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The clubhouse vernacular

Text: R.J. Weick

“Golf course design, as I’ve learned through many of the designers we’ve worked with, is its own very specific, emotional, technical, and spiritual journey, and an environmental and landscape one,” said James. D. Nordlie, AIA, president of Archiventure Group PC in Denver, Colorado; Harbor Springs, Michigan; Dana Point, California; and Naples, Florida. “We are there to enhance the golf experience and not overpower it, so the clubhouse becomes a focal point for going out, coming back, and accommodating the many needs of a golf business.”

Archiventure Group is an architectural firm specializing in the design of residential, commercial, and resort projects. While the firm has developed a robust portfolio of residential, commercial, educational, hospitality, and interior work since its

establishment in 1984, Archiventure is also known for its clubhouse and hotel designs on golf courses in North America and abroad. Its work on the fairway has taken the firm to Michigan-based Tullymore Golf Club, Stanwood; Oakhurst Golf & Country Club, Clarkston; Forest Dunes Golf Club, Roscommon; Bay Harbor Golf Club, Petoskey; and Grand Traverse Resort & Spa, Acme; and as far as the Republic of Georgia, China, India, Russia, Vietnam, and Barbados.

The firm, which is backed by a team of principals and associates, offers client services such as programming, site feasibility, construction administration, and architectural, space, urban, and environmental design—and at its core, embraces a philosophy that architecture is a symbol and a reminder of the hopes and values of society. Each project is meant to deliver a

distinctive architectural statement through a collaborative design process among client, contractor, consultant, and the design team—ultimately reflecting a consideration for cultural, functional, environmental, and human needs.

“It is creating something workable, inspirational, timeless, and sensitive out of nothing. The design process, if it is done well, is a very rewarding and painstaking process. To do it well, you can’t just throw it together. You have to be your own toughest critic,” Nordlie said. “Design is from nothing to something and I guess that is why I’m in my late 60s and still motivated.”

Prior to launching his own firm, Nordlie began to define his architectural career after graduating from the University of Colorado with a Master of Architecture and then working at Skidmore, Owings & Merrill LLP in Denver and then at Perkins



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Eastman in New York City as a senior designer and project manager. Nordlie, a Michigan-native hailing from Birmingham and alum of Cranbrook, returned to Denver to launch Archiventure Group and began doing work back in Michigan in the residential and commercial fields to facilitate seeing his family more often.

Archiventure Group worked on the Birmingham Bloomfield Arts Center addition as well as the 151 West Jefferson Tower with Heller-Leaks Architects, and then the firm served as the architect for Bay Harbor Yacht Club and Bay Harbor Golf Club along with JJR, an Ann Arbor-based firm, Nordlie said quite a bit of golf club work in Michigan and Ohio quickly followed.

By the early 2000s, Archiventure Group had expanded its hospitality and golf work to India, China, Vietnam, Russia, and other international locations—which helped the firm during the economic downturn from 2008 to 2012. Currently, the firm still works throughout the Midwest, Colorado, California, Florida, and Arizona, and has planned projects in Vietnam, Ireland, and potentially Zimbabwe, Russia, and Mauritius.

“The golf business has changed and there aren’t as many new clubs being constructed so we are having to go farther to find our work,” Nordlie said.

“Now the problem is the world is very

disruptive politically, so we are being forced into areas that are sometimes war zones, so we have to pick and choose where it is safe to work. I do it because I enjoy the diverse culture and travel, but also, you’ve stepped way out of the box to try to do something different,” Nordlie added.

Whether it is a Hindu, Buddhist, and Islamic-inspired clubhouse at a 27-hole, Nicklaus-designed course; a sweeping modern design in Europe; a traditional shingle-style in Ohio; or the elegant grandeur atop a rolling terrain in Michigan; there is a respect for the surrounding environment, culture, and history, and a skillful management of the multifunctional needs inherent to clubhouses.

“It is flow, access, food and beverage, locker rooms, instruction, gathering, and families. The building type is a very diverse and complex building that is interesting to design. If you mix in the history of golf and then the culture and history of the local area, it becomes a very interesting piece of architecture,” Nordlie said.

“It is fun and it gets you out in nature and in unique areas anywhere in the world. I decided many years ago I would try to find building types that allowed me to go to places I had never been before,” Nordlie added.

In terms of the project type, there are a number of different matters that need

to be considered when approaching a new clubhouse, lodging, or related work on golf courses. Nordlie noted the projects are often driven by budget, membership, usage, capacity, size of the site, and views—both inward and outward related to the course—and flow of the building for users, members, guests, staff, service, and delivery.

“The experience starts as you approach the building and it continues throughout the use of the building, out to the golf course and back, and then as you leave. There is a sensitivity issue of not overpowering the site and also working with the golf designer, who really—as I tell my designers—if their course was not there, nobody would come to see my building,” Nordlie said. “I have an extreme respect for the golf designers we work with and they have been equally as kind to refer new work to us.”

The budget itself can play a rather large role in driving the design process for a golf clubhouse, influencing the balance between spatial requirement and aesthetic look of the building. Understated elegance or dramatic statement also has to be comfortable and maintainable without exceeding the budget, since the bottom line also often includes food and beverage, golf course maintenance, pro shop, and hospitality and lodging. Nordlie said it is a puzzle of putting the right pieces together so the end user only sees a comfortable, inviting,

and workable flow—and equally enjoyable experience—while having all of the supporting elements needed for a clubhouse to function.

“When we are in hotels, the most important part sometimes is the back of house. It’s a challenging building type and you want to work it into the history and culture,” Nordlie said. “Tullymore was a fairly tight budget, smaller building, and more of a closed community of residents and guests so we tried to make it look like the building had been there for a while so it grows naturally into the site and the site naturally embraces it.”

For Forest Dunes, Nordlie noted while now the venue has cottages and other lodging, the setting at the time was more for the elite golfer who flies in specifically to play Tom Weiskopf or Tom Doak courses and the clubhouse had to reflect that it was a standalone destination.

“The clubhouse was mainly a statement for high-level member user with a sense of discovery and tradition,” Nordlie said.

Though Nordlie said there is rarely an “Aha!” moment during the process due its complex design, there are times late at night when he is sketching that the plan starts to settle down, the massing begins to build up, and the façade and nature of it comes to life.

“It takes care and a strong willingness to be a tough critic of yourself to get it right. I think in the end you have a gel point where you have refined everything inside and outside schematically and then

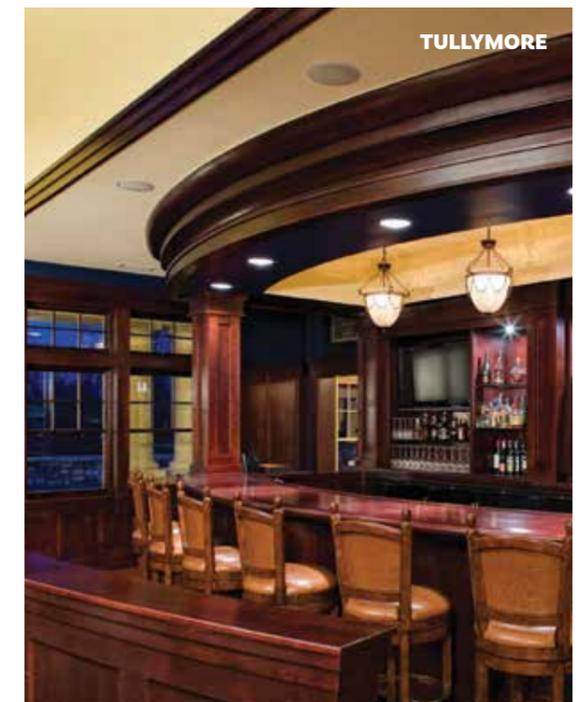
you have to put it into workable drawings that are well done, that are well-detailed,” Nordlie said. “It’s about the people. There has to be a chemistry there; it is a very team-based operation. It is not me coming in and telling them what they need to do: it is back and forth.”



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TULLYMORE