



by Stefan Feketeföldi

Club Design From Real Practitioners



Stuart Ohlson



Hervey Lavoie

Hervey has published articles on the subject of design in club industry magazines and books for more than 18 years. We are

very pleased to have a real world practitioner, with his depth of experience and creative record, as a regular contributor to Bodylife International. His willingness to share his design know-how is relatively uncommon in the highly competitive world of architects.

In a recent issue, we, inadvertently, left out the author credit when we published an article of Hervey Lavoie's on the design of spa facilities in the club envi-

ronment. This faux pas got us to thinking about Hervey Lavoie as more than just a name. So, we hooked up with Hervey and asked him a few questions. Now let's look behind the curtains of Ohlson Lavoies Company and find out about the company behind the name!

Would you tell us how and when the Ohlson Lavoie Corporation was formed?

When I completed graduate school receiving my Masters Degree from the University of Colorado in 1974, I was hired by Stuart Ohlson, who had established his Architectural firm in 1961. We worked together on office buildings and apartments in the early years and later, in 1979, we became partners and

formed the Ohlson Lavoie Corporation with a staff of four persons.

Today, what is Ohlson's and what is your responsibility in the company?

Stuart Ohlson is now semi-retired although he still works with a handful of his old clients. I am President and majority owner of Ohlson Lavoie Corporation and have seven partners. My primary work is developing new business and directing the design or creative work.

How did you get involved with the fitness industry?

Stuart and I were both avid tennis players and members of a local indoor tennis club. When the club owner decided to expand the club and move to a new location in 1982, the two of us were selected as his architects. Designing his new club turned out to be very successful. With the experience and expertise that we gained through this club project, we then saw the potential of using this project to attract other design work of the same type.

Do you own a health or fitness club?

No I do not. However, we have had opportunities to invest in club projects, but we believe, firmly, that our priorities should be to reinvest in our own architectural business. Our business is becoming very capital-intensive with new hardware and software for engineering, design, drafting, illustration, reproduction, communication and animation.



Located on the campus of Prairie State College



Located on the campus of Prairie State College, The Fitness Complex addresses the multi-faceted needs of the university, in conjunction with its operating partners, The Chicago Heights Park District and St. James Hospital. Conceived as a full-service health, recreation, and fitness facility, this club has proven most successful in responding to the needs of the local community, while also serving to interweave a close relationship between the student body and that same community in which the campus is located. Intercollegiate sports and local community sports leagues in conjunction with health and wellness activities for kids and adults have all contributed to a highly active and successful facility. The open-plan nature of the building, allowing for interaction and overview of all activities, has provided a pleasant, harmonious environment for all patrons.

Besides your headquarters in Denver, Colorado, do you have other branches throughout the world?

Yes. Besides our main office in Colorado which has an average staff of fifty, we have a branch office in Tokyo with a staff of seven. We also have a branch office in Cairo, Egypt with an average

staff of eight. Over the past two years, we have averaged between 60 and 70 employees.

What would you say is your basic corporate philosophy?

We believe in a client-centered design process which focuses on the success of our client's business. Even

though our ever-expanding experience delivers real value to achieving this success, we feel strongly that it is also a matter of respect, dedication, and following through on every promise.

Do you have designs for smaller clubs with tighter budgets?

Yes we do. However, let me clarify



HEALTHPOINT FITNESS CENTER, Boston Celtics Athletic Training was designed as a world-class, wellness-based fitness facility. The partnership between Caregroup (New England Baptist Hospital) and the Boston Celtics enabled such a facility to be built. Healthpoint offers wellness management (physical therapy, health management, and much more) in addition to housing the Boston Celtics training facility. The building features: a fitness area with 240 pieces of state-of-the-art fitness equipment; 3 aerobics studios with shock-absorbing floors and enough flexibility to accommodate anything from high-impact aerobics classes to low-impact Yoga classes; an eighth of a mile jogging track located on the third floor which overlooks the entire facility and provides an outdoor view of the lush Massachusetts landscape; a gymnasium built to the Boston Celtics' exact specifications, and it also features a red oak parquet floor with 6 NBA regulation backboards and baskets; a 25 meter, 6-lane lap pool as well as a warm-water pool with an underwater treadmill; 5 squash courts with ASB system design (ASB system provides perfectly plumb and seamless walls where the ball plays, true, unique floors that provide spring, and ultra-dense sand-filled walls that lend a solid, quiet feel); 8,000 sq. ft. multi-sport, children's gym with a nursery to accommodate infants and toddlers; in-house clinical services; a restaurant that services members as well as catering for the conference rooms; pro-shop; men's, women's, and family locker rooms; whirlpools, steam rooms, and saunas are featured in both the men's and women's locker rooms.



WELLBRIDGE CLAYTON CLAYTON, MISSOURI. This project was an adaptive reuse and remodel of an existing building. The building was positioned at the center of a local shopping mall. One of the unique challenges was the placement of the indoor lap and therapy pools in the below-ground level of the facility, shown in the photo above. When dividers are used in the pool, they separate the lap portion from the warm-water therapy side. Other amenities within this club include a day spa (reception area shown in photo below), physical therapy, conference room, child care, deli, and a retail venue.

this by saying that, although we have worked on projects as small as 5,000 ft. and as large as 365,000 ft., we do not promote the use of "cookie-cutter" plans. We believe that each market, each site, and each facility program package have unique strengths which need to be exploited, as well as unique weaknesses that need to be recognized and minimized. This applies to small clubs as well as to the larger ones.

What is your biggest challenge when designing a health club?

Our biggest challenge is to properly understand all the different things that will influence and play a role in making the new club distinct or unique from the last one. Influences such as site configuration, market demographics, programming trends, user demand, access orientation, and retail exposure, when properly understood and supported, will be the key to success of the new club. This creative challenge is actually the essence of our services.

What, in your point of view, is the most important message to get across to club owners?

I think it is of prime importance for club owners to recognize that an intelligent and original design can increase their chances of business success! I have seen it happen over and over again: when you copy another design,

you copy the mistakes as well as the good points of the design. An original design, tailored for the needs of that specific club, can pay an excellent return on its cost for that club owner!

What changes would you like to see in the fitness industry?

I would like to see less self-serving conflict between the for-profit and not-for-profit sectors of the fitness industry. Both sectors have valid missions. It is frustrating to see certain industry forces working to deny the benefits of exercise to some of the population just because of a perceived competitive disadvantage. Development of the non-profit sector should not be blocked. A better strategy for the for-profit clubs would be to allow the development of the non-profit clubs, but focus on the enforcement of conditions for tax-free, non-profit status. This is how the whole industry can grow and prosper.

Why are you so willing to share your insights on club design? Aren't you worried about giving away secrets to your competition?

First of all, the club industry is a relatively young and vulnerable industry. Facility design has lagged behind other factors that influence business success like programming, marketing, management, and equipment. Poor

design (meaning dysfunctional, or too extravagant, or too cheap, or lacking in creative interest) has contributed to some spectacular failures in this industry. As a service provider specialist to this industry, I believe that we will prosper as the industry prospers. Therefore, I do what I can to raise the level of design awareness for all those who choose to participate in the risky work of club development.

Secondly, there are no secrets. Good club design is not rocket science or brain surgery. It is all about embracing the unique opportunity presented by each assignment and each client, respecting their agenda and devoting a diligent and truly creative effort to enhancing the member experience in every physical detail of the facility. Designers and their clients must have the right mix of pride and humility necessary for taking the time to think through the experience they want for their members.

There are dozens of architectural firms specializing in this field of design. What is the secret of your success?

I have been fortunate enough to attract loyal and talented partners and employees whose strengths complement my weaknesses. Many of the senior designers and managers in our firm have been with us for 10 to 20 years. Another thing is that we have formed strong relationships of trust with our clients. They tell us that we are different from other architects they have used in the past. Our designer-client relationships are enjoyable and rewarding for both parties. In addition to this, much of our work is repeat work from a diverse range of clients. The 300 facilities designed to date have been the result of more than 100 different clients. We really love doing this work and it shows!

And then, last but not least, our geographic diversity and willingness to travel have broadened our horizon to reach clients in all corners of the world!

Thank you so much, Hervey, for the privilege of such an enlightening interview! It is a delight to now know the Company behind the name! 