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## Decked Out

**Many clubs' patios have become more than just concrete slabs outside sliding glass doors—they're now valuable new "rooms" that can help delight current members, and even attract new ones.**

by Erin Brereton ([editor@clubandresortbusiness.com](mailto:editor@clubandresortbusiness.com))

When the Country Club of Terre Haute in Terre Haute, Ind., learned that its 67-year-old pool needed immediate replacement, club officials didn't see the situation as a hassle. Instead, they saw an opportunity to put a fresh look on the club's al fresco areas.

"During the process of designing the pool, we asked our landscape architect to give us a proposal to expand our patio in a fashion that would integrate the new pool and deck area with the patio," says Joel R. Harbaugh, President of the club's Board. "His proposal included additional patio space that would overlook the new pool, two retaining walls designed to match the stone work done on the rest of the patio, and a walkway that would accommodate strollers and wheelchairs."

For the groundwork, the club chose paver bricks, known for their reasonable cost, durability and resistance to the chipping and cracking that affects mortar-based paving when the ground shifts. "[The bricks] are easy to maintain, provide a surface that is pleasant to look at, and are easy to walk on for our older members," Harbaugh notes.

The club also added aluminum outdoor furniture that allows the space to be used regularly for lunch and dinner. The patio now also works well for special events such as weddings, fundraising and private parties, all because of a well-thought-out design, says Harbaugh.

"When you're sitting on our patio, it feels like it's been here for a long time," he says. "The design and materials that were used all fit so naturally into the environment. The patio utilizes space that was previously unused and serves as a connection among several components of the club—the clubhouse, pool facilities, snack bar and golf course."

The renovation cost \$52,000 and to Harbaugh, it was worth every penny. "As a private club in today's economy, it is important that we continue to find ways to add value to our members' club experience," he says. "By offering them an additional dining option, hopefully, they will choose to come to the club for dinner rather than going to another restaurant. It has exceeded our expectations in terms of member satisfaction."

### Getting Visual with Landscaping and Decor

Feeling that its outdoor areas were a bit worn, the Country Club of Little Rock renovated one patio in 2001, and the positive reaction led the club to revise another one in 2003.

Since renovating both patios for a reasonable \$35,000, the club has seen a spike in attendance and event-hosting requests. In fact, it's had such success with the two renovated patios that the club is considering updating a third.

"The members call the club and ask if the patio will be open," says General Manager Brian D. Jones. "They really look forward to the nice weather so they can sit outside and enjoy the views."

Those views, which take in downtown Little Rock, were just part of the specific visual goals the club formulated for each patio before any of the renovations began. The first patio received a simple update to accommodate dining, and the second one was revamped for a spa-type feel, with careful color and furniture choices.

"We used a combination of white and earthtone colors," Jones says. "The ceiling is a very light greenish-blue. The chairs are modern, a brown tone with tan cushions. They bring the whole area together."

As in many renovations, blending the new area into existing club facilities was a top priority, so patio columns were painted white to match the existing clubhouse trim. Structural design was also given extensive consideration in the second patio upgrade.

"The landscaping is also a big part of the ambiance," Jones says. "We have palm trees, which are very rare in Arkansas and have to be brought indoors in the winter. We also have canvas sun shades that roll down to block the sun or the wind. The ceiling fans are very tropical-looking and really enhance the décor."

The result? An oasis inside the club's otherwise active space. "It creates a more pleasurable experience," says Jones.

### Going Year-Round with the Right Furniture and Feel

In some cases, clubs don't have the luxury of turning older patios into new outdoor centers; they have to start from scratch. Such was the case when the National Golf Club, located in Southern Pines, N. C., decided to add a patio to its property less than a year ago.

"[We wanted to] utilize the space behind the clubhouse," says Mary Smithson, the club's Membership Marketing Director. "Versatility and flexibility were also important, for casual get-togethers as well as formal parties."

The club's departmental managers met on several different occasions with the designers they hired. The initial sketches were also shown to the club's operating board, which consists of club members, for feedback. In the process, some of the initial intentions were sidelined as the group came up with new ideas to increase the space's functionality.

"As with any design process, some compromises had to be made and some 'must-have' items were re-prioritized," Smithson says. "We looked at the patio for year-round use and included a fireplace for the cooler months. Patio furniture was purchased for the space. Umbrellas are brought inside during inclement weather and winter months."

Reaction to the \$50,000 patio has been positive, and although Smithson says members use it on a daily basis for drinks and special events, such as a Thanksgiving-time wedding that was held near the fireplace, the National Golf Club is hoping to increase usage.

"We would like to see more events and members using the patio," she says. "Plans are in the works to encourage increased activity, [including] a special menu to encourage more casual dining, and special [patio] events booked around tournament and member event schedules."

### Where There's Smoke...

Carefully-constructed outdoor areas can be a club member benefit; but in some cases, they can also be a member necessity. When the state of Florida instituted a

decided to construct a patio to provide puffing space.

"When the state instituted the law, we needed to do something in a hurry to accommodate our smoking members," says General Manager Rudy Lanza. "We already had a dock outside our grill room, so a design [to make better use of the space] was created by a member who had seen the set-up at another club." The dock area, which extends 40 feet into a lagoon, was enhanced to allow for waterfront dining and also create a tiki-themed outdoor bar space.

To finance the new \$25,000 bar and dining area, the Sombrero CC utilized a different method of raising funds. Recognizing that some members might have cried foul at the prospect of being charged an assessment to cover the smoker-friendly construction, the club instead solicited donations for the new space. It was a creative solution that produced contributions from smokers and non-smokers alike and in the end better served all of the club members—in particular, Lanza says, those who prefer casual dining to jackets and ties.

Although all of the tiki furniture in the new cocktail area is outdoor-only, for large outdoor functions the Sombrero moves indoor banquet tables and chairs to the tiki dock. Yet for Lanza, the patio's biggest draw isn't as an event venue or a smoking space—as with so many clubs' outdoor spaces, it's all about the ambience.

"Dining and cocktails in the early evening with the moon so bright offers a truly romantic dining experience," he says. "It has been successful so far."

## Porch Pretty

Forget simple stone and boring bushes. Today's outdoor decks are anything but ordinary, thanks to the following design techniques.

**Pavers**—Available in different textures and colors, pavers allow landscapers to incorporate walkways and greenery without the mass coverage of cement slabs. And the pavers don't have to be brick. Other materials, such as flagstone, can also create an appealing design. A tip: It's popular to use pavers a shade or two lighter than the building they'll be closest to. That way they don't draw attention away from the structure.

**New Views**—Clubs with more mature (i.e., taller and fuller) landscaping may have lost some of the views that were intended with the original design. Instead of excessively pruning or removing the vegetation, consider using a terraced design to add height to the patio. The levels will add interest to the overall design and, if carefully planned, can do wonders to integrate the building into the surrounding landscape design.

**Utilizing pre-existing space**—Most club renovations rely heavily on the club's current look and structure. It's important for clubs to take the personality and culture of a club into consideration when planning a new patio. A tiki-themed area, while not bad in itself, isn't right for every clubhouse. Design the patio to meld with the rest of the property and save the strong themes for temporary event setups, where they'll be appreciated even if they aren't appropriate for everyday use.

**Weather-Wise**—When designing a patio, it's important to look up. Protection from the elements—both excessive sunlight and light rain—is important. Umbrellas work well, as do awnings. For shelter from the wind, which can easily make an otherwise beautiful day seem a little too cool for comfort, fences and thick bushes can provide respite. To truly make a patio more useful year-round, though, consider adding a few space heaters or misting fans to your equipment list.

## Summing It Up

- Consider different materials—and their pros and cons—for the patio.
- Keep the look of new construction in line with the rest of the club or resort's design themes. Basic designs can still accommodate themed events without sacrificing the appeal of a classic day-to-day look.
- Provide protection from the elements—sun, wind and rain—by utilizing umbrellas, awnings and strategically placed hedges.



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