



Accessorize Your Dock

by Andy Bennett

From seating to storage, get the most from your favorite cabin accessory.

Your lake place, perched on your very own stretch of shoreline, is beautiful. And whether it's been in the family for generations or you've just signed the paperwork and have been handed the keys, you might be feeling the urge to make it a little bit better. Sure, you could undertake major renovations and remodeling, but you can put your own distinctive stamp on your lake place by doing something as simple and relatively inexpensive as giving your dock a little facelift with some fun new accessories.

So take a close look at your dock. Once you've thought of a few more ways you could be using it, there are a

lot of options and accessories to help you get the most out of it and your waterfront. Whether your dock is old or new, the following accessories can help make your dock more user-friendly and can really dress up your dock, no matter how old it may be.

First Things First: Safety

Think about the friends and family who'll be using your dock. Do you have young children, elderly parents, grandparents – or even dogs – who have a hard time navigating? If so, consider a set of steps leading from the dock down into the water. It makes swimming a lot more accessible for all.

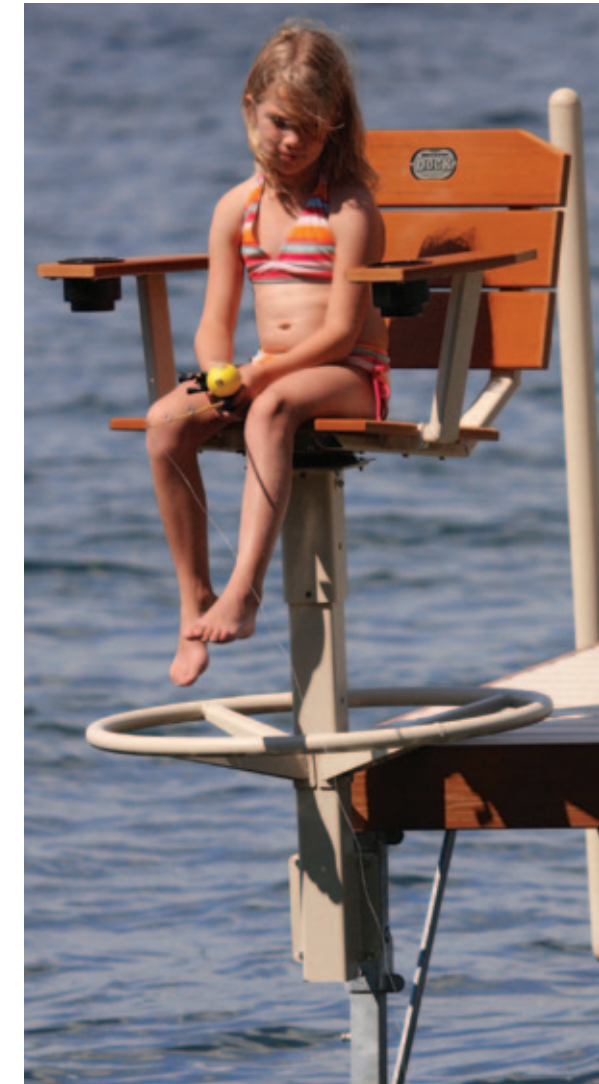
photo courtesy ShoreMaster



LEFT: Rope railings, like these from Eastern Township Docks, keep you safe while giving your dock a more natural look.

RIGHT: ShoreStation's EON Marine Swivel Chair is 22" wide and rotates a full 360 degrees.

BELOW RIGHT: FLOE's hammock stand is made from sturdy aluminum and swivels over the dock for easy access.



A swim ladder is a safety essential. It can be a lifeline for a tired swimmer or someone who has accidentally slipped off the dock, but it also greatly improves in and out access to the lake for swimming on a daily basis.

For ladders and stairs, you'll want to select a material that matches the design and decking material of your dock, and you'll want to make sure that the treads of the ladders and stairs are slip-resistant. Powder-coated aluminum, for instance, provides solid traction and remains cool to the touch under the summer sun.

Also, consider your freeboard (the distance between the surface of the deck and the water). If it fluctuates, you'll likely want to choose an adjustable ladder versus a fixed staircase for getting in and out of the water. If you're worried about space, Tommy Docks offers a quick release bracket that lets you add or remove the ladder as needed.

When it comes to protecting your loved ones on the dock, several companies offer optional hand railings to add extra stability and security when walking along your dock. And some, like FLOE and EZ-Dock, have pre-engineered corner pieces or transition edges that make navigating the right angles of your dock and getting in and out of your boat much easier and safer. Couple these with a product like EZ-Dock's security curbing, designed to keep wheelchairs and stroller wheels from going over the edge, and your dock can quickly become a safe and accessible fun pad for the whole family.

Get Comfy: Seating

It's amazing how quickly your dock becomes an extension of your living room. Watching the sun set while you dangle your feet in the water is an experience you just can't beat. But, if you really want to make your dock a family gathering spot, investing in some seating options is a good idea.

Probably the most popular option is a bench. It's the perfect spot for two to sit and watch a sunset and relax, and the benches offered by most major dock companies are affordable and easy to install. Plus, they're generally low-maintenance.

But even something as standard





ShoreStation's Gear Tower has six storage hooks under the large table top surface. An optional light attachment not only helps illuminate the items on the table top, but provides additional lighting over a portion of your dock's surface.



ShoreMaster's Storage Shed provides you with enough space to tuck away all of your favorite on-the-water toys.

as a bench comes with options. Do you want cupholders? How about something ergonomically designed to make it easy on your back? Or maybe you'd like a full 360-degree pivot to take advantage of all that your view has to offer? Whatever your choice, there's a bench out there for you. And some even mount out and over the water, saving valuable deck space.

Your seating can also include chairs. For instance, ShoreStation offers the EON Marine Swivel Chair made of maintenance-free material that's designed to resist splitting or rotting. The chair rotates a full 360 degrees and provides an ideal spot for casting. FLOE even offers a hammock stand that fits any hammock and provides a perfect spot for lounging with your favorite book. Looking for a table? Porta-Dock offers a table and chair set complete with umbrella.

Out of Sight: Storage

If you're using your dock to its full fun potential, you're also likely creating some clutter. Swim gear, snorkels, tackle, rods and reels – it all adds up to a lot of stuff needing a place to hide.

ShoreMaster offers lockable dock boxes in 3-, 5- and 7-foot sizes that can be installed on either a standing or a floating dock. EZ-Dock offers its own dock-mounted storage boxes made of weather-resistant material in either a standard or corner-mounted version. (Corner mounts do a good

job of saving on foot-traffic space.)

ShoreStation also offers a Gear Tower with a tabletop large enough to clean your catch and heavy-duty storage hooks underneath for storing life jackets, tow ropes and towels. And, if you just have more stuff than you know what to do with, you could always go all-in and get a dock storage shed from ShoreMaster.

Finally, if you're looking to store something a little larger, say something with a paddle, consider building or buying a canoe or kayak rack. Porta-Dock offers a ready-made rack.

Shine On: Lighting

Unless you plan on using your dock only during the daylight hours, dock lights are a good idea. They'll make it easier to spot your dock from the boat in the dark, and make loading and unloading easier.

When you're looking for lighting options, you'll need to decide your preferred power source: The sun or the outlet.

Solar lights are great because they don't require any cords or plugs, but if your dock is parked in a shady spot, you might find solar lights don't pack enough of a luminary punch or get dim too soon.

If you don't want lights on your dock spoiling the view of the starry night sky, the glow-in-the-dark dock cleats from FLOE might be a good solution. They mark a path along

the dock and give you markers to steer toward. Plus, there won't be any stumbles or toes stubbed on cleats in the dark when you're racing to get to dinner on time.

Protecting Your Toys

A dock, by its very nature, is on the water. And anytime you're around water it's a good idea to minimize the opportunities for damage to yourself, of course. But don't forget to give a little extra protection to your toys.

Your boat and dock are both large, heavy objects. And you'll regularly be steering one of them toward the other. So a soft, squishy barrier between the two of them sounds like a good idea, right? Most dock companies sell dock bumpers of some shape or size, and it's up to you whether you want vertical or horizontal, and just how much coverage you need.

To answer that question, consider how many items you plan on tying up at your dock and how much of the dock comes into contact with them – both in calm and rough waters, as well as high and low water levels. Also, be sure to include pipe bumpers and corner bumpers in whatever dock plan you make.

If you really want to keep your

boat and dock apart, consider mounting fiberglass mooring whips or mooring arms onto your dock. Mooring whips are somewhat flexible, but mooring arms – like the ones from Safe Harbor Marine – are rigid and keep your boat at a safe distance from your dock in all types of weather.

Yes, that's a lot to think about. But here's what we suggest: head on down to your dock, dangle your feet for a while, and before you know it ... well, you'll probably be asleep. But maybe you'll dream about the perfect dock set-up for you and your family. Who knows? Stranger things have happened. ☺

Andy Bennett often dreams of the perfect home theater system. But that's only because he doesn't own a dock ... yet.

READER RESOURCES:

- Eastern Township Docks, www.docks.qc.ca
- EZ-Dock, www.ez-dock.com
- FLOE, Intl., www.floeintl.com
- Porta-Dock, www.porta-dock.com
- Safe Harbor Marine, www.safeharbormarine.com
- ShoreMaster, www.shoremaster.com
- ShoreStation, www.shorestation.com
- Tommy Docks, www.tommydocks.com

Most dock accessories can be placed anywhere along a dock's surface, allowing you to customize according to your dock's layout.



Porta-Dock's Solar Dock Lighting provides over 18 hours on a full charge and mounts to any Porta-Dock with the included bracket.

bottom photo courtesy ShoreMaster/ top photo courtesy ShoreStation

photos courtesy Porta-Dock