

# Blending the old with the new

*Long Island club modernizes, adds to clubhouse,  
yet retains atmosphere of old estate.*

By **DESMOND TOLHURST**

Take a 47-room Normandy Tudor mansion and convert it into a country club, add a half-million dollar expansion, re-decorate and furnish it, and you get some idea of what was involved at Mill River Club, in Oyster Bay, L. I., New York.

Even more remarkable is that, viewed from anywhere on the course, the charming facade of the original house still appears to be exactly the same.

The man behind the acquisition of the property, the formation of the club and the conversion of the house is William S. Roach, Mill River's first president.

Bill Roach, himself, is quite a story. At various times in his career, he has been a reporter for *Variety*, a Hollywood cameraman, a B-29 bomber pilot during World War II and an expert copyright lawyer, with many books to his credit.

In 1964, Bill persuaded Mrs. Eleanor

Davidson, the original owner of the estate, to sell for \$550,000. She was so satisfied with the plans for the new club that she decided to hold the mortgage herself. Payments on the mortgage did not start for two years, allowing the club to become established before payments started.

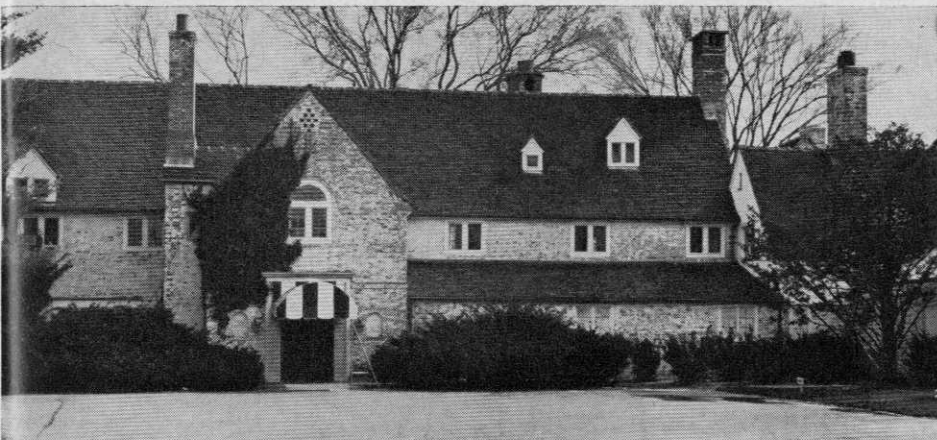
Similar easy-payment schedules were also worked out with the designers of the course and landscape contractor.

Mill River's 250 members now enjoy a fine, par 72 golf course of 7,010 yards laid out on the club's 125 acres. Designed by Gerald Roby, Jr., the course has the fifth green finishing at the clubhouse, as well as the more usual ninth and 18th, providing golfers with a "bite-size" game that can be played in one hour.

Jim Turnesa, the club's professional from the beginning, describes the course as being, "... of superb, modern design,



*The south side of Mill River's clubhouse still appears to be the same, despite the half-million dollar expansion work.*



*Lower level roof and walls of small addition to right of club entrance, above, matches the older building around it. Below right shows exterior of new dining room. New bay window and wall blend into old structure.*

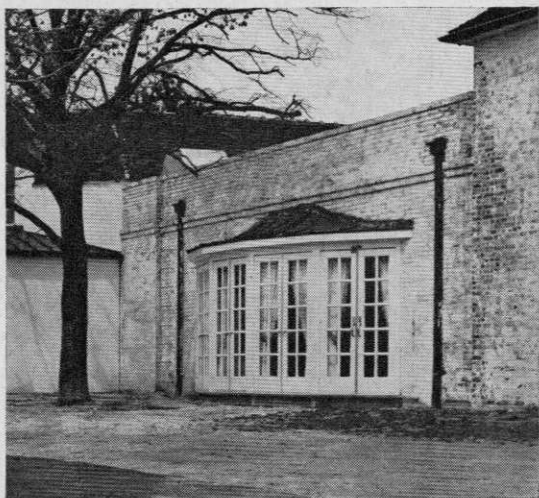
with no two succeeding holes alike in length or shot values . . . each having its own personality.”

Course maintenance is under the able supervision of the greens superintendent, David Parson.

The club also has three outdoor tennis courts, and one indoor court. There is also a fine, olympic-size outdoor swimming pool and cabana.

Perhaps the most remarkable achievement at Mill River is that the budget of \$2 million( which included purchase of the property), prepared in 1963, proved valid within \$150,000. This is especially noteworthy considering the amount of work involved in the conversion of the house to clubhouse use and extensive additions.

This phase of the project was very much a team effort. Bill Roach and the club building committee worked closely with the architects, Bentel & Bentel, of Locust Valley, L. I., N. Y., and the interior designers, Howard Williams Associates of New York City. Also very much in the picture was the club manager, Bob Stanley, who joined the club before the clubhouse plans had reached the drawing board stage.



“One of the biggest mistakes you can make on a project such as this is to neglect to hire a club manager before work commences,” says Roach. “Moreover, Bob had unique qualifications for the job.”

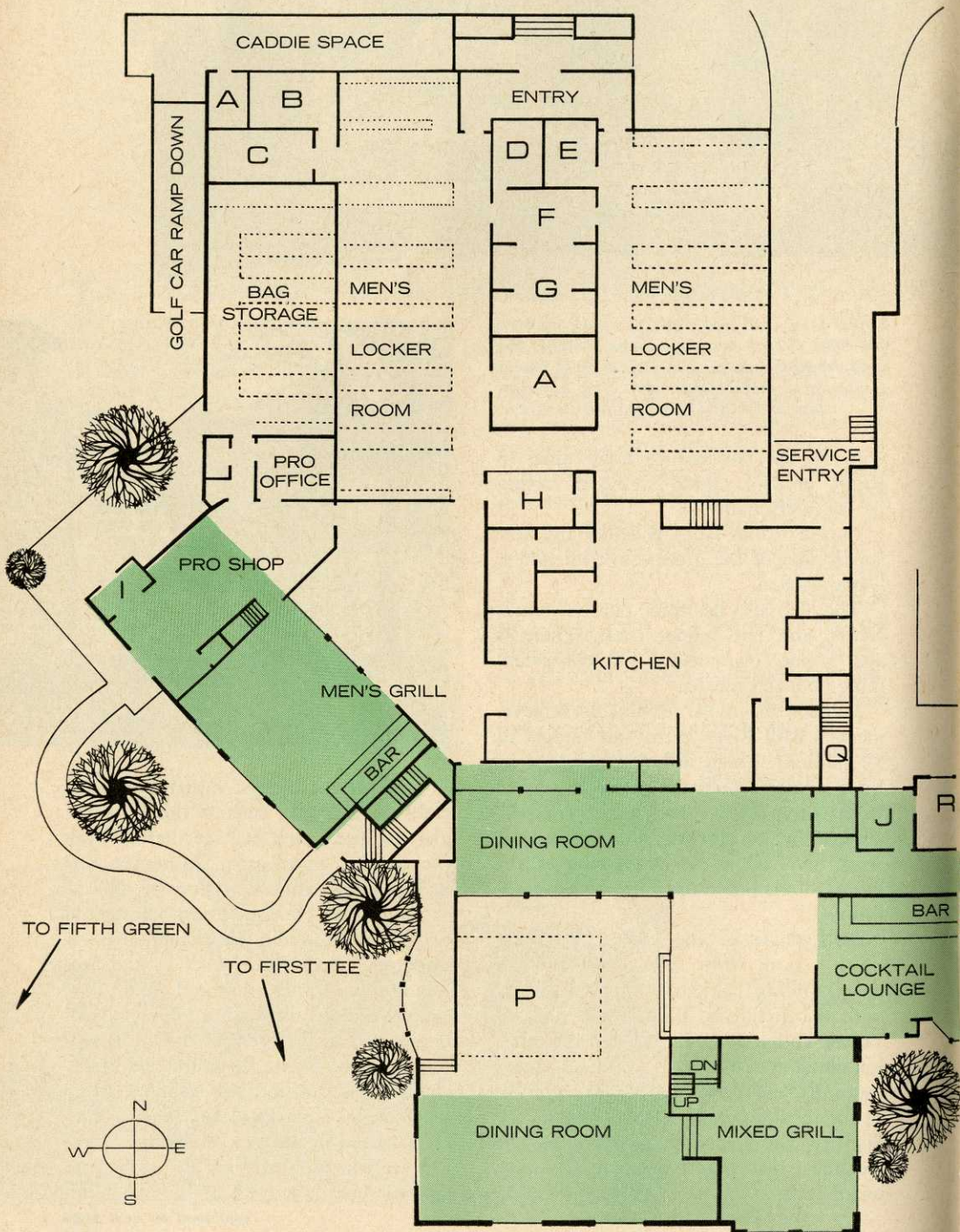
Stanley had previously been manager at two clubs that built new clubhouses — Engineers Club, Roslyn, L. I., and Seawayne CC, Hewlet Harbor, L. I.

In between these jobs Stanley built homes to his own design in Florida and was manager during reconstruction of the clubhouse, barns and stables at the Blind Brook Polo Club, Purchase, New York.

In planning the new clubhouse, there were certain problems that had to be considered. Just how much of the old build-

*continued on next page*

# Ground floor plan Mill River Club, Inc.



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*continued from preceding page*

ing could be utilized, and what additions would be necessary.

The four-car garage of the south wing was converted into the pro shop and part of the men's grill. The former summer room became the mixed grill, the former dining room, part of the cocktail lounge, the former sitting room, the multi-purpose room, and the former living room became the club lounge.

The second story was converted into offices and the ladies' locker rooms. These were the former bedrooms.

The ladies' locker rooms have a fine view of the course. "Another touch," says Roach, "is that the girls enjoy a more intimate, chatty atmosphere in this succession of small rooms than in the more regular open style of men's locker rooms."

Downstairs, there was still the problem of adequate dining space. The solution was to build between the wings of the original building (See floor-plan on page 22.) Thus, the new dining room did not alter the facade facing the course.

Outside, it is impossible to detect where the two wings ended and where the

addition begins. A fine bay window was put into the west wall of the dining room. The new wall was carefully treated so that, today, it blends perfectly into the older brick on both sides.

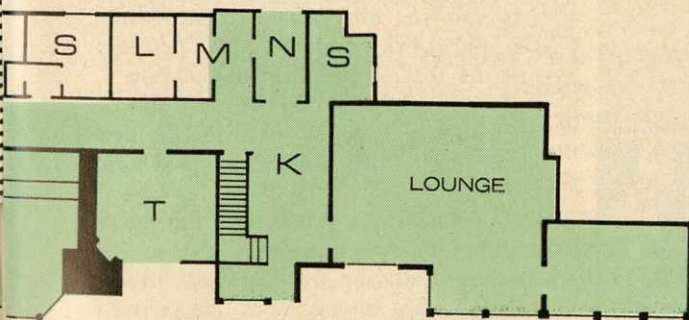
The new dining room can accommodate 225 people with dining room seating and can be enlarged to seat 350, banquet style. "This is sufficient," says Bill Roach, "for any crowd which we may have for any of our formal or informal social occasions, except on three or four occasions during the year, when a few members might be disappointed for failure to make early reservations."

"Thus, we preserved an intimate atmosphere at all times in our dining facilities, irrespective of the usage being made, we have a maximum facility for 95 per cent of the usages, we have a convenient, efficient area to service and we saved lots of money in construction costs, maintenance and operation by the elimination of dead space. We also managed to solve the problem of the rare overflow by use of our auxiliary rooms, such as the summer room (mixed grill) and men's grill.

A small addition was made to the west of the main entrance to make space for a reception office. The new wall outside

*continued on next page*

COURTYARD



Color tint shows location of original building.

### KEY TO OTHER AREAS

- A—Toilet
- B—Massage
- C—Quiet Room
- D—Sauna
- E—Barber
- F—Drying Area
- G—Showers
- H—Attendant
- I—Caddie Master
- J—Lounge
- K—Lobby
- L—Coats
- M—Reception
- N—Entry
- P—Dance Floor
- Q—Stair to Teenage Room
- R—Ladies
- S—Men
- T—Multi-Purpose Room



*New dining room addition is shown above. It can accommodate 225 people with dining room seating, can be enlarged to seat 350, banquet style. By specifying structural steel for dining room, club can add a second floor over it at a later date. At left is men's grill.*



## **Blending the Old**

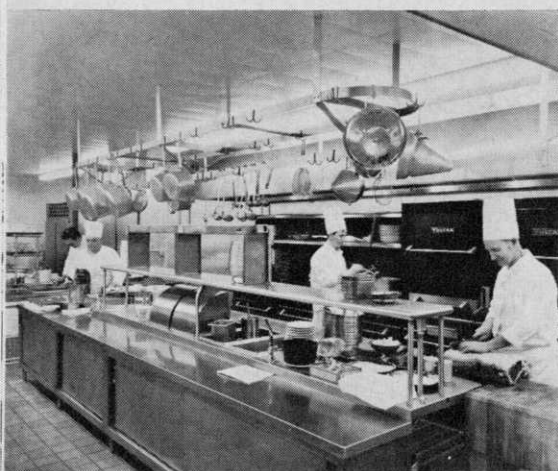
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was also carefully treated to blend into the old brick, and its roof perfectly matches that of the original building.

The main addition on the north side of the building provided space for the new kitchen. This Bob Stanley designed himself.

The kitchen is 2,000 sq. ft. over-all and has entrances on the west to the men's grill and on the south side to service the main dining room, the terraces, and the cocktail lounge. "My chief concern as regards the location of the kitchen," says Stanley, "was to have it placed as close as possible to all areas where food would be served. The interior design of the club kitchen was chief-

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*Integrated departments of new kitchen allow operation in winter with minimum staff.*

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ly the problem of flexibility."

"In a club, where the food business is seasonal, it is necessary to have integrated departments, so that the kitchen can operate with a minimum of employees. It's important that a man be able to prepare a hot dish and a salad without having to walk the length of the kitchen.

"April through September we have the chef and 12 employees in the kitchen, while the rest of the year, the chef manages with but three employees."

Other points about the kitchen include Bob's choice of quarried tile for the floor, which is easy to keep clean and lasts indefinitely, and the use of stainless steel wherever possible.

"I have always learned something from every job," says Bob, "and sometimes you learn in most unexpected fashion. For instance, when working out of the original kitchen, I had an existing stove against

one wall. But I needed two new stoves."

"When it came to fitting the new stoves into the old kitchen, I just couldn't do it. One day, Chef Otto Lirsch suggested I move the first stove to another wall. The other two now fitted perfectly!

"The moral is that in a job like this you *must* try to see every problem with fresh eyes and not accept any part of the existing situation as being unalterable."

Regarding the planning of the over-all project, Bob feels that his greatest value to the management and design team lay in the design for anticipated traffic patterns and the planning of the kitchen itself. Stanley states: "I never attempted to involve myself with the aesthetics, such as color, which are properly the interior designer's domain—except the problem of practicality and lasting qualities of the furniture, fabric or other material under discussion."

One of the greatest reasons for the success of the entire project was undoubtedly

continued on page 58

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the fact that Bill Roach enjoyed the complete confidence of the Board. He and Bob Stanley were on the job every day and could cope with problems as they came up and make on-the-spot decisions.

Compromises, of course, were necessary in many cases. A good example is the location of the kitchen service area. Obviously, it was not in the ideal spot. The solution was to build a wall to screen this section off from the club entrance. Also, a rustic gate will close off the service area, and shrubbery will be used as an additional screen.

Another important principle to bear in mind, says Bill Roach, is *not* to expect the architects to solve country club problems. The main addition to the north of the original house needed foundations," says Bill, "but the first plan submitted by

the architects made no use of the potential cellar space.

"On pointing this out to them, they then came up with a basement area that we have put to excellent use. In your anxiety to save money, you might yield to the temptation to omit a cellar space. This is a mistake."

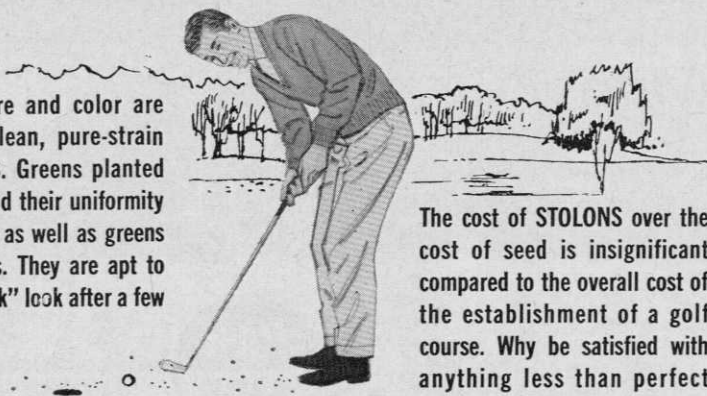
Mill River's basement area now houses the golf cars, with a ramp up to the caddie area, and provides space for employees' dining room and rest rooms, as well as the main storage area for liquor, beer, soda, and additional china and silverware, besides four driving nets for the winter use of the members.

Other factors behind the decision to excavate the foundation area were that cellar space is much less expensive than space above the ground, and secondly, *you can always use the storage space.* In fact, Roach considers that one of the com-

continued on page 60

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monest mistakes in club building is underestimating storage space.

Anxiety to save money can hurt you in other directions, too. "When we were planning the new dining room," says Bill, "we spent \$1,600 investing in the future." By specifying structural steel for the dining room addition we can now build a second floor over it if necessary.

"Perhaps the most important principle in club building," says Roach, "is 'expandability.' Our men's locker room is a good example of what I mean."

"It's tempting to provide only sufficient lockers for what is projected to be a full membership. Then, four expensive walls are put up around this and within a few short years everyone wonders why such skimpy space was provided. At Mill

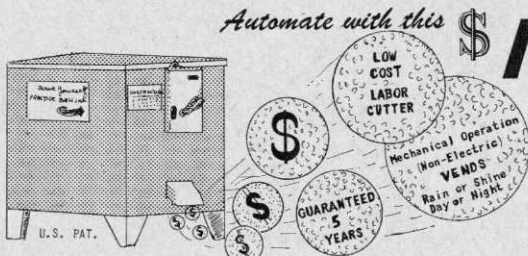
River, we have an additional six feet of expansion room on the east side.

"The parking lot is another example. Had we conformed to the minimum requirements established by local authorities, we would have had a serious parking problem almost immediately. Today, we are practically a three-car family, particularly among families affluent enough to belong to private country clubs. We not only installed a considerably larger area for parking than required by the authorities, but we also provided an unpaved adjacent area for occasional overflow parking problems.

"The whole point is not to hem yourself in needlessly," says Roach. "We did not build the golf course right up to the clubhouse on purpose. This allowed us room for future expansion.

"You must build into today's plans the answers to tomorrow's problems." •

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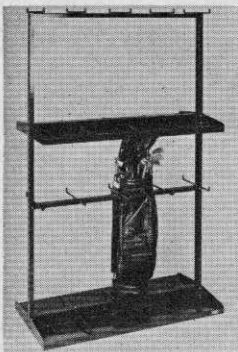
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