

## DESIGN/BUILD

A patio with “exquisite furnishings” enhances a company’s portfolio, says John Algozzini.

# Park it here

Ramp up your designs by offering seating options. *By JOHN ALGOZZINI*



## PRICE IT RIGHT

Everything designers do outside is part of the design process and the profit process. Furniture is an integral part of both.

“I have a design responsibility to my client and also a financial responsibility to my employer to explore all possibilities in the landscape,” says designer Anna Smailus of Thornapple Landscapes in Batavia, Ill. “While seat walls are incredibly popular, I also like to include furniture groupings and bench seating in those jobs where budget will allow it. By doing so, I’m providing a professional service that helps complete the design thought.”

Small furniture purchases made by landscape contractors may not be high-margin items, but they don’t have to be loss leaders either. Pricing varies from project to project, but I recommend including a 15 percent to 20 percent mark-up on materials only. Delivery, assembly and set up are done on a time and material basis.

A lower profit margin on furniture may be a reality, but there is an upside: There are almost no post-installation issues since it doesn’t require water and any warranty issue is with the manufacturer. Also, when a company decides to photograph a project a year or two after the installation, it knows its furniture selections will be in place as part of the design. Arriving to find plastic furniture from a big-box outlet on a patio you designed can be a bit deflating, but a patio with exquisite furnishings enhances any company’s portfolio at point of presentation.

## SELLING SEATING

Not all clients are receptive to the idea of having furniture selected for them. It takes a subtle and educated approach to engage clients and gain their trust. Locating the furniture on the drawing is a good way to start; it shows clients that you’ve considered scale and how the space can be used for the family and for entertainment.

Talking about seating provides a competitive edge. It involves the designer in a more meaningful way. Early in the process that discussion assists the homeowner in a way that distinguishes the designer as more concerned, informed and holistic than the competition.

The landscape market evolves constantly and being part of the evolution is preferable to watching it pass you by. Whether you park it here or park it there, furniture in the landscape provides pleasure, profit and possibilities for every designer and contractor looking for an edge in their business.

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**A** good landscape is always about utility *and* aesthetics. One of the more expressive ways to accent any garden is through seating options. Seating in the landscape is a definitive expression of style. Whether it’s wood, metal, wicker or composite, the furniture in our landscapes helps define, embellish and provide the outdoor living space with enduring character. Almost any landscape I design today includes seating, whether it’s seat walls or furniture groupings.

What led me to start integrating furniture and other site amenities was a class I attended by landscape architect Leo Kelly. The class was not on furniture, but on wood structures. He referred to one of his arbors as a “visual pause.” It made me think not so much of arbors or pergolas but of other garden elements that gave the eye and the user points of reflection beyond the patio or the plantings. More specifically, it led me to think about seating and furniture in the garden beyond its basic utility.

## VARIETY AND PLACEMENT

Whether the space is strongly formal or randomly casual, I like to incorporate a variety of seating elements into designs. My designs have included wide-ranging seating choices, such as seats from Wrigley Field in Chicago and a tribal council stump from the TV series “Survivor.” But even a solitary chair in the right place on the patio or in a garden bed works wonders from an aesthetic and practical standpoint.

Beyond Kelly’s “visual pause,” sometimes furniture is a “visual stop.” A thoughtfully placed grouping, chair or bench at the end of an axial view works wonders to create impact. The terminus of an axis is not completely developed from a design standpoint unless there’s something located there to catch and hold the eye.