

## THE BEST PROTECTION FOR OUTDOOR FURNITURE

By Sharon Sanders



303 Products is fast becoming the most trusted name in fabric care and furniture care among specialty outdoor-living retailers. Dennis Praegitzer, founder and CEO, has built a brand that manufacturers, including Sunbrella®, are recommending to customers to protect and enhance their patio furniture and fabrics.

Praegitzer created the formula for 303 Products in 1980, when he was working in aviation. 303 Aerospace Protectant was the first ultraviolet-sunscreen surface treatment in the world created specifically to protect aircraft from ultraviolet light and the elements. After a number of years, Praegitzer expanded the 303 Products brand and began selling products to the marine and automotive industries (and, recently, to the outdoor-living industry).

Nearly 1,000 specialty patio stores across the United States carry 303 Products on their retail floors today. "When people drop thousands of dollars on outdoor furniture, they expect it to last," Praegitzer says. He explains that most people don't know that even the finest outdoor fabrics can lose water, stain and mildew repellency after a period of time because the factory-applied chemical naturally wears away. Fabrics need to be cleaned and retreated regularly with products that are gentle and effective. 303 Products offers four formulations proven to keep outdoor furniture looking and performing as originally intended.

303 Fabric Cleaner™ and 303 Fabric/Vinyl Cleaner™ remove even the most difficult stains from cushions, umbrellas, awnings and canopies. They are perfect for precleaning fabric before applying 303 High Tech Fabric Guard™, which restores water repellency and repels dirt and oil-based stains to keep fabrics clean and looking like new. They are effective on all synthetic and natural fabrics.

303 Patio Furniture Cleaner™ safely removes leaf stains, bird droppings, tree sap, barbecue smoke, oil and grease from teak, plastics, polyethylene, vinyl, fiberglass, powder-coated metal and stainless steel. 303 Patio Furniture Protectant™ is the world's most powerful ultraviolet sunscreen that prevents fading. It brings back a like-new finish that repels soil, body oils and suntan lotions.

Sunbrella recommends 303 Fabric/Vinyl Cleaner and 303 High Tech Fabric Guard to its customers. "They know that 303 Products won't damage their fabrics," Praegitzer says, and will keep the fabrics performing as they should. He works closely with Sunbrella and specialty retailers to educate customers on the how-to aspects of fabric care and furniture care.

The 303 Products Web site was created specifically as an education resource for all of the company's product lines (including those for the marine and automobile industries). More than a million site visitors per month—15 million per year—can obtain tips on how to maintain outdoor furniture, including specific instructions for Sunbrella fabric care.

Another part of 303 Products' education effort is providing retailers with fabric-care brochures (free of charge) that they can give to their customers who purchase patio furniture. 303 Products sends the brochures out by the thousands, even to retailers who don't carry its products. "Our goal is to educate consumers, not just to sell products," Praegitzer says. Glen Raven regularly refers customers with questions about fabric care directly to 303 Products to ensure that they are using the right product to get the desired results.

303 Products recently expanded its product sales into Europe and Scandinavia. "Our first year, we sold 100 cases; now, we're selling tens of thousands of cases per year," Praegitzer says. Customers can easily find local retailers who carry 303 Products by visiting [www.wheretobuy303.com](http://www.wheretobuy303.com), a new Web site that includes a store locator. Any retailer who carries 303 Products and fills out the company's factory support form is included on the site. As the demand for the company's products increases, Praegitzer plans to continue to grow the business, while maintaining his focus on providing a high-quality product. "The most important thing to our company is to deliver a great product and great service. Price is secondary," he says. "Retailers and manufacturers recommend us because we're looking out for their best interests, which ultimately leads to happy customers and more sales." ■



Outdoor fabrics take center stage with customers who want to create furniture with a custom look.

to wow our customers when they walk through our doors because they expect the best," Simons says. She and her team go to great lengths to select products that will appeal to their customers' discerning tastes. Manufacturers such as Brown Jordan, Gloster and Cast Classics, which make classic styles, tend to be the most popular.

"People around here like tradition," Simons says. All-weather wicker and teak are big sellers because they have a timeless look and feel. Simons also offers a wide selection of outdoor fabrics because customers want furniture with a custom feel, not something straight off the showroom floor. While Simons carries full collections of manufacturers' fabrics, she recently brought in outdoor fabrics from Kravet and Robert Allen, as well. Using these fabrics, she says, "costs customers a little more, but they like the fact that they can put their own spin" on their purchases.

Simons is just as particular when it comes to gift and accessory items. If a company is selling its products to a large retail chain, she doesn't even consider carrying them at Dodds & Eder. "Customers come to us expecting to find something special and unique for their homes," she says.

Simons explains that diversity has been the key to Dodds & Eder's longevity. "There's always something changing and happening around here," she says. During the holidays, all the outdoor furniture is taken off the showroom floor and the store's talented design team transforms the showroom into a glistening wonderland filled from floor to ceiling with all the classic Christmas decorations and gifts, including snow globes, Christmas villages, nativity scenes, ornaments, wreaths and live Christmas trees and roping.

Seasonally, the store sets up a farm stand where local growers sell fresh produce, including corn, potatoes, tomatoes and onions. Simons says that customers are constantly stopping by the store to see what's new on the showroom floor, buy plants, pick up birdseed (one of the few products left from the early years) or meet with the landscape design-and-build team. "People come in three to four times a week, especially during the holidays," she says.

### BUILDING THE BRAND

The Dodds & Eder brand is growing stronger every year as its reputation and visibility grow with consumers. Simons runs an image advertising campaign in the *New York Times*, February through September, that has brought in many new customers. She has also built a



The Dodds & Eder management team: left to right, Jo-Ann Perkins, Joe McLaughlin (owner) and Carrie Leopold; seated, Dottie Simons.

close relationship with one of the feature writers for the newspaper's home-and-garden section; this reporter calls her twice a year (at the beginning of the outdoor season and before the holidays) to get her take on the latest trends in outdoor living. "I'm willing to get on the phone and talk to anybody, anytime, because I want people to see our name," Simons says.

She also advertises in the high-end regional magazines that target affluent readers. These publications only run ads for top brands, such as Mercedes-Benz and Kohler. "It gives an extra kick to our credibility when Dodds & Eder is tied in with those names," Simons says. One of the magazines regularly hosts special events for its readers. Last month, Simons set up an outdoor-furniture vignette at one of its cocktail parties so that guests could see (and relax in) the furniture, and it was a big hit. She hopes to host the kickoff event for the magazine's spring 2008 issue, which is expected to draw more than 100 readers and manufacturers.

Dodds & Eder has also gained a reputation as a business that gives back to the community. It supports the local Boys & Girls Club, senior center, schools and chamber of commerce. It even donates merchandise to a local preschool's thrift shop. "We are a community business, so we give back in any way we can," Simons explains.

Ultimately, Dodds & Eder has become what it is today because of its service reputation, which has been its cornerstone from the very beginning. "We are a service business," Simons says. "Customers want a knowledgeable sales staff, individual attention and a company that's willing to do whatever it takes to keep them happy. It's what sets us apart from the big-box retailer," she says. ■