

First-Class Seating

Villa International produces custom RV furniture to satisfy the most discriminating tastes.

Words by Shelly Floyd

Some people are unlucky in love; my misfortune has always been with furniture. Everything always seems to end up too big, a bit small, alarmingly short or ridiculously tall. Over the years I have bought and discarded enough sofas, chairs and ottomans to furnish an off-campus apartment complex. The last place I ever expected to find a perfect fit was inside an RV, and the surprise of such an unexpected discovery was enough to warrant a personal visit to these furniture wizards.

Villa International has two locations — Elkhart, Indiana and Cerritos, California. My fact-finding mission brought me to the Golden State site, far enough from Hollywood to avoid the tour buses, but still conveniently RV-accessed right next to Interstate 5. The surrounding side streets were wide enough to accommodate a motorhome.

Robert Long, Vice President of Sales, greeted me in a front lobby displaying Euro-recliners in various colors. "We

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recently moved to get the operation all under one roof," he said. "Our previous facility was spread out and that made it tricky moving around furniture during rain showers."

Normally my Oregon grown opinions would scoff at the idea of problematic southern California rain, but after a week of torrential downpours. I could definitely see where packing a 10-way cab seat across the parking lot could have some downsides.

Luxury sleeper sofas, savvy J-lounges, soothing recliners, regal dinette chairs and cab seats with integrated safety belts are a few of the different RV furniture styles crafted by Villa International. The company deals exclusively with the RV market, building stock orders for manufacturers and custom orders for individual owners. "We love to accommodate the customer," Robert said.

When a furniture order comes into Villa International, the first place it goes is to Neil Ta, the resident product designer



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charged with designs from concept to blueprint. "I create the pencil sketch and scan it into my computer. To create the

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final artwork I use Adobe Photoshop program instead of CAD," Neil explained, referring to the Computer Assisted Drawing software favored by architects and engineers. "I find Photoshop is easier to manipulate and it also allows me to add color."

Neil clicks a few keys and brings up a drawing that doesn't just include dye, but also the shading and tinting of interior lighting, which helps to explain why Villa RV products appear more as art than trade.

Once Neil's drawing is complete, and given the green light by Robert, the project is turned over to Sal Garcia, who personally oversees construction of each prototype. Sal is also responsible for the occasional oddity that shows up in the Villa display at shows and rallies. "We like to exhibit unusual pieces that will demonstrate our custom capabilities and cause people to stop and talk about their own creative ideas," Robert said.

Villa International celebrated its 50th anniversary last year. As we walked away from the front offices and through a doorway that led into the bustling manufacturing portion of this establishment it was pretty obvious to see that there is plenty enough work to keep them hopping for another half-century.

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Rows and rows of shelving were filled to the brim with rolls of leather, vinyl and fabric in every imaginable color. I was curious about the lack of dust normally found in a stockroom. "Nothing stays on the shelf for long," Robert replied. "We move through the inventory at a fast pace. Enough pieces to furnish seventy to eighty coaches each week."

Today Villa International still handcrafts each piece of furniture, but a computer is employed to cut the leather, ultra-leather and vinyl material used to upholster the individual items. "The computer scans the material for flaws," Robert explained. He added that the computer also assists the process

by calculating exact amounts of material required, in place of estimates yielded from hand cutting. However, there is still plenty of human input during this phase. "The patterns fed into the computer are created by hand," Robert said. Patterns consist of stiff cardboard that are attached to hangers and hung on extended rods, when not in use, gracing a whole back wall.

One section of the plant is a metal shop where the tubular steel frames are hand cut and hand welded to create the custom contouring that has become a familiar Villa trademark. Metal springs attached to the frame provide suspension to give the furniture a comfortable residential feel. Next to the steel construction area is a wood shop where sturdy hand cut pieces are assembled to make arm rests, leg pieces and those always appreciated storage drawers that grace the front panel of so many sofas. The foam shop rounds out the final piece of base construction. And according to Robert this is where, "the best quality, high resilience, heavy duty foam," is wrapped and glued onto the frame.

Once the frame is wrapped in foam it's time to upholster. Each piece is assigned to one of a dozen workers to cloak the item with fabric, vinyl or that ultra-soft leather that can convince even the busiest person to stay seated just a bit longer. The upholstery experts are so professional they make the process seem as simple as wrapping a small square box. How do they acquire such obvious skill? "Most of our employees have been with us a decade or more," answered Robert. "All new hires go through a lengthy apprenticeship to acquire on-the-job training."

Once the furniture is complete and installed in an RV, it is maintained by frequent cleaning to remove dust. Fabrics should be vacuumed using a soft brush attachment; vinyl and leather wiped with a soft cloth. Spills on any of the furniture should be immediately washed using warm water and a mild liquid detergent. Dry damp vinyl and leather spots to prevent water stains. Window shades or exterior awnings can be commissioned to prevent the furniture from prolonged exposure to direct sun. Framework on Villa International furniture comes with a lifetime guarantee and there is a two-year warranty on foam, springs and fabric.

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If you are ever in need of repair to the framework, new foam or upgraded upholstery, Villa can assist by shipping replacement parts to your RV dealer or a professional upholstery specialist, whomever you prefer. "We always take care of repairs, but how that is done is unique to each circumstance," Robert said.

Aftermarket customization is a large part of Villa's business. "We have customers that come back each time they buy a new coach and request that we personalize the furniture for them," Robert said.

Villa will also work with you to measure, create and install custom furniture pieces. You can begin by filling out the order form and spec sheet available over the website at www.villainternational.com and click on "Place an Order."

During my visit to the Villa International factory Sal was finishing up a black sofa slated for display at an upcoming rally.

"This piece is designed to maximize available space," Robert said, inviting me to sit as he demonstrated a centerpiece that pulls down to serve as a middle armrest and removable compact pillows installed on each end. The sofa was also made from that superb ultra-soft leather and as I found myself sinking into the luxurious sensation of handcrafted excellence it dawned on me that I no longer need to play Goldilocks in my relationship with furniture. Nothing produced by this company is too hard, too narrow, too heavy or too compact. In fact, when it comes to Villa International, everything feels just right.

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