

Too Cozy for Comfort

Growing pains led to a \$24 million renovation and expansion at Admiral's Cove.

Project Profile

Club: The Club at Admiral's Cove

Location: Jupiter, Fla.

Master Planner: Peacock + Lewis

Architect: Peacock + Lewis

Interior Design Firm: Image Design

Clubhouse Contractor: Weitz Golf International

Golf Course Construction: Quality Grassing

Cost: \$24 million

Date: May through December, 2003

Project Highlights:

- Parking situation remedied by removing two tennis courts and adding 25 parking spots for cars and 64 for golf carts in a landscaped plaza
- Clubhouse expanded by 38,000 square feet
- Original interior architecture and décor upgraded from nautical to transitional
- Faded teak paneling replaced with painted gypsum walls and custom molding
- Clubhouse brought into building code and ADA compliance with infrastructure upgrades

By Jamie L. Scheppers, Contributing Editor

There is no shortage of impressive numbers associated with The Club at Admiral's Cove in Jupiter, Fla. The private recreational country club, located on the state's southeast coast just north of Palm Beach, has over 900 residences on over five miles of secluded waterway, with 500 private docks. There are 45 Robert von Hagge-designed golf holes, two golf retail shops, and ten tennis courts. Two fitness facilities, an Olympic-sized pool, a spa and a beauty salon provide recreational activities off the course. A 74-slip, full-service marina and a 32-room hotel up the ante further, and there's even a Wachovia Private Banking branch inside the main clubhouse.

But as these numbers were being amassed, at one point they spawned a second set of more troubling figures (see box, pg. 25) that reflected a serious challenge for the club's management: Membership was fast outgrowing existing facilities, leading not just to operating inefficiencies, but lost revenue opportunities.

These problems were first brought to light through a survey in which 80 percent of responding members said they felt the club's East Clubhouse required improvements, and more than half also thought that the West Clubhouse, located in the area of the community called Admiral's Cove Golf Village, needed upgrades.

The enlarged dining room (above) now offers expansive views of the waterfront—without the wait.

This member dissatisfaction went far beyond issues involving décor or simple cosmetic appearance. There were also many comments about specific amenities, such as “the lack of a ‘spa atmosphere’” in the spa, and “inadequate space” and “no area for stretching or personal consulting” in the fitness center. Looking more closely into these issues, management realized that the disparity between the club’s growth and its facilities was actually causing many members to be turned away from various functions and offerings. At the same time, the club was spending too much operationally because of insufficient back-of-the-house capabilities, which created extra costs for things such as linen storage and ware washing.

Expanded Mission

In view of these issues, it was clear that major upgrades to the club were a necessity, not a luxury. A long-range planning committee was formed to determine the best course of action. Because the needed improvements were so extensive, a complete teardown and rebuild was briefly considered, but that option was deemed cost-prohibitive.



“We do an evaluation of the existing buildings and determine if it’s feasible and cost-effective to replace facilities,” says Brian Idle, Senior Vice President and Director of Hospitality Design for Peacock + Lewis, the architectural firm selected to develop the master plan for Admiral’s Cove. “In this case, the infrastructure was in good enough shape and provided enough utility that [expansion] made more sense. We were able to come up with a plan that resolved all the mission statement points by expanding the square footage.”

A capital improvement plan, including new

Prior to renovating, the club estimates it turned away \$180,000 in private parties due to inadequate space. “We have added \$475,000 in member functions,” reports GM John Herring.



The bar was rearranged to better serve cocktails to members in the living room and grille.

assessments (see box, pg. 26) to cover the needed renovations and expansion, was set into motion. Admiral’s Cove members approved an estimated \$22 million project to be split among the East and West Clubhouse renovations and expansions (\$16 million), golf course renovations (\$5 million), and vegetation removal and replacement (\$1 million). The original figure was based on good-faith estimates for the required work, but included a contingency to spend up to 10 percent

more, if needed, without membership approval.

In the end—seven months after the renovation began on May 1, 2003—the final bill came to \$24 million. But even with that overrun, the Admiral’s Cove renovation now stands as a prime example of the value of spending money to make money. Not only is overall satisfaction up to 90 percent and 87 percent for the East and Golf Village Clubhouses respectively, revenues have taken off across the board.

Feeling at Home

The dramatic reversal in member satisfaction can be traced as much to an overall change in atmosphere as to the improvements in specific areas of functionality.

“The buildings were very contemporary, and club members had expressed interest in softening and warming up the interiors so they felt a little more residential,” explains Sandra Berg of Image Design, the interior design firm selected by Peacock + Lewis to help give the club a new look.

The renovation achieved this by retaining the contemporary, nautical-themed architecture

while softening the edges through custom millwork and stone details that were sprinkled throughout the clubhouses' large-volume spaces, grand vistas and sweeping curves.

"When you try to warm up a space, you look at texture and detail," says Berg. "When a space has a 22-foot ceiling, a person can begin to feel small, so adding more detail brings it down to a more human scale. With [the custom moldings], we were able to add more depth, which in turns adds more richness and enhances the ambiance."

Throughout the clubhouses, worn teak-paneled walls were replaced with detailed gypsum-board walls, to help create a brighter and more polished ambiance. Wood moldings and trims were added to the walls and ceilings and painted to resemble wood paneling.

"When you have a tight budget, you can create a great deal of richness using that treatment," Berg explains. "The other thing we were trying to do was lighten up the space."

Form and Function

Beyond these changes to décor and ambiance, there were several instances where the focal point of a room had become lost over time.

"The uses of the space had changed from the original design," Berg notes. "This is typical of 98 percent of the clubs [we renovate]—the membership has grown and the function of the rooms has changed. So you need to create a new gathering point."

In the lobby, for example, the function had changed from a real estate sales office, marina brokerage and concierge, to become the club's foyer and living room. To better define that space according to its new functionality, the seating and stairways were relocated, to direct traffic elsewhere.

Upon first arrival through the remodeled *porte cochere* into the clubhouse lobby through newly refinished doors, members and their guests are now greeted by polished Mediterranean limestone floors. The main floor is done in three tones while a custom-designed compass rose medallion, composed of five colors of polished marble, adds a nautical touch.

In a major change, the stairwell leading

to the mezzanine level was moved to visually expand the lobby and improve the flow of the space, making room for several seating arrangements in the living room below. Through the room's terracing toward the marina beyond, solid railings were replaced with decorative iron with wood caps.

In the living room and bar/lounge, new custom Axminster carpeting was added, and the fireplace mantle and surround was updated to create a stronger focal point. A custom-designed staircase ties into the millwork detail. Columnar newel posts match the millwork, and the antiqued iron

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Admiral's Cove now features dazzling details to enhance the overall experience from the minute you walk through the door.

balustrade repeats the lobby's circle motif.

In a pre-function living room, an updated and spotlighted fireplace surround and mantle also creates a stronger focal point. The room's bar was rearranged to remove equipment and storage from sight and facilitate beverage service to the living room and Bayside Grille. The new design also showcases the glassware and liquor. New furniture with updated silhouettes and fabrics rounds out the new nautical-influenced design.

"By adding the millwork in rooms with existing fireplaces, we made them more dramatic," Berg notes.

Many rooms' furnishings were also updated to fit with the updated look of the new space. In some cases, as with the 19th Hole Lounge, they were simply reupholstered. But more often, they were replaced entirely.

"The look we were going for was a very clean, updated profile," says Berg. "The woods tend to be a little darker and a bit more dramatic. It creates a contrast with the creamy walls. The furnishings profile is what we would call transitional. It's just a very clean, classical approach."

Throughout both renovated clubhouses, specific motifs and details were repeated in ceilings and wall articulations, to unify the design and allow it to flow freely between the rooms. Custom-designed millwork, railings, chandeliers and sconces were designed with aged finishes, to contrast with the light walls and millwork. Area rugs in jewel tones were also custom-made for Admiral's Cove. As a final touch, artwork was commissioned to reflect the club's desire to combine waterfront motifs with vibrant color.



Perfect Marriage

In addition to sprucing up the existing interiors, 38,000 square feet of new space were added to expand the casual and formal dining rooms, add new men's and women's card rooms, and create new salon, spa and fitness areas.

"We respected the architecture of the existing building," says Idle. "The goal was to marry the additions so they blended naturally into the existing architecture."

The Bayside grill was expanded toward the club's marina to double its size. At the same time, the new hurricane-resistant windows were designed to maximize the views of the marina and intercoastal waterway. To accommodate larger groups using the facility, new mobile buffet units, in stained

The Numbers (Before and After) Don't Lie

An analysis of what it was spending versus what it was taking in made it clear that The Club at Admiral's Cove was in need of more than a cosmetic facelift, because its membership had outgrown its existing space. After spending \$24 million on a property-wide renovation and expansion, there are now concrete numbers to prove it was all money well spent. Here are some before-and-after examples of the payoffs for selected operational areas:

- The fitness center now averages 200 visitors a day, where just two years prior it was only attracting an average of 75 members a day, with many others often being turned away due to lack of space. Net annual profit soared to \$41,000 after losing \$30,000 a year pre-renovation.
- The salon was averaging over 80 clients a day, yet there was only room for two people in the waiting area. Net annual profit jumped from \$13,000 to \$82,000 as a direct result of the renovations.
- In the dining rooms, previously, one out of every four dinners was sold out, with an average of 50 members on the waiting list. Also, in season, members usually had to wait 10-15 minutes for lunch in the Bayside Grill. Expanded space now accommodates all of these diners, and more.
- In 2002, GM John Herring estimates "conservatively" that the club turned away \$180,000 in private parties due to lack of space. "Since the renovation," Herring says, "we've added \$475,000 in member functions."
- A lack of linen storage was costing the club \$10,400 in annual rental fees. New on-site laundry and storage facilities eliminated this expense.
- Limited space in the ware washing area was costing roughly \$5,000 in yearly breakage. A trailer was used for extra storage space to the tune of \$3,000 per year. These costs have all been eliminated through new space.
- The club determined that it could save \$20,000 to \$25,000 by making improvements that would make it possible to bake all breads and pastries on the premises.

—JLS

millwork, were custom-designed to blend with the interior architecture.

Members can now enjoy a new private dining room created by moving the card rooms to a new section of the clubhouse. Pocket doors were incorporated into the design for added flexibility in room size and function seating. And while events are being held in the new private dining room, other members can relax in the enlarged main dining room, as expanded and relocated kitchen and storage areas ease the flow of employee traffic.

Not only were the new men's and women's card rooms moved to take advantage of the panoramic view of the marina and waterway, they were also doubled in size. Between them is a general-purpose meeting room. For larger meetings and private functions, this room can be expanded, using portable walls, into one or both of the adjacent card rooms.

But the club was thinking about more than just business events when planning this design.

"Prior to the renovation, holiday dinners had to be limited to 500 meals," notes General Manager John Herring. "Last Thanksgiving, the card rooms were transformed into another dining area, and we served more than 800." **C&RB**

Footing the Bill

To raise the \$24 million needed for the overall project, all 846 members of the Club at Admiral's Cove were assessed \$7,500, and its 682 full golf members were assessed an additional \$2,500. Members who qualified were given the option of taking out a personal loan to pay their assessment. In addition to member assessments, the non-refundable portion of new member initiation fees was raised to \$20,000 on June 1, 2002. Those two revenue streams raised approximately \$8 million, and the balance of the projected cost came from a bank line of credit. The club estimated that if it reserved \$40,000 of each new \$120,000 golf membership, the loan would be paid off in about five years if roughly 40 member homes were turned over each year (a conservative estimate, based on the average 70 to 80 homes that changed hands in previous years). Since the original plan, the golf membership initiation fee was raised from \$120,000 to \$150,000 (in 2005). The club is still on track for a 10-year payoff. —JLS

More photos of the renovation at The Club at Admiral's Cove, along with additional details about the project, can be found at www.clubandresortbusiness.com

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