

CONANICUT YACHT CLUB

Jamestown, RI



The Conanicut Yacht Club, built in 1892, has a storied history on the water. The main clubhouse sits on a green lawn that leads to a long dock, rocky beach, and the sparkling Narragansett Bay, which in the summer is dotted with CYC's sailing fleet and members' boats. The tennis and paddle courts are located a half mile upward in the historic Shoreby Hill neighborhood, a shingle-style enclave that has welcomed the racquets community.

PLATFORM TENNIS CHANGES CLUB

In 1997, an influx of pioneers from Connecticut pushed hard for the club to add two (used) platform tennis courts to the tennis court facility. The club, with about 350 families, immediately turned into a year-round haven of activity, with crossover between the sailing, tennis, and paddle members.



Don Wineberg said, "I am an enthusiastic sailor. I joined CYC after they put the paddle courts in. They were a generational change tool. So many younger families joined, our membership grew, even the food in the clubhouse improved." The only problem was the tennis/paddle hut. It was chicken-coopish, with no heat in the winter and stifling in the summer. The plastic sheeting over the windows may have been the lowest of the CYC's style moments.

RACQUETS BUILDING IMPROVES CLUB

In 2016, then-Club Commodore Wineberg was able to get the club to commit to building a new racquets building, after three years of preliminary work, including a needs assessment, architect search, and design work. "I had a few wants: 1) It had to be approved by a strong consensus of members; 2) Knowing that change is hard, I wanted it to be a very deliberate, inclusive process so that

members were never surprised; and 3) It was important that we kept the relationship with the neighborhood strong.”

Evan Smith, a former board member, spearheaded a committee of 12 members for the new facility. He was present through every phase of the project to the ribbon cutting; during construction he was on site three days a week. Smith said, “Don had the vision to go forward. I told members they would be proud of it, and that it would be stylish and comfortable.”

For helpers, the abutting neighbors were members who were very positive about the project. Also, CYC decided to site the hut between the Har-Tru courts (eight in total) and the paddle courts so they didn’t have to move courts or interrupt the paddle season. Demolition started on September 18, 2018 and the project was completed by September 18, 2019, but the building was usable by early spring of 2019. “Our members were great about using a temporary work trailer for a bit,” Smith said.

RELATIONSHIPS BUILT ALONG WITH HUT

The group hired Newport-based A4 Architects. Wineberg said, “They were great to work with. They took into account the architectural character of Jamestown, sight lines for paddle and tennis, and thought about light filters, like the gable, for the neighbors.”

A4’s Managing Director Ross Cann said, “Our goal on this project was to create a compact but comfortable facility well-suited to the needs of the membership but which also fit comfortably into the shingle-style residential neighborhood. We have been gratified by how quickly and well the membership has taken to the new facility and how much they enjoy using it.”

The new porch holds Adirondack rockers and stadium seating wide steps that are just four feet from the edge of the court, and the overhang provides shade. “The steps down to the tennis court are definitely the most dramatic outdoor optic,” Smith said. Next to that is a large Trex low-maintenance deck with chairs, tables, umbrellas in the summer and coolers in the winter to watch both tennis and paddle as well as enjoy the tall pine trees and the seasonal water views.

The walk to the new building gives you the feel of heading to a friend’s house. There is a picket fence with a gate at the parking lot, a lamppost, and a neat gravel path that leads to the front steps and large, gracious glass door entryway.



INTERIOR GATHERING SPACE

The indoor space is generous and open and has a wow factor. The ceiling is vaulted, accented with wooden beams. A stone gas fireplace adds winter cheer. Along the hallway, there is an office and retail area for the tennis/paddle pro, and stairs to a full basement for storage. Two nicely appointed bathrooms—one with a shower—are a very welcome addition. There are counter-height ledges at the windows with fabric-covered bar stools. The windows offer great interior light and viewing of the paddle courts and tennis courts. The building is air-conditioned, has room for a ping pong table, and is appointed with a smart TV, music system, and comfy chairs that you can fall back into that surround a large coffee table.

The paddle courts are filled every evening from 6-9 PM and the hut is well used every weekend, during tournaments, and for all daytime contracts and social groups. As a player, Wineberg appreciated the need for a building that kept people together. “I adore the process of the game. The after is as important as playing, like when you come in from sailing and tie up to a mooring and have a drink. We didn’t want to have programs where it was ‘play and go.’ We built outdoor viewing spaces and indoor seating spaces with that intention.” «»

Important Contributors

Jeff Cook Club Commodore (after Wineberg) who managed the construction after all the approvals were in place.

Bill Ritter A neighbor who was instrumental in letting the club build. He loved the game and the club.

John Mayers, Treasurer, and Dick Trask, Finance Chair, who jointly negotiated a very affordable financing package for the project.

Rob Parker Former tennis and paddle professional who was helpful with input on the interior needs and was an ardent advocate for the project.

Tenley van der Wall and Sylvia Monti, Interior Design Committee «»