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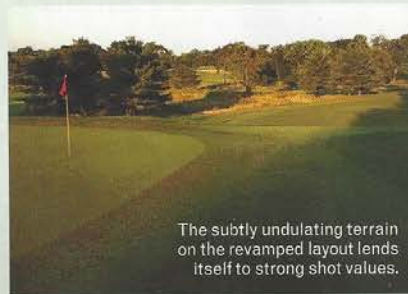
The fescue area near the second green at Army Navy Country Club's Arlington Course Blue nine adds to its aesthetic appeal.



Looking back to the green at the par-3 third hole at Army Navy Country Club's Arlington Course (White nine).

Striking Makeover at Army Navy

Changes to the club's Arlington Course provide definition, eye-catching appeal *BY STEPHEN GOODWIN*



The subtly undulating terrain on the revamped layout lends itself to strong shot values.

I F YOU'VE EVER ENTERED Washington, D.C., on Interstate 395, you've driven right by the Arlington location of Army Navy Country Club. Not that you would have noticed.

As you pass the Air Force Memorial, the highway crests a hill and provides a dramatic panorama of the nation's capital—the Pentagon, the Potomac, the Washington Monument, and the Capitol itself.

That blur of green on the left? That's Army Navy Country Club.

That blur is actually a sizeable tract of 255 acres and 27 holes of golf. The three nines are called, patriotically, the Red, White, and Blue. Founded by military officers in 1924, Army Navy Country Club has no official association with the military, though its members over the years have included many notable generals and five presidents.

Today, the club has over 2,200 resident members and more than 3,000 nonresident members. It also has another full-service facility in nearby Fairfax, with an additional 27 holes, making it the biggest, busiest private club operation in Virginia.

After a top-to-toe renovation by golf course architect Richard Mandell, Army Navy's Arlington Course is also one of the most inviting layouts in the region, a track rich not only in history but in charm and character. With its specimen trees, burbling streams, pristine fairways, and strands of waving fescue, Army Navy Country Club feels worlds away from the surrounding hubbub, a serene enclave and a place of sanctuary.

TIME FOR IMPROVEMENTS

Greg Scott, Army Navy Country Club's PGA director of golf, has been the point man for the renovation project since the first master plan was drawn up in 2002.

"Before then," he explains, "changes had been made from year to year, but we had reached the point where we needed a holistic plan."

The problems at Army Navy Country Club were the familiar, unavoidable issues for mature clubs: tree encroachment on the playing areas; an outdated infrastructure and irrigation system; degraded bunkers; inconsistent turf with a variety of grasses and

inadequate teeing areas. In addition, steep slopes made it next to impossible to keep the ball on some fairways.

For architect Mandell, the challenge was to solve these problems while enhancing the traditional "Golden Age" character of the golf course. The membership at Army Navy Country Club wanted to preserve the distinction between the two facilities; the Arlington Course had a more rustic, traditional flavor, and the Fairfax Course, originally designed by Robert Trent Jones, had sleeker, more modern lines (renovations are still in progress at Fairfax).

Mandell, the author of a meticulously researched book entitled *Pinehurst—Home of American Golf (The Evolution of a Legend)*, is a lifelong student of Golden Age architecture, and he regarded the job at Army Navy Country Club as a rare opportunity.

"The original design was by a general, not an architect of note," he says, "so I didn't have to approach it as a restoration of some individual style. I saw it as a chance to use the general principles of Golden Age design, to give it that kind of flair while making it work for modern equipment."



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ESTABLISHED FEEL

Working on nine holes at a time so that members could always play a full 18-hole round, Mandell tackled the issues in his customary boots-on-the-ground style, logging long days to make sure that the renovation work with bulldozers would be compatible with the lay-of-the-land look of a classic course.

For instance, on the second and third holes of the Red nine, he softened a steep slope that gave too much tilt to both fairways – and tied in the new slopes without a trace of cut-and-fill. He also added a set of bunkers in echelon – he thinks of them as his “Tillinghast bunkers” – to give players a strategic choice from the second tee, and enhanced the prominence of a small stream that serves as a hazard.

The changes came off as intended – that is, they look as though they’ve been there for decades. While preserving the routing and the features of the original layout, with its smallish greens and its variety of uphill and downhill shots, Mandell found ways to create new strategic options, highlight existing hazards, eliminate awkward situations and increase shotmaking possibilities. In addition, his use of handcrafted, tattered-edge bunkers and no-mow areas of tall grasses transformed the appearance of the course.

Touring the course, Scott routinely notes the manner in which the renovations have added to the definition and challenge of the golf course. On the par-4 first hole of Arlington’s White nine, for instance, he points out how removing trees at the corner of a once-sharp dogleg has given players an option from the tee instead of forcing a defensive drive into a small landing area.

An even more dramatic example of the result of tree removal comes at the Blue nine’s par-4 eighth hole, where bunkers that



Middle photos: Designer Richard Mandell has introduced strong visuals and provided definition to bunkers on numerous holes, including at the par-4 third at the Red nine. The pond near the second hole at the Blue nine at the Arlington Course. A historical reminder stands close to the ninth green at the Red nine, which is inside the perimeter of the old Fort Richardson.

were once on the left side of the fairway are now in the center, and Position A is where the trees once grew densely.

The Blue nine’s par-4 third hole is another strategic and arresting hole, with a stream meandering along the left side of the fairway – a hazard that wasn’t even visible before the renovation. It now provides a beguiling, dangerous frame for the hole, and its effect

is even more pronounced since it flows across the fairway; it used to be piped underground, out of sight and away from play.

READY FOR THE FUTURE

And so it goes, hole after hole, with Scott pointing out the seemingly small nips and tucks that have converted an outdated course into a flourishing example of classic design, a layout where the traditional elements have been blended nicely with modern requirements.

The renovation even kept intact many of the ornamental “memorial groves,” stands of cherry trees that were planted over the years to honor prominent members.

The new teeing grounds are more than ample, allowing for five sets of markers and making the course more playable for women and juniors.

The greens have been regrassed with A4 bentgrass, and they have plenty of pitch and speed. The greatest change in the turf is on the fairways, where the Army Navy Country Club went with Patriot bermudagrass, a strain specially developed for transitional areas like the mid-Atlantic region.

Golf course superintendent Bob Wilbur has been at the club for more than 32 years and has never seen the fairways in better shape – green and crisp, so that the ball sits up as if on a hairbrush.

“The bermudagrass is loving life in all this heat we’re getting,” he reported this summer.

The choice of bermudagrass, which requires less water and fewer chemicals, underscores an important aspect of the renovation at Army Navy Country Club; it has been carried out with an eye toward sustainability, both economic and environmental.

As Mandell points out, the designers of the Golden Age were “minimalists” by necessity. They made an art of working with what nature offered, and produced courses that gave decades of pleasure and recreation.

Army Navy Country Club has nearly a century of history, and they now have a course that is ready to provide another century of enjoyment.

Author Stephen Goodwin, a regular contributor to Virginia Golfer, is the author of Dream Golf: The Making of Bandon Dunes, the story of an Oregon resort that has become one of golf’s most stirring destinations. He is a professor at George Mason University and writes regularly on golf and travel at www.stephengoodwin.com.