

# Welcome to the Clubhouse



*Clubhouses have long been admired for their architecture, and now for their creature comforts too*

BY TOM CONNOR



If as a youngster you were fortunate enough to have been invited inside one or more of the great, old, Met Area golf clubhouses, you may have wondered what the all the fuss was about. Some were as spare as summer cottages or boarding schools, others stuffy and stodgy, like a museum, where you aren't allowed to touch anything. Very few felt particularly inviting or homey.

It's no wonder, as many of the early clubs had been private estates of the wealthy elite. On Long Island, for example, Roslyn Country Club in North Hempstead took up residence in the 1920s' manor house built for industrialist Edward S. Moore. In Manhasset, William K. Vanderbilt II turned part of his rolling acreage into the Deepdale Golf Club; in 1954, when the Long Island Expressway pushed through the northern corner of the property, club members bought W.R. Grace's mansion nearby and designed a new course around it. And the clubhouse at the Old Westbury Golf & Country Club was once the 30-room Colonial mansion of Cornelius Vanderbilt Whitney.

What the older clubhouses lacked in amenities, of course, they made up for in

exclusivity. Their allure lay in the knowledge that you were being granted admittance and allowed to gaze upon the fairways from inside. The grillroom served adequate food but excellent spirits. Who cared if the locker rooms were spartan and the sofas threadbare?

Things have changed. While extensive renovations have warmed the hearts of many MGA clubs in recent years, a host of clubs have risen during the same time to serve the needs of new generations of golfers. Staunch-

**Atlantic Golf Club's classic clubhouse frames the approach to the final hole (top).**



GlenArbor's stately columns evoke a genteel, relaxed atmosphere, as does its locker room (inset, opposite page).

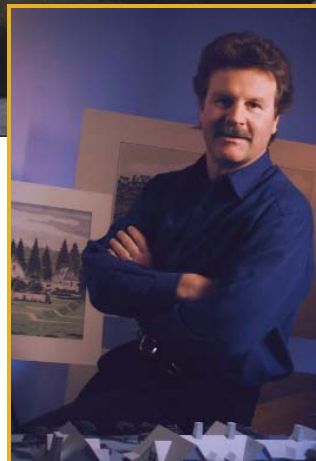


**Mark Finlay (inset, right) designed Whippoorwill's clubhouse in the style of a large country cottage.**

ly traditional or radically contemporary, these clubhouses relate to their courses much as the old-line clubs did (in some cases, better). In addition, they are often a lot more welcoming and casual in nature, with little or no fuss.

One of the people responsible for this shift in clubhouse atmospheres is Mark Finlay. During the last decade, the Southport, Connecticut architect has designed or renovated facilities at more than a dozen MGA clubs, including GlenArbor, Whippoorwill, Siwanoy and Waccabuc in Westchester County, and the Patterson Club and Country Club of New Canaan in Connecticut. Finlay has made news outside the Met Area as well: Earlier this winter, his work on The Alotian Club near Little Rock, Arkansas won top ranking for golf accommodations in *Golf Digest's* annual index of America's 50 Greatest Golf Retreats.

Finlay is a traditionalist in the mold of Clifford Wendehack, who designed the stone edifices at Winged Foot, Ridgewood and Mountain Ridge, and Stanford White, architect of the iconic clubhouse at Shinnecock Hills. "I'm doing what they were doing," Finlay says. "I've stayed with traditional design, and continue to build traditional clubs,



because golf is so traditional a game. The old clubs are romantic and reassuring – they frame the course in a way that you always know where you are in the landscape."

There is no question that the older Met Area clubhouses which endure today are worthy of imitation. Built on Long Island in 1892, and the first clubhouse in the U.S. designed specifically for golf, Shinnecock Hills is the embodiment of White's classic style: an elongated rectangle composed of broad gables with Palladian windows, continuous porches with Doric columns, and cedar shingles that weather and silver over time. Despite additions and renovations, it remains the quintessential, traditional American clubhouse.

With Winged Foot, meanwhile, Wendehack sought to create an English scholastic-style clubhouse that would not only look as if it had been around for centuries (it went up in 1923) but that would, in fact, endure forever. The stones used extensively in building this monument to golf – Fordham Gneiss, Pound Ridge Gneiss, Manhattan Schist – were mined on the property. (Not quite so easy for Ken Bakst. The owner of Friar's Head Golf Club, which opened in 2002 on the far northern shore of Long Island, Bakst had to trans-

restaurant, and a massive (nearly 70,000 square feet) clubhouse.

The clubhouse has undergone a change in architects since planning began, but not in concept. When the design was first unveiled in 2005, it resembled a futuristic ocean liner with sails of steel and glass, and that has remained the vision.

“I think we’re going to show how far you can go in clubhouse design, because we’re going as far from the traditional clubhouse as you can go,” says John Newman of Lindsay Newman Architecture and Design, the current firm on board with the Firemans.

Whatever that may mean in terms of curb appeal, like other new clubhouses Liberty National intends to emphasize interior comfort and ease of use. “What’s important inside will be the continuity and flow of space from room to room,” Newman says. What might also be important to members will be the views of the Statue of Liberty and the Manhattan skyline that all that glass will afford.

But if an argument can be made for a modern approach to clubhouses, Robert Rubin may be the best man to make it. The Bridge on Long Island is Rubin’s homage to the self-made, contemporary man.

The modernist, glassy, fan-shaped clubhouse, slated for completion in the fall, was designed by Rubin, who teaches architectural theory at Columbia, and architect



Roger Ferris. The design is inspired by the blades of a racecar turbocharger, but might as easily be mistaken for a modern art museum (Rubin, a former commodities trader, has an extensive art collection).

The clubhouse design at The Bridge certainly suits the course. Situated on the site of the 520-acre former Bridgehampton Motor Racing Circuit, which Rubin owned and operated for years before his obsession with golf, the fairways are dotted with old guardrail and flag stations from the circuit, and the cart paths lined with discarded tires.

Rubin has been quoted as saying “the words ‘country club’ make me nervous,” adding that he has felt unwelcome at some of the world’s finest clubs and vowed never to have anyone feel unwelcome at the Bridge. “I wanted to design something that would be very comfortable for the way people live now, which is different than when the great clubs were built,” he says. “A lot of clubs try to recreate tradition and that’s a losing game, because traditional clubs have tradition and you can’t manufacture tradition.”

Instead, members and their guests can expect to find a minimalist, contemporary interior, lacking the clutter of older, more traditional clubs, but loaded with racing artifacts, comfortable furniture, and modern amenities: men’s and ladies’ steam rooms, a common exercise room and Pilates studio with a trainer specializing in golf specific training, and storage space in the clubhouse cellar for up to three cases of wine per member.

At the end of the day and the round, what the best of the newer clubs have in common are buildings that relate to their sites and courses in intimate and individualistic ways. And that is indeed something to welcome. ■

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The futuristic design of the Liberty National clubhouse (top right) contrasts with the more nautically themed structure now under construction at Bayonne Golf Club (below and inset).

