

# The Heart of Your Club

Planning the design and decoration of locker rooms requires a knowledge of your guests' needs, careful thought and communication with your architect ▶ Locker rooms may well be the last domain in the Western world where the sexes are separated. While women golfers enjoy these spaces, men often consider them sacred. In fact, they form the very heart of many clubs. Therefore, your locker rooms should meet your guests' needs and reflect the overall personality of your facility. / **BY ALEX CARTER**





Contemporary locker rooms are generally comprised of three elements: locker spaces, wet areas and lounges. Successful locker rooms allow smooth flow among these areas, yet ensure privacy as needed. While it's also appealing to have views of the course from the lounge areas, this should not drive your design. Function is far more important.

To design effective locker rooms, you'll need to understand how members and guests plan to use the space, then relay this information to your architect early in the design process. That's because placement and design of locker rooms affect practically every aspect of clubhouse design.

#### Setting a Plan

**F**or starters, your architect will need to know whether you operate a daily fee course, private golf course or country club facility. Locker rooms are usually much more important to private golf and country clubs than to daily fee clubs,

where golfers often use these spaces primarily as dressing areas. At country clubs and private golf clubs, on the other hand, locker rooms extend the social areas. In fact, members of some clubs spend the majority of their time in the locker areas, making them the hub of activity and the core of these clubs.

Your architect will also need a profile of your clientele or membership. This provides an idea of how the locker rooms will be used. For example, if 80 percent of your members are retirees, your locker rooms will be used differently from those at a club with a young, working membership.

Once the target audience has been identified, you and your architect can then work together to answer more specific questions, such as:

▶ Do we need full or stacked lockers? Stacked lockers require only half the floor space of full lockers, so this decision will affect the square footage of locker rooms. While blue-

chip clubs have traditionally preferred full lockers, many are now moving toward well-designed stacked lockers with special features and ample depth.

▶ How many lockers should we install? You and your architect can make this decision based on your pro forma and golfing membership. Although everyone wants a locker, not everyone needs one. Therefore, some clubs charge a nominal fee to reduce unnecessary usage.

▶ What should the lockers be made of? Most high-end clubs use wooden lockers that resemble finished cabinetry. It's important to select materials that help integrate the locker rooms into the overall design scheme. After all, you want the locker rooms to merge functionally and aesthetically with the rest of the clubhouse. To make this happen, your architect and designer must create a shared vision for the club.

▶ How should we place the lockers in relation to the wet areas? The

wet areas must be adjacent to the locker areas, but this can be configured in several ways. Frequently, two separate locker areas bracket a central wet space that connects to a lounge. While members cannot see into the wet area from the lounge, they can access both spaces from either locker area. In other instances, wet areas may be scattered throughout the locker rooms, or they can be divided from the locker areas by a corridor.

▶ Will we serve food and drinks in the locker rooms? If so, your design should maximize the use of attendants and allow for efficient use of your kitchen and storage areas. Locate the kitchen to support good service flow to the locker rooms. You might also let the locker room bar back up to a grill so one attendant can serve both spaces, particularly during slow seasons. If your locker rooms are located on a floor above or beneath your kitchen, consider dumb waiters.

▶ Will we allow smoking in locker rooms? If smoking is allowed, you'll probably want to designate smoking areas and include a smoke-removal system.

#### From Plan To Action

**D**esign theory aside, the best way to gauge locker room effectiveness is to analyze real-world applications. Here's how several clubs designed functional locker rooms that served their guests' needs and captured their individual character.

Laurel Springs Golf Club in Forsyth County, Georgia, is a small club with the look and feel of a French country cottage. Originally opened as a daily fee facility, it plans to transition to a private club once it has attracted enough members.

Part of the facility's appeal are the locker areas, which include stacked wooden lockers and a cozy sitting area that reinforces the cottage feel. Marble and ceramic tile wet areas

continue this residential air. "Our locker rooms have worked very well for us, and they have helped us attract the members we now have," says Greg Davis, general manager.

The Medalist, in Hobe Sound, Florida, was designed on traditional principles. However, contemporary touches give the club an elegant simplicity. This extends into a high-ceilinged locker room lounge, where members enjoy drinks, lunch and cards under the eye of a 15-foot great white shark that hangs above the bar. At the end of the lounge, a small library space known as the Medalist Room makes a more intimate after-golf retreat, complete with a fireplace, leather chairs and two televisions. Doors on either side of the library lead into two locker areas, which are equipped with banks of full-size pine lockers. There's also an adjacent, but private, wet area.

Rather than creating a separate lounge area, the management of Old Marsh Golf Club in Palm Beach Gardens, Florida, took a different approach to the club's locker rooms when building its stately clubhouse. Adjacent to marshland inhabited by native cranes, the locker area is appointed with teak floors and mahogany lockers that make the locker room appear paneled. The area is lit with natural light from windows located near the ceiling.

The developers and architect turned this space into a social area by distributing tables and chairs throughout the locker area. Members gather here for lunch and drinks, served from a nearby grill. Although there is a central wet area, the locker area is also scattered with sinks, so members may wash their hands or shave without returning to the wet area.

The Country Club of Virginia in Richmond, Virginia, will soon open a new James River facility. Designed to resemble a colonial Virginia farmhouse, it includes

verandahs, sprawling wings and spectacular river views.

One wing will house the men's locker room, which will be separated from the wet areas by a corridor. Scattered sofas and chairs continue the gracious feel, as does an adjacent lounge with a paneled fireplace, beamed ceilings and a home-like social area.

"The architects have put together a design with tremendous flow and function," says William "Skip" Harris, general manager. "Several groups of members have taken tours of the new facility and been very excited about the locker rooms and other areas."

Carmel Country Club, in Charlotte, North Carolina, recently renovated its women's locker room as part of a major effort to bring it up to par with the men's area. The management replaced the metal lockers with wooden units similar to those in the men's locker room and added a card room, where ladies now enjoy drinks and lunch.

"Our new ladies' locker room has been a great success," says Graham McDeson, general manager. "We held member focus groups to determine exactly how the area would be used, and we worked with architects who specialize in clubhouse work. They understand our industry and the problems we face."

Designing locker rooms that meet your members' needs and reflect the character of your club takes careful consideration and attention to detail. If you listen to your members, they will tell you what your locker rooms should be. Then, you and your architect can work together to create locker rooms that will form the heart of your club, help you attract and retain members, and enhance the overall golf experience. ♣

Alex Carter, AIA, is president of NCG Architects in Atlanta, Georgia.