years, and was recently awarded Product of the Year by the Modern Library Awards. Huston & Company is located in Kennebunkport, Maine. Bill Huston is the owner of Huston & Company.

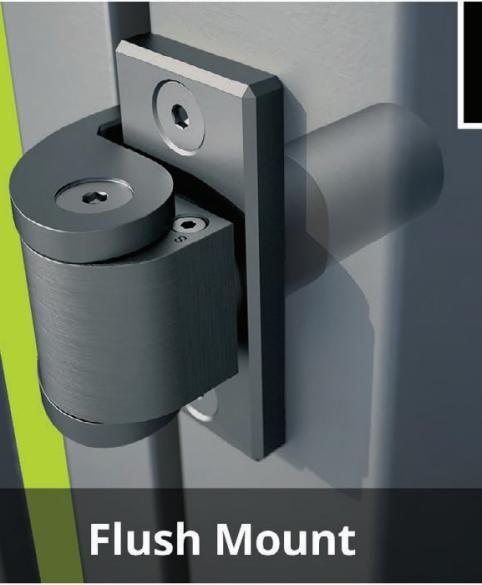
An advertisement for BEVCO seating. On the left, a large black ergonomic office chair with a textured seat and backrest is shown from a side-on perspective. To its right, another black office chair is shown from behind, highlighting its adjustable armrests. The background is a blue-tinted photograph of a group of people in a professional setting, possibly a classroom or office, engaged in a discussion. The text "SEATING THAT MAKES THE DIFFERENCE" is prominently displayed in the center in large, white, sans-serif capital letters. Below this, a smaller paragraph reads: "BEVCO chairs provide flexible options that play an active role in keeping students engaged and empowered to learn. BEVCO's GreenGuard Gold certified chairs offer adaptable seating that is sustainable, supportive and long-lasting." The BEVCO logo, consisting of the word "BEVCO" in a bold, white, sans-serif font with a green swoosh graphic above it, and the tagline "Where Quality Meets Comfort" below it, is located at the bottom left. To the right of the logo is the GreenGuard Gold certification seal, which is a circular badge with the "UL" logo and the words "GREENGUARD GOLD". At the very bottom, the text "Call 800-864-2991 or visit BEVCO.com to select your chair today!" is displayed in a white, sans-serif font.

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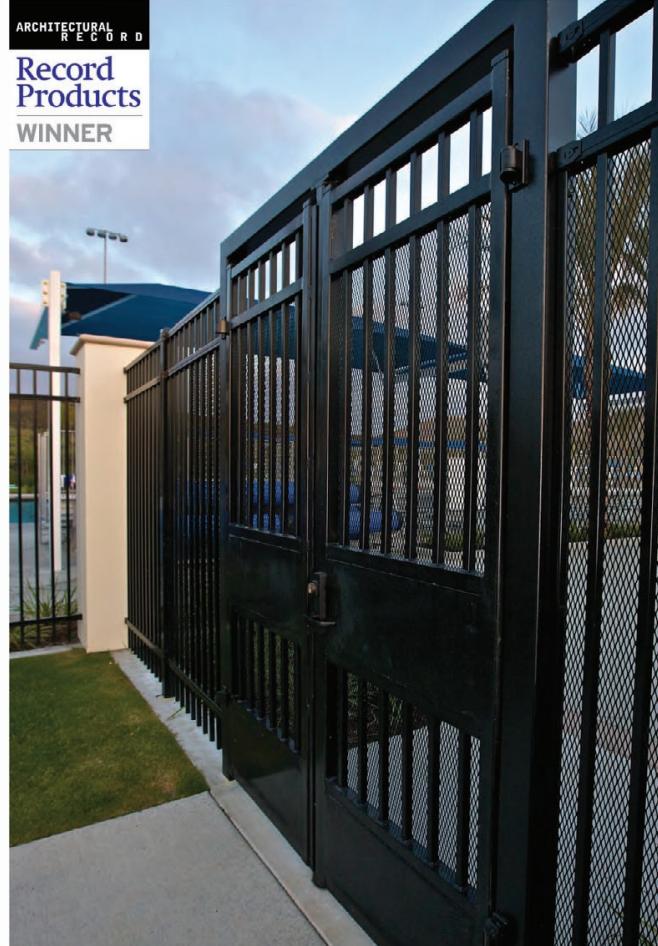
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