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MERCHANDISING: Pro's Progress

For a viewpoint on how today's golf professional conducts his business and can improve his buying decisions, Jerry Claussen interviewed Charles Newton. At the time of the interview, Newton was president of Denver Golf & Tennis, a supplier of top-line equipment and merchandise to more than 1,500 golf course pro shops in 13 states. He recently sold this highly successful business at a reportedly handsome price. DG&T was a pioneer supplier to Rocky Mountain area pro shops, beginning in the 1930s. Newton and a partner bought the business in 1962 and acquired a similar company, Winter-Dobson of Dallas, in 1968. Newton subsequently became president of the combined wholesaling firm.

Drawing upon his years of experience as one of the country's leading pro shop distributors, Charles Newton talks about the merchandising practices of professionals and offers some sound advice.

GOLFDOM: What trends have you seen develop in the golf business over the last 11 years?

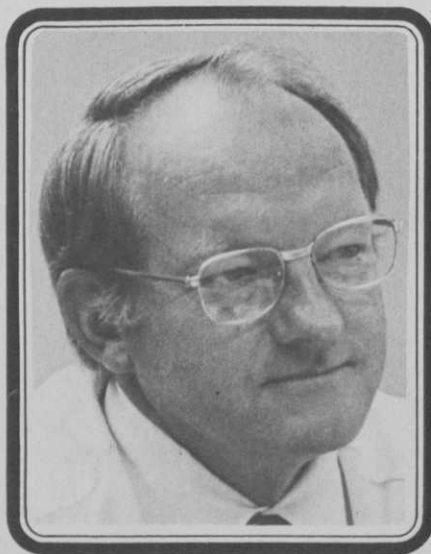
NEWTON: In the '60s, we saw the fun, dramatic growth of golf. We're now doing six times as much business as we did in 1962. Nationally, it has slacked off a bit since 1970, but areas, such as Colorado and the Texas Gulf Coast, will be big in the future.

GOLFDOM: How has this growth affected the club professional's business?

NEWTON: The golf professional is more sophisticated. He is better organized, better educated and more involved in his business. But even a good golf professional has to fight old stigmas. If he goes to the bank for money, the banker is nervous about doing business with him. Yet the credit situation in the golf industry is no worse than in other industries. You must just watch who you do business with.

GOLFDOM: Considering that the pro-

With the benefit of many years of experience, one of the country's leading pro shop distributors talks about the buying practices and errors that he has too often observed
by JERRY CLAUSSEN



NEWTON

fessional has changed in the last 10 years, have you changed your merchandising methods—how you reach and deal with the golf professional?

NEWTON: Serving our customers has always come first. We never let the phone ring or a customer wait to get help. Secondly, we try to display samples of our goods in the warehouse, so that when a professional comes in, he can see what's available. Most of our customers are impulse buyers to some degree, like the rest of us. Another change we made was to get into soft goods, the sales of which in the last five years have been fantastic. We have seen apparel cause a lot of excitement in the pro shop. Clubs and balls are

still the backbone of the golf shop business. But when a customer asks, "What's new?" we always have the answer in soft goods.

GOLFDOM: Why have soft goods become so predominate in many golf shop businesses?

NEWTON: Few golfers buy a new set of clubs each year. So, a shop needs to deal in disposable items, such as apparel, that get used and turn over. Today's golf apparel is casual, comfortable, sharp looking and easy to care for. This is what the pro shop can offer and it's exactly what people are looking for.

GOLFDOM: Are most club professionals aware of these style trends?

NEWTON: Nearly all the professionals with whom we deal know this. Some are better than others in selling it. You must understand that it is difficult for some professionals—athletes interested only in golf and teaching and fitting clubs—to be enthusiastic about soft goods. Most of them, though, hire assistants who know about buying and selling soft goods.

GOLFDOM: Is there still a marked trend toward hiring women assistants in the bigger shops?

NEWTON: Women as shop assistants has paid off. Women probably work in more than 50 per cent of the private and semi-private shops. The capable ones buy all the soft goods merchandise.

GOLFDOM: Does this mean that the head professional in many shops doesn't make all of the buying and merchandising decisions?

NEWTON: Yes. Our salesmen sometimes must call on two people: one for soft goods, one for hard goods. But we respect this delineation of jobs. We can do a better job for somebody who is educated in what we're talking about. All suppliers went through a period in the '60s of trying to educate the golf professional about clothes—what's available, why things are made

in a certain way and what the new styles were each year.

GOLFDOM: What methods do you use to keep golf professionals in your sales territories informed?

NEWTON: We have several. Our major suppliers publish catalogs; some imprint our name on them. These say hello for us all year, especially in fall and winter. We also publish our own catalog. We don't do special mailings because the professional gets too much mail and can't read all of it. We expect our salesmen to follow a schedule in calling on customers, especially in the prime urban markets. We have an obligation to our suppliers to call on every shop during the year. So, we try to get around as few as three times a year or as often as twice a month.

GOLFDOM: Do you find that most golf professionals are more astute businessmen than they were 10 years ago?

NEWTON: Definitely. The credit belongs to a handful of veteran golf professionals in almost every section of the country. They have trained and sent assistants to other jobs. The effect keeps multiplying. After 20 to 25 years, there's almost no room for an unqualified man. That's the way it should be. The professional should come up through the ranks and get the experience so that he can manage a pro shop. Some of the younger professionals are as good businessmen as they are teachers or golfers.

GOLFDOM: What are the differences between a professional who does well in business and one who doesn't?

NEWTON: The differences are more evident in smaller communities. The successful professional is interested in his community and its people, he puts in extra time, has imagination and interest in his shop. We have seen examples of professionals going into a small-town, nine-hole course and turning over super volumes. They've endeared themselves to their golfers. And yet other persons in the same kind of situations might not do one-quarter of the amount of business. A man who has educated himself in merchandising, watches national advertising, stocks quality goods, can do well almost anywhere.

GOLFDOM: Do most golf professionals buy too many or too few merchandise lines to stock their shops?

NEWTON: There's no answer in numbers. A professional must consider all

contingencies—the shop's physical size, type of clientele, overhead, what his resources are and what he can get. He can't, for example, stock only one brand of golf ball. Yet he shouldn't buy 20 brands. He should judge from members' requests and catalog in his own mind what his customers want. On the whole, though, most professionals buy too many lines. They feel obligated to order from everyone who calls on them. A professional shouldn't allow this to happen.

GOLFDOM: Are you saying the average professional buys and stocks more than he can afford to sell at a profit?

NEWTON: Not necessarily. There's an old saying, "You can't sell from an empty wagon." Occasionally, we spot a professional who is, say, "bag conscious." Subsequently, he overloads with bags compared to other items. The most common is the "putter nut," who carries more putters in his shop than we have in our warehouse. Professionals must put in a solid dollar amount of inventory, but they shouldn't go overboard on any one item.

GOLFDOM: How influential is the salesman, versus other sources, in the professional's buying decisions?

NEWTON: We've studied our territory and our merchandise thoroughly, so no one owes us anything. A professional who doesn't look at every line and give every salesman that courtesy is missing the boat. The professional stands to learn something from every salesman, because there's always something new. The Professional Golfers' Assn. Merchandise Show is a great "tire-kicking" time. But it's too big. Many professionals in the West can't attend. It's hard for any professional to order for his entire season at the show.

GOLFDOM: How much lead time do you need to fill professionals' orders for next season?

NEWTON: Most golf professionals still don't fully understand the industry's problems in planning and manufacturing goods for the next season. Our commitments—90, 120 or 180 days—must be made in October for the following spring-summer golf season. The whole process requires a certain number of days. We all would like to pick up the phone and get immediate delivery. But that can't be done anymore. The golf professional has to

help us pre-plan the selling season. All we ask for is a general indication of what we should order. It's up to us to do a good job of pre-season selling. But the professional makes the decision.

GOLFDOM: Are delivery and invoice terms more difficult now than a few years ago?

NEWTON: Not at all. The professional can request delivery for any reasonable date. If he wants delivery in March, normal payment terms are for April. And any first-class company can still deliver 90 to 98 per cent of any order, although it's getting more difficult to get certain products and materials. The price of wool, for instance, is up by 300 per cent.

GOLFDOM: What trends do you see developing in the pro shop business over the next few years?

NEWTON: A lot depends on whether the golf industry continues to grow. Right now, tennis is catching up in popularity. It's cheaper to build courts than a golf course; it's cheaper to play tennis than golf, and tennis is an easy sport for youngsters to get started in. Changes are occurring in the type of golf facilities being built. Golf is an enticement in many new real estate developments. Pro shops at these courses are possibly the only retail outlet close to home. These shops could end up broadening their scope, which means the golf professional also will have to expand into other product areas—be interested in women's wear, for example, be up on the newest materials and be more competitive with downtown stores.

GOLFDOM: Are golf professionals finally learning how to deal with their competition: the downtown, retail store?

NEWTON: No one has the final answer. The professional, of course, has an edge; he's conducting the game where it's being played. He has already established a rapport with golfers. It's a shame when members don't support their professional, but a professional can't expect that, if his prices are considerably higher than those downtown. If he looks around at the end of the season, he will find the high-priced items still on the shelf. He must always be aware of the existence of his competition, be innovative, create more golfing activity at his course as well as business for himself. □

PROMOTION EQUALS SALES

How much money does your pro shop put in your pocket? What items produce the greatest volume of sales and profit? Most professionals sell golf balls, golf clubs and gloves, but how about sport jackets, shirts (not necessarily golf shirts), shoes and full sets of clubs? Perhaps you've found that soft goods are your biggest moneymaker, perhaps you've discovered women are your best customers and perhaps you have room only for the basics. Each of you, of course, is faced with a unique situation and some of you must feel you're already exploiting your shop size and clientele fully. But suppose "Madison Avenue" came to your shop—do you think their techniques could increase your buying expertise, educate you in display techniques or help you promote your shop to your members?

How important are such things as correct buying for the tastes and life styles of your members? How valuable is a merchandise display that stimulates the person in the shop to buy? How can you advertise yourself to your members and their guests?

All these questions are important, but the last one is what promotion is all about. The better you become in letting people know what you have, the better your chances are of selling it. Let's look at some of the ways you have of generating interest in your merchandise.

ADVERTISING

Billboards and television commercials might be a little beyond your means, but fliers shouldn't be. You can easily design a one-page

Having trouble "moving" your shop merchandise? Here are some tips on helping your members "see" what you have to offer

by PARKER SMITH



A color or patterned coordinated golf ensemble display encourages members to think about buying a "total outfit."

promotional piece that highlights merchandise you want to sell. Suppose it's the end of the season and you're offering a special on this year's club models you've been unable to sell. You can cut out pictures of the sets from the company booklets, paste them onto a piece of paper, put the original asking price and slash through it, marking the sale price in bold black numbers. Print on the mock-up, "See So-and-So at the Pro Shop" or "This month only in the pro shop—get a top-line set personally fitted to your game at a tremendous saving." Mimeograph your mock-up. Now, you've got copies for every locker in the club or one to put on every cart (especially useful for public courses).

As a back-up or an alternative, you can request space on a prominent wall in the locker room. Put up a bulletin board and keep your members informed of specials or of recent purchases you've made that you think they'd like to know you have available.

At King's Inn, a successful resort complex on Grand Bahama Island, director of golf John Mickle heads an operation that is geared to sales. Although a concession format, its techniques can and should be implemented at your club whenever possible. King's Inn is a gigantic, multi-level business that uses each facet within that business to promote its other segments.

In the hotel lobby, in a spot where it can't be missed by any guest, golfer or non-golfer, there's an easel display panel advertising the many types of clothes available in the pro shop. This ad is aimed as

much at the tourist looking for a sports jacket as it is at the golfer who might be persuaded to buy a coordinated golf outfit. There is also a wall-panel display in the hotel hall. This contains a complete golf ensemble on a mannequin, a set of clubs in an expensive bag, a couple of dozen golf balls, an umbrella and other accessories. Everything is color-coordinated. The objective of this kind of display is to get the customer thinking about an entire outfit rather than an individual item. As a result, "...many wives will come and shop in the pro shop rather than going to stores in the downtown shopping complexes." The shop also uses its street window to attract attention by featuring a mannequin in a brightly colored, coordinated outfit.

I would suggest, then, that you explore your clubhouse, your carts and your locker rooms for available space to carry out potential promotional activity. You might even try posting a reminder at the turn house if your course has one.

IN THE SHOP ITSELF

Display techniques depend upon what you're trying to sell and to whom, but there are basic laws that apply to every selling situation. The more attractive your pro shop is, the more enticing its merchandise becomes to those within it. People buy clothes because they want to look good in them, so you've got to make the clothes look good before members put them on.

Most of the resort courses openly capitalize on the drabness of northern pro shop displays. They successfully operate on the thesis that bright colors will catch the buyer's eye simply because he's seen nothing but blues, grays, dark reds and greens up North. King's Inn, which does a large convention business through travel agencies, gears its ads and displays to "school" colors. To follow this successful approach, merely display outfits incorporating the colors of your club's emblem. Don't be afraid to be a little jazzy, either. You want to attract attention, to get members to stop and look around the shop.

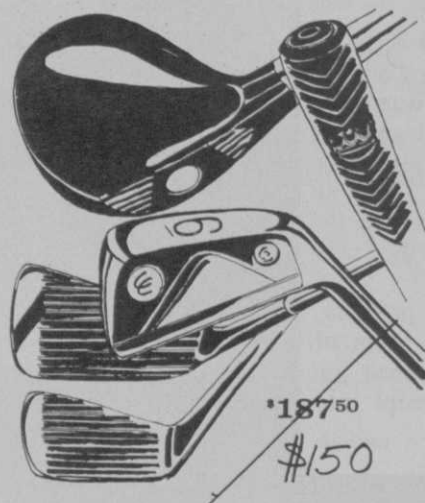
Many shops find that a round or



Northern pros can capitalize on members' Southern vacation trips by featuring brightly-colored, tropical apparel.

semi-round interior helps to immerse the buyer in the merchandise. Display experts also consider concise areas better than large areas. These two approaches "surround" the buyer and fill his eyes with your wares.

Because multiple sales are the key to selling large numbers, it's a good idea to offer "package" bargains. "If you buy this complete outfit (glove, shirt, slacks, socks and shoes), get this cap free." "Buy a set of clubs at this special price, and we'll give you a dozen balls abso-



Mimeographs of this simple, handmade promotion flyer can be displayed wherever club members congregate.

lutely free." Don't be afraid to give a little to get a lot.

There are other ways to increase sales in the shop. Employing a woman is one of the surest means of increasing sales. She knows how to talk to other women and an attractive one will flatter a man into a purchase. She can also offer valuable assistance when it comes time to do your buying.

You should always try to feature that which you want to dispose of. If you're having trouble unloading clubs, make up a sample set from which people can take a club or two to the practice range and/or the course. You can also offer to anyone who buys a set of those clubs discounts on golf bags.

Make the most of your shelf space. Don't overload it, but display a sample of each type of item you stock. This serves two purposes. It makes the buyer feel he must have the "last one" of that item in that color, which is an inducement to buy, and it makes him request similar items, thereby making you go and "find" them for him, creating a sense of obligation to "pay" you for the time you've taken with him. Notice I said "him," for this obligatory feeling is most often aroused in the male.

One more suggestion. Run fashion shows using club members whenever you get in a new line of clothing (such as spring). And you might try "equipment" shows where you take the newest clubs, such as the graphite shaft, and schedule a clinic in which everyone who comes gets a chance to hit a few balls.

BUYING

Buying also comes under the heading of promotion, because you can't sell something that someone can't use.

Returning briefly to the resort courses, they buy apparel in bright colors because bright colors aren't sold in the North during the winter. Why not sell some "traveling clothes" for your southern-bound members this coming fall? You should at least stock shirts that match the fall colors created by the trees on your golf course.

Buy with an eye toward multiple sales—buy color-coordinated out-

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Toftrees—
**IMPRESSIONS
ARE LASTING**

by JOHN PHILIP BACHNER

President

John Bachner Communications, Inc.
Washington, D.C.

When Phil Sieg bought 750 acres of rolling wooded land in State College, Penn., in 1964, he knew he wanted to design and build a golf course and surround it with housing. His reasoning was very straightforward. The golf course would not only generate income, it would also increase the value of the residual land.

Once the land became his property, Sieg began assembling a team of highly-regarded specialists. Their job would be to turn his concept into

continued



concrete plans.

The group recognized immediately that the golf course would be competing against three nearby private country clubs. Accordingly, Sieg's team decided to make their course semi-private, with membership fees, but no member equity. The idea of building a motel or lodge on the site, too, was accepted because they felt such a facility would have several advantages. First, the area could use another motel, and the setting envisioned for it would make it appealing to anyone passing through. Second, any transient who happened to like to play golf would choose this particular stopover. Third, groups of serious golfers would jump at the chance of spending a weekend on the course itself.

Edmund Ault of Bethesda, Md., was retained as the architect. The plan developed quickly. In the summer of 1968, the first nine holes were opened for play, complete with a 1,000-square-foot starter's cabin and snack bar. A surprised Sieg found that Tof-trees CC and Lodge had 100 members and was averaging 100 green fee players a weekend.

The unusually good reception given to the club prompted Sieg to revise his initial concept. Instead of creating a golf course surrounded by housing, his group decided to make Tof-trees a planned community, a new town similar to Columbia, Md., or Reston, Va. They would make the clubhouse and lodge the focal point of what had turned into a major undertaking.

Sieg sought and found one of the nation's preeminent architectural and planning firms, Bucher Meyers & Associates of Silver Spring, Md. Having worked before with Alan Meyers, one of the firm's principals, Sieg knew the Meyers organization had an impressive track record in the field of recreational projects.

Alan Meyers recognized that a traditional design approach would not bear fruit. Given the natural setting of the site and the firm's propensity for retaining and improving upon as much of the natural environs as possible, Bucher Meyers began developing concepts of its own.

Within two months, Alan Meyers presented a preliminary set of drawings for a clubhouse complex. The architecture was untraditional, but reflected perfectly the type of work the

firm is known for: Striking contemporary design blended with earth colors and materials that take advantage of natural land forms. Says Alan Meyers, "The project we did [for Sieg], in fact, the only type of projects the firm does, are contemporary. Only with contemporary architectural design can you develop a free-flowing structure or complex of structures without having to go into extensive uprooting and grading to make the land suit the building. We had beautiful land to work with and we wanted whatever we designed to complement the site and so have the site complement the structure. In other words, with contemporary design, we feel we can achieve a unity, a oneness of sorts, which simply cannot be achieved through a traditional approach."

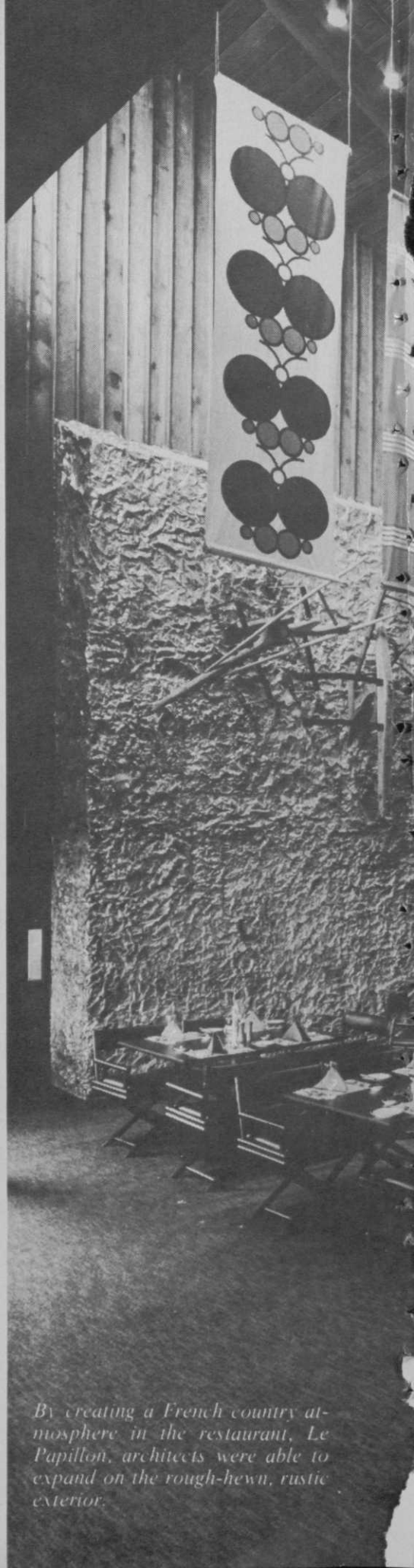
Sieg and his associates liked the concept. They loved the design. But the first set of preliminaries did not fully satisfy them. They felt that too much space was being used and too much cost was involved.

Two months later, the design firm presented its second set of preliminaries. The same basic concepts were employed, but, once again, it did not seem to be right. This time it was too small.

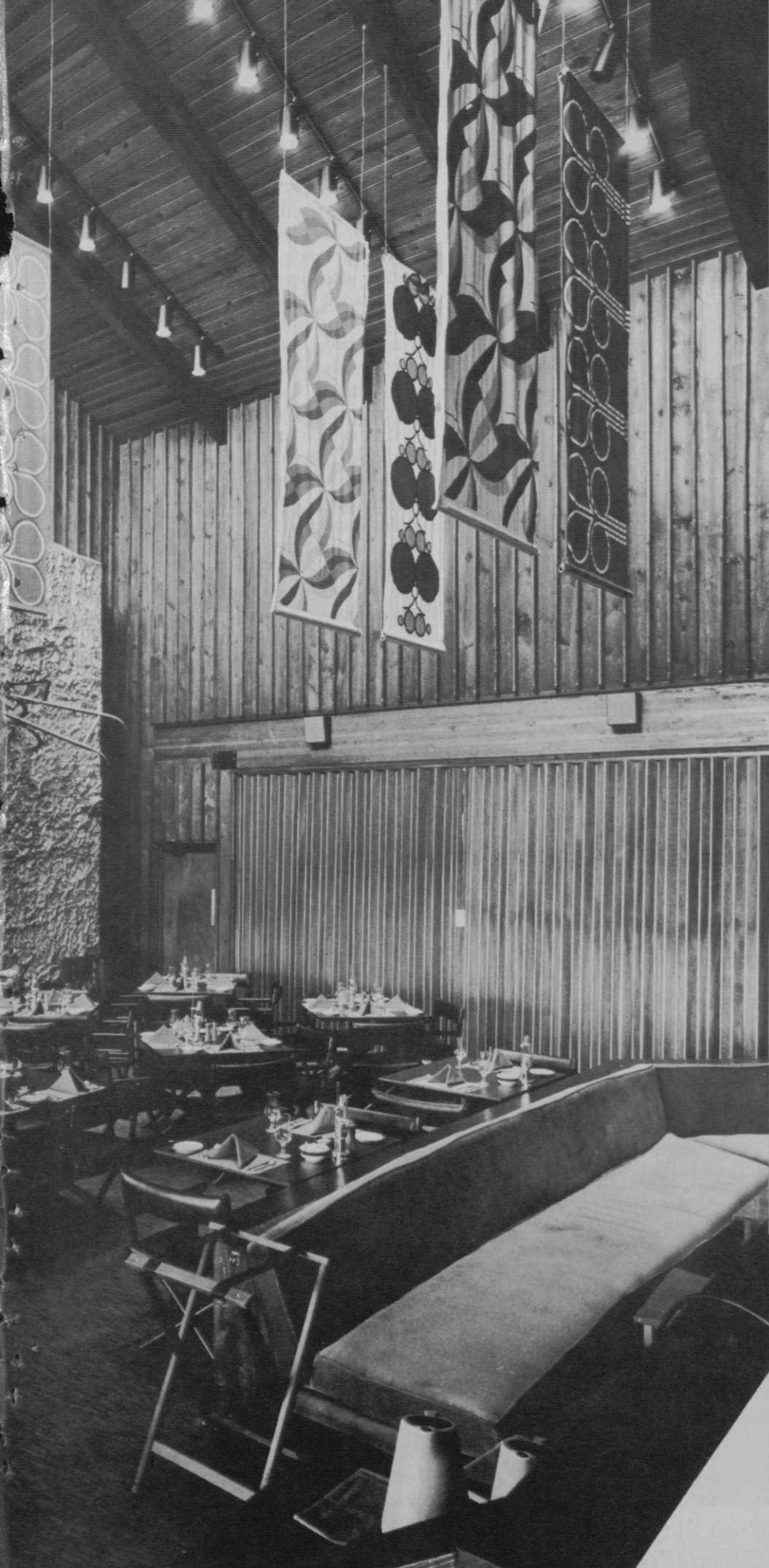
Finally, four months after first being called in, the firm presented the third, and as it turned out, last, set of preliminaries, which everyone agreed was the right way to go: spacious, but prudently so.

Plans called for two connected structures—clubhouse and lodge—comprising a total of 22,000 square feet. The lodge would contain 32 units, but was expandable with room for major banquet facilities. The clubhouse would contain a 1,400-square-foot cocktail lounge designed to seat 70; a 2,400-square-foot dining room to seat 200; a conversation pit and fireplace off the cocktail lounge; a 430-square-foot pro shop, 2,300 square feet for men's and women's lockers and saunas; a golf car storage area and a swimming pool and two adjacent tennis courts.

A significant return on investment was contemplated for the clubhouse, because of the high ratio of usable area to total area. The potential confusion that a multi-purpose clubhouse could cause was completely avoided through the development of traffic patterns. Alan Meyers explains, "By taking the



By creating a French country atmosphere in the restaurant, Le Papillon, architects were able to expand on the rough-hewn, rustic exterior.

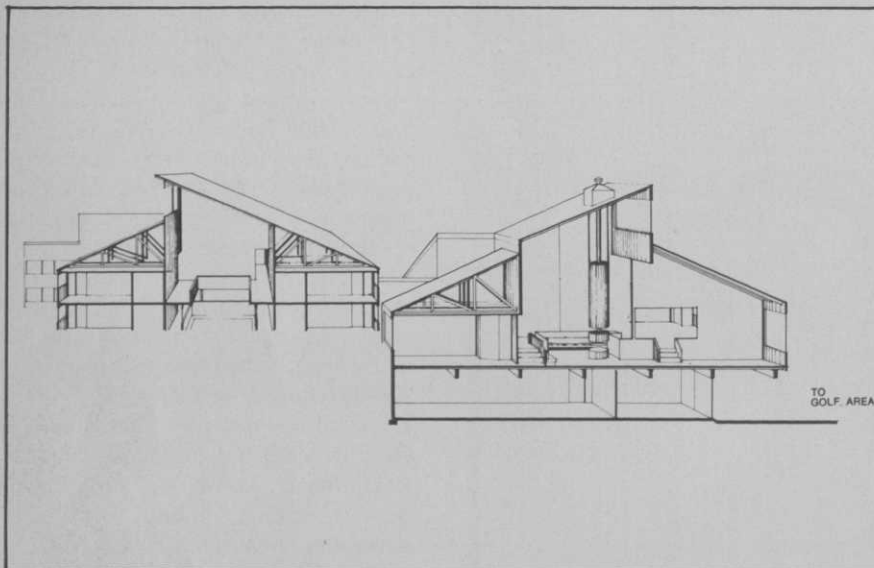


approach we did, the working value of the structure was increased many times over by creating pockets of space, each with its own character and purpose. Without such attention to traffic flows, there's the very real danger that those using the space feel as though they're in a three-ring circus, conscious of being just one element out of many, all going on at once. By segregating flow correctly, we still have a lot of things happening at once in one core space while each function still maintains a reasonable degree of privacy."

Once basic plans were finalized, Bucher Meyers turned its attention to interior design. The restaurant was of particular concern. Here, a basic and wholly unorthodox decision was made. Rather than creating a typical country club restaurant, somewhat elegant, but usually devoid of character, Sieg and Meyers decided to take a chance and create the ambiance of a French country restaurant. They felt that this gambit would risk "turning off" some people who like typical country club restaurants that serve the traditional steak and potatoes, but, equally persuasive, the restaurant could "turn on" many area residents whose only interest in Toftrees would be the restaurant. Another important factor: By utilizing a French country atmosphere, the architects were able to expand on the rough-hewn, rustic, but still sophisticated, exterior theme, while also generating significant cost savings.

Realizing that they were to some extent playing the odds, both Alan Meyers and Phil Sieg felt they should leave as little as possible to chance. When the basic dining room design was complete, it was turned over to Bucher Meyers' interior design department. Working with Sieg's team, they chose not only the tables, chairs and other usual appurtenances, but picked out all graphics, place settings, silverware, even napkins and table cloths. Says Meyers, "Sure, someone may say it's a lot of detail, but in cases like this, detail is crucial. By designing and coordinating the total interior, we can take a strong concept and be sure that it's developed thoroughly, just as it should be. In all too many cases, we've seen excellent designs almost ruined by someone who didn't know what he was doing when it came to developing an interior design scheme."

continues



At the same time Bucher Meyers' interior designers were at work, the firm's landscape architects also were busy. Of particular concern to them was the entrance drive. As Alan Meyers explains, "We're convinced that first impressions often are lasting. If you approach a beautiful structure or setting along an unattractive route, you necessarily view the setting with some mixed emotions. We wanted the entrance drive to the country club to exemplify the mood of the entire Tof-trees theme. Our landscape architects recommended that the entire setting be left as natural as possible, keeping the beautiful pines intact. The roadway was carefully laid out to provide brief vistas of the golf course—now 18 holes—and its mountainous surroundings. New trees, shrubs and earth mounds were added, so that the end of the drive would present a perfectly framed view of the clubhouse. As a result, the crescendo of events developed along the entrance is heightened and expanded upon until you arrive at the country club complex.

"In terms of business—and that is really the name of the game—it means that people enjoy coming here, not only because of the facilities, but also because it's a very beautiful visual experience."

The clubhouse and lodge construction program took 10 months to complete. As the opening date approached, Bucher Meyers reviewed every detail to ensure that everything specified in the plans was carried out in construction. Meyers and an associate were up until 2 a.m. June 1 adjusting exterior lighting to ensure that effects achieved were precisely those intended for the grand opening scheduled for that evening. (A June 1 through 5 grand opening week was held, with 200 guests invited each evening. Public opening was held June 18, 1972, and 1,600 people attended.)

The opening also found the club prepared with marketing packages to enable people to take advantage of the facilities they wanted, still within the framework of a semi-private country club.

Membership categories offered and still operational, include:

1. Family full membership (\$300), which permits family members (except children over 21) to play golf, tennis and to use swimming pools and sauna on an unlimited basis;

Tof-trees' architecture, with the lodge and clubhouse as the focal point, is un-traditional, contemporary design blended with earth colors and materials that take advantage of the natural land forms.