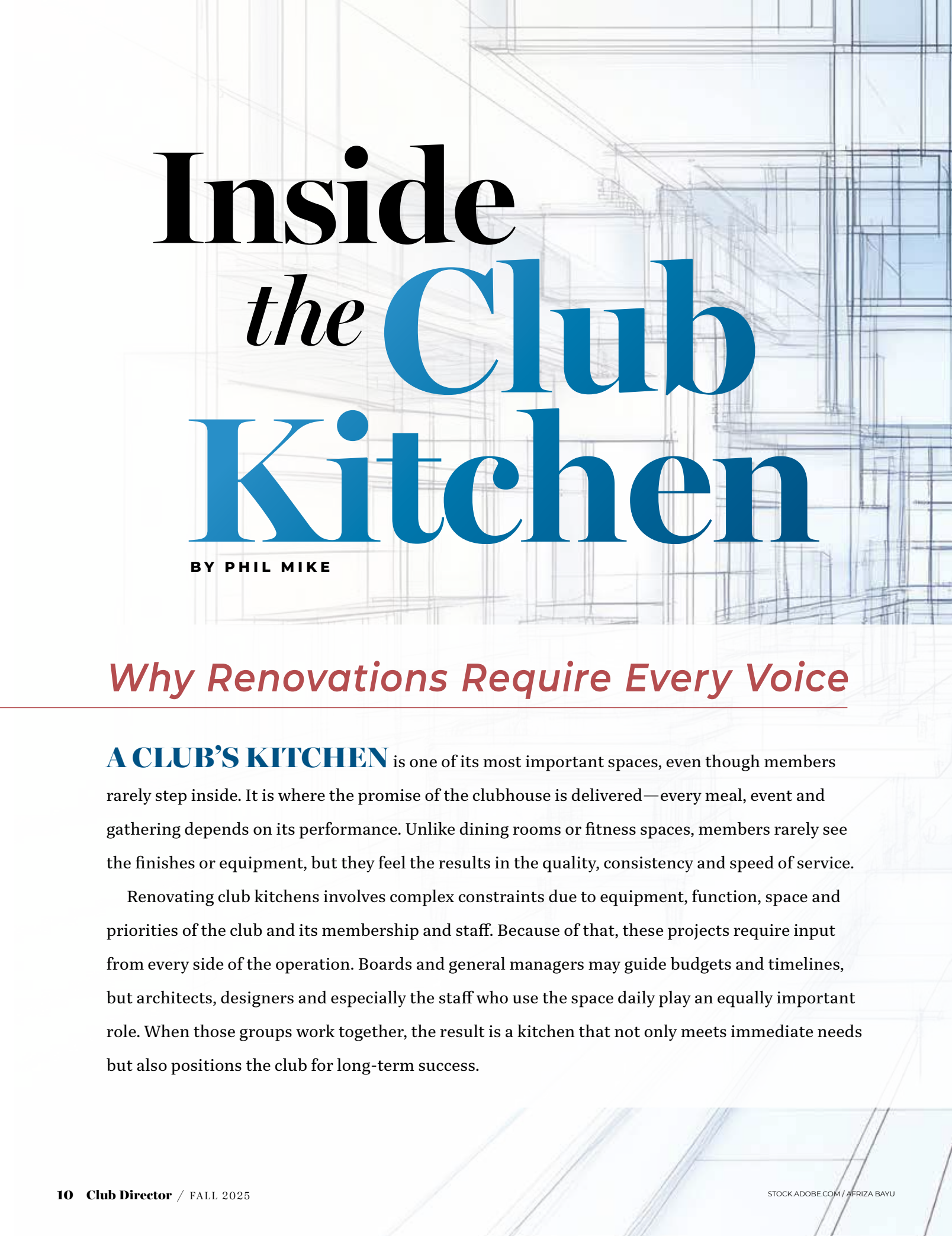


The background of the page is a light blue architectural wireframe of a modern building, showing various levels, corridors, and structural elements. The title 'Inside the Club Kitchen' is prominently displayed in the upper half of the page. 'Inside' is in a large, black, serif font. 'the' is in a smaller, italicized, black, serif font. 'Club' is in a large, blue, serif font. 'Kitchen' is in a large, blue, serif font.

Inside *the* Club Kitchen

BY PHIL MIKE

Why Renovations Require Every Voice

A CLUB'S KITCHEN is one of its most important spaces, even though members rarely step inside. It is where the promise of the clubhouse is delivered—every meal, event and gathering depends on its performance. Unlike dining rooms or fitness spaces, members rarely see the finishes or equipment, but they feel the results in the quality, consistency and speed of service.

Renovating club kitchens involves complex constraints due to equipment, function, space and priorities of the club and its membership and staff. Because of that, these projects require input from every side of the operation. Boards and general managers may guide budgets and timelines, but architects, designers and especially the staff who use the space daily play an equally important role. When those groups work together, the result is a kitchen that not only meets immediate needs but also positions the club for long-term success.



Columbia Country Club: Reimagining the Lower Level

Columbia Country Club began its recent renovation to update the lower level of its clubhouse and address decades of deferred maintenance. The kitchen had not been redone in 40 years and was no longer able to keep up with increased post-pandemic demand. “We were a size 12 foot in a size nine shoe,” said General Manager Bill Jankowski.

Jankowski joined Columbia shortly before the project began in January 2023, giving him a unique perspective as both a new leader and the person responsible for guiding the process to completion.

“lower-level project guide” Jankowski described as “the bible” for ensuring transparency and consistency.

Jankowski, a former chef himself, also personally engaged in the details. “I marked up the drawings myself, sitting down with the chef to make sure we were looking at the right details,” he said.

Management and phasing

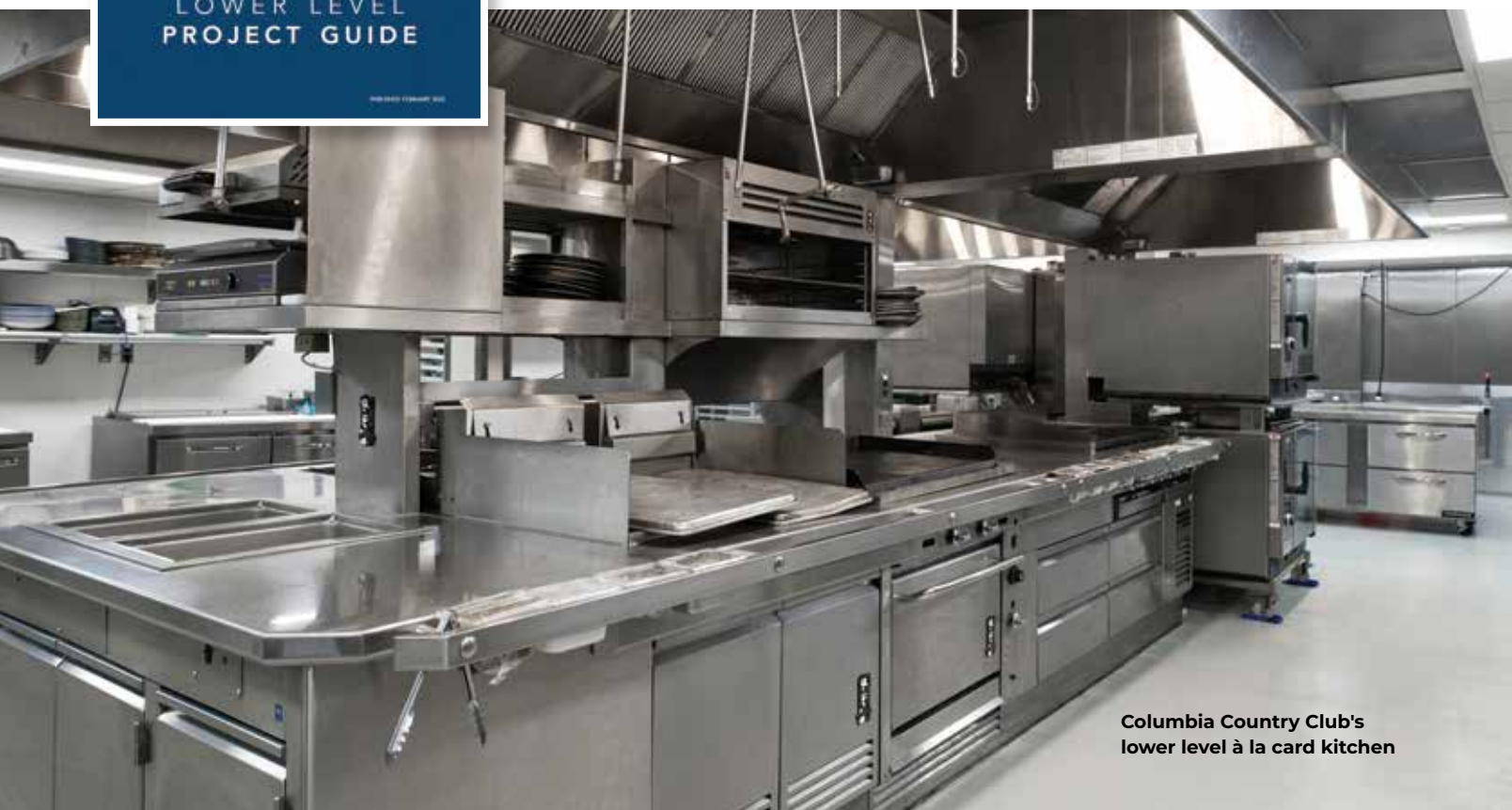
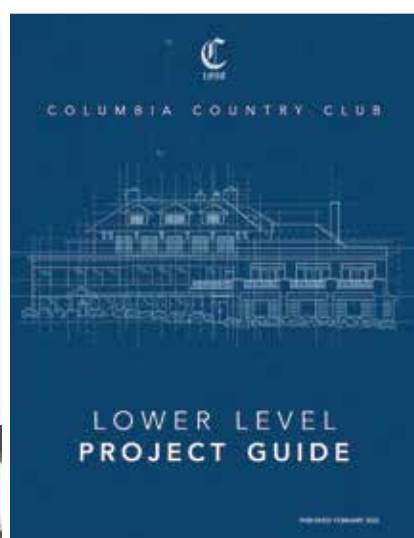
The project was divided into two phases. Phase one began in January 2023 and addressed infrastructure and locker rooms. Phase two, launched in January 2024, focused on the kitchen and restaurants. A series of soft openings began by Labor Day 2024. “The board gave us the proper time to do it the right way,” Jankowski said.

Continuity during construction

With the lower-level kitchen offline, à la carte operations shifted upstairs into the main-level banquet kitchen. To accommodate members, two banquet rooms were temporarily converted into dining spaces. The arrangement required adjustments for both staff and members, but longtime members recalled that the upstairs had once served as the club’s primary dining area, which helped smooth the transition and ease expectations.

Governance and planning

The Long-Range Planning Committee initiated the project and worked with the board, operational leaders and a third-party project manager. Executive Chef Brandon Gross and the operations team were central to early planning. Focus groups helped define member needs versus wants and the club produced a



Columbia Country Club's
lower level à la card kitchen

A Chef's Perspective on Renovations

When clubs renovate their kitchens, much of the focus centers on budgets, schedules and member perception. For the general manager and board, those are critical issues. But for chefs, the lasting question is whether the space will work under pressure and remain effective for years to come.

Certified Master Chefs Russell Scott and Jason Hall both spent years as private club chefs before joining Middleby. Their dual perspective—as operators and now equipment experts—underscores how vital chef input is in shaping successful projects.

Involve the chef early and often

Renovations are most effective when chefs are part of planning from the start and remain engaged throughout. Too often, design choices are left to consultants or architects who may not fully grasp daily kitchen realities. Including the chef ensures that workflow and functionality drive decisions, not just aesthetics. Hall cautioned that even missing a single construction meeting can result in expensive fixes later, since “sometimes there are drastic changes in just a short meeting.”

Connect equipment to workflow

Equipment decisions cannot be made in isolation. Chefs bridge the gap between member expectations and operational realities, matching menu goals with the tools required to deliver them efficiently. Scott explained that primarily, chefs can specify what's needed for high-volume service, such as a commissary line with braising pans and combi ovens versus an à la carte line designed for daily breakfast, lunch and dinner.

A chef's experience provides a key touchpoint for workflow. A misplaced cooler or prep station can add wasted



steps and fatigue. Hall described his guiding principle simply: “I don't want my cooks walking 20 yards to the nearest cooler. So what does this space need to be hyper-efficient?”

Communicate in operational terms

Budgets are tight and priorities vary across leadership. Chefs strengthen their influence when they tie requests directly to operational and financial outcomes—explaining how a piece of equipment saves labor, improves consistency, or supports banquet revenue. Hall put it bluntly, “You're arguing your case in court on every single piece. It's a good idea to know why you need those things and how that relates to budget dollars. I don't feel like there can be enough of those examples.”

Future proofing

Both chefs emphasized that planning must look well beyond current needs. Small choices can have long-term consequences—such as a valve size that

limits what can be cooked years later. At the same time, innovation is moving fast. Scott urged chefs to stay open to technology, from ventless ovens to automated fryer lifts, noting that these tools can reduce labor strain and increase throughput without compromising quality. Hall added that culinary training has not kept pace with these advances, which is why partnerships with vendors and manufacturers can help close the gap.

Scope of the chef's role

Chefs may not drive financial or structural decisions, but they carry authority on how the kitchen supports service. Their responsibility is to translate menu goals and member expectations into practical requirements for space, equipment and workflow. When they are active participants—attending meetings, working alongside the GM and board and visiting facilities with decision-makers—renovations are more likely to deliver lasting results.



Ladies card room (left) and wine tasting room (right) at Columbia Country Club.

Soft openings and staff engagement

Columbia staged its reopening deliberately. The board previewed the new space with a chef's dinner, followed by staff meals, committee tastings and complimentary member soft openings. "There are going to be mistakes when you're opening something brand new," Jankowski said. "Offering complimentary soft openings gave us flexibility and grace." Members praised the process, particularly that staff were provided their own soft launch before them, which reinforced the culture and gave employees ownership of the new space.



Chef involvement and design

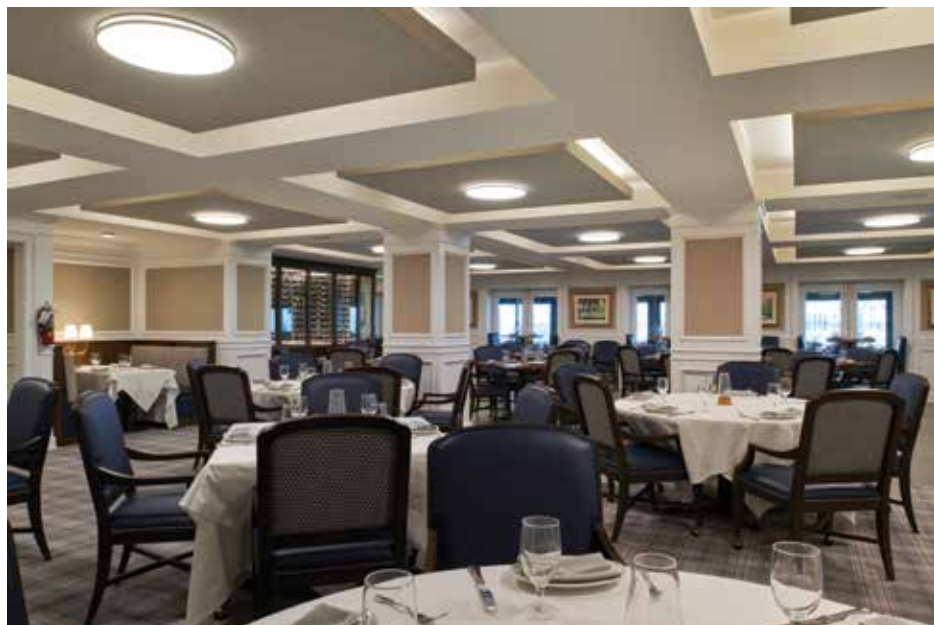
Jankowski's experience helped him work closely with Gross and the kitchen designer to review and mark up plans. Additionally, weekly owner-architect-contractor meetings gave the team a structured forum to raise concerns and adjust plans as needed. Having both the general manager and the chef present in those meetings helped keep the kitchen's needs from being overlooked in favor of other priorities.

Challenges

Working within a historic building required creative solutions. A structural foundation interfered with the planned hood system, forcing installation of a new beam that added almost nine weeks to the timeline. "It's always about timing and budget," Jankowski said. "You try to focus on other aspects while you wait."

Equipment and outcomes

The culinary team selected equipment in collaboration with the kitchen designer and operations leadership. "Nothing was value-engineered," Jankowski said. "We wanted the best brands, top tier, tried and true." The result gave the staff space and tools to elevate their work. "Before, you're just surviving," he said. "Now, out fast is not an issue. We can focus on creativity and quality."



Interlachen Country Club: Updating the Kitchen Within a Master Plan

Interlachen Country Club's kitchen renovation was part of a larger master plan to reimagine the clubhouse and campus. The aim was to modernize and elevate member-facing spaces while also upgrading the infrastructure behind them. "None of those spaces matter or are going to reach their full potential if you don't have the infrastructure behind the scenes to support the experience," said GM/CEO Joel Livingood.

The club wanted to create food and beverage experiences that matched member expectations, with kitchens and service spaces designed to deliver at that level. "The excitement of a beautiful new

space will mean little if it isn't matched by the quality and consistency of the service and the food," Livingood said.

Governance and planning

Interlachen relied on its governance model and professional staff to shape the project. The executive team and board worked closely together, selecting design and construction partners early.

Livingood emphasized that before any improvements were considered, the club first aligned on its mission, values and long-term strategy. The facilities master plan became the framework for executing that strategy, ensuring every decision was tied back to the club's identity and long-term success.



The Lodge at Interlachen features a thoughtfully designed, expansive kitchen space of more than 2,500 square feet.



The Lodge at Interlachen

Balancing priorities

Livingood described the renovation as a balance of member expectations, budget realities and operational constraints. “There’s some Venn diagram out there,” he said. “On one side, there’s everything we want. On the other side, here’s our budget. On the other side, here’s all these other constraints. You’re looking for that sweet spot in the middle.”

He cautioned against cutting too deep in the kitchen, “If we’re going to spend \$6 million building a new restaurant, I don’t want to trip over few thousand dollars in the kitchen that will prevent us from delivering a great experience.”

Staff involvement

The executive chef, director of food and beverage and restaurant managers were deeply involved in the process.

Strategic Spaces: Why the Best Clubs Are Rethinking Kitchen Design

By Carrie Eyler

Today’s most innovative clubs aren’t just looking inward—they’re drawing inspiration from outside the traditional hospitality playbook. Boutique hotels, upscale coworking spaces, day-to-night coffee shops and wellness resorts are setting new standards for design, personalization and operational efficiency—and kitchens are being revamped to accommodate.

- **Boutique Hotels:** Known for intimate atmospheres and curated experiences, boutique hotels have influenced club design by emphasizing personalized service and ambiance. The global boutique hotel market is projected to grow over the next year, driven by demand for experiential travel and distinctive accommodations.
- **Wellness Resorts:** With the global wellness tourism market expected to reach \$906 billion in 2025, growing at 12.5% annually, clubs are incorporating wellness-focused design elements like open kitchens, natural lighting and healthy menu

options to meet evolving member expectations.

- **Coworking Spaces:** These environments prioritize flexibility, community and tech integration—principles that clubs are adopting to create multi-functional dining and social spaces. The global coworking market is projected to grow to \$82.12 billion by 2034, with a current annual growth rate of 14.1% and over 40,000 coworking spaces worldwide by 2025.
- **Dual-Identity Trend:** Multi-use venues that transition from coffee shops by day to bars by night are becoming increasingly popular, especially in urban areas and

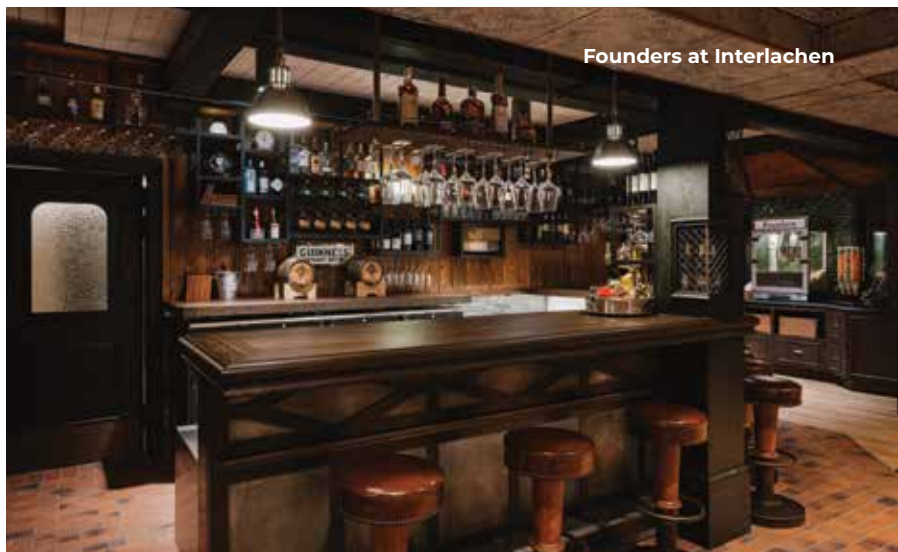
hospitality-focused clubs. Cold beverages now account for 75% of Starbucks U.S. sales and the hard coffee market is projected to grow 67% over the next five years, reflecting consumer demand for hybrid experiences.

As these trends reshape what members expect from their clubs, kitchen design must follow suit—not with overcomplication, but with deliberate simplicity. The most successful renovations adopt a “simple best” philosophy: design only what’s essential, ensure every element serves a clear purpose and maintain flexibility for future needs. This approach not only

“I’m a firm believer that people support what they help create,” Livingood said. The chef guided decisions about equipment and layout, while F&B leaders advised on service flow, pinch points and bar design. “Every project has conflicts and constraints, but I rely on our team, the people closest to the work, to guide us and reach the best solution given our resources,” he said.

Flexibility and future-proofing

Interlachen designed the project to support long-term goals and adapt to changing preferences. “It’s really important to know who you are,” Livingood said. “Does this project support our mission, values and goals not just over the next one, two, three years, but over the next five or 10 years?” The club also built in flexibility with seating, equipment use and space planning. “We can do different



Founders at Interlachen

improves operational flow but also reduces cost, clutter and long-term maintenance.

Introducing HOST: A Strategic Framework for Club Kitchen Design

Boelter’s HOST approach—Hospitality, Optimization, Safety and Technology—offers a comprehensive lens through which clubs can evaluate and reimagine their kitchen environments.

H – Hospitality: Designing for the Member Experience

- ▶ Flow & Accessibility: Kitchens should connect effortlessly with dining and service zones—members should feel smooth service without glimpsing behind-the-scenes chaos.
- ▶ Multi-Use Spaces: Adaptable kitchen layouts support a range of offerings, from à la carte meals to poolside snacks and banquets.
- ▶ Ambiance Support: Open kitchens or chef’s tables can elevate atmosphere and strengthen brand identity.

O – Optimization: Maximize Efficiency, Minimize Waste

- ▶ Right-Sizing Equipment: Use only

what’s necessary. Oversized or underutilized gear drains resources and space.

- ▶ Zoning: Clear stations for prep, cook, plate and clean streamline flow and minimize disruptions.
- ▶ Labor Efficiency: Fewer steps and ergonomic layouts reduce fatigue and speed up service.
- ▶ Innovation: Using energy-efficient equipment and intuitive layouts supports team satisfaction and performance. In fact, 74% of users feel more productive in well-designed workspaces and 67% report improved work-life balance.

S – Safety: Protect Team, Members and Operations

- ▶ Food Safety: Prioritize ventilation, temperature control and hygienic materials for clean and consistent service.
- ▶ Team Safety: Non-slip floors, ample lighting and ergonomic design prevent accidents and strain.
- ▶ Compliance: Stay ahead of ADA and health code standards to safeguard operations.
- ▶ Useful Life of Equipment: Choose equipment that can be safely maintained and adapted over time.

T – Technology: Future-Proof the Kitchen

- ▶ Smart Equipment: Use combi ovens, induction, programmable fryers and energy-saving appliances to boost productivity while trimming costs.
- ▶ Digital Integration: KDS systems, POS connectivity and inventory tracking streamline operations.
- ▶ Data-Driven Decisions: Analyze usage trends to refine staffing, purchasing and menus.
- ▶ Sustainability: Embrace energy-saving tech and zero-waste solutions to align with eco-conscious values. With 73% of coworking/hospitality venues prioritizing sustainability, clubs are expected to follow suit.

Why HOST Matters

When clubs implement HOST principles, they’re not just redesigning kitchens—they’re reshaping the member experience. This intentional approach builds operational resilience while attracting top culinary talent by making kitchens easier to work in, smarter to manage and more aligned with members’ expectations. **CD**

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Fieldhouse Cafe at Interlachen

unique things as member wants and needs change and as we see trends outside the club industry that we want to bring in,” he said.

Continuity during construction

Phasing was critical to minimizing disruption. The first phase renovated parts of the clubhouse while other kitchens stayed in service. Later phases introduced new construction while maintaining the spaces that had already been completed. “Construction is always disruptive,” Livingood said. “You’ve got to account for those things and think about the member experience through that lens.” Clear communication helped manage expectations when timelines or logistics shifted.

Opening and training

Like Columbia Country Club, Interlachen staged its reopening carefully, with dress rehearsals and soft launches before a full opening. A dress-rehearsal soft launch allowed staff to identify issues and retrain before members arrived. Even after opening, reservations were intentionally limited for the first several weeks, gradually increasing as the team grew more confident. “You’ve only got one chance to make a first impression,” Livingood said. “Hospitality has to be memorable. Food has to be of the highest quality and consistency. And that doesn’t happen overnight.”

With new equipment, spaces and procedures, staff retraining was also a critical part of the process. “In renovated spaces, our



team was used to doing things a certain way because it was the only way to do it in that space. Now we had an opportunity to form new, better habits,” Livingood said.

Results

The project strengthened Interlachen’s food and beverage program by focusing on four key outcomes: quality, consistency, variety and speed of service. “The result has been a 250% increase in a la carte revenue and increase in its restaurant Net Promoter Score from 14 to 83—we couldn’t have done that without the right people and equipment,” Livingood said. Multiple venues now provide members with distinct experiences, rather than trying to deliver everything in one space.

Lessons from General Managers

Jankowski said the most important factor

was thorough planning from the start. “You’ve got one shot at doing this.”

From Columbia’s renovation, three lessons stand out:

- ◆ **Budget for the unexpected.** Historic facilities bring surprises. A structural foundation discovered mid-project required a new steel beam and delayed the work by nearly nine weeks. Building in contingency helped the club adapt without sacrificing quality.
- ◆ **Plan for operational impacts.** Moving service to the upstairs banquet kitchen meant rethinking staff flow, reallocating rooms and retraining the team. Careful planning minimized disruption and kept dining standards intact.
- ◆ **Keep members informed.** Columbia launched a weekly *Behind the Fence* video series and a detailed “project guide” to explain the purpose, timing and progress of the work. The consistent updates built excitement, reduced rumors and earned member patience during delays. Livingood emphasized that successful projects depend on aligning vision, engaging staff and trusting experts. “Of all the places to engage committees and members, behind the scenes is where you really have to trust your team,” he said. “Ask for their input and expertise and then deliver on it so they’re set up for success at the end of the day.” He summarized three key lessons:
 - ◆ **Find partners who share your vision—and involve them early.** The right architect, designer and general contractor should feel like an extension of the club’s team.
 - ◆ **Engage your own team throughout the process.** Staff insight into day-to-day operations leads to smarter, more practical solutions and builds pride in the final result.
 - ◆ **Trust the experts.** Defer decisions to designers and operators who live the experience every day, rather than designing by committee, to ensure the best long-term outcomes. **CD**

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