



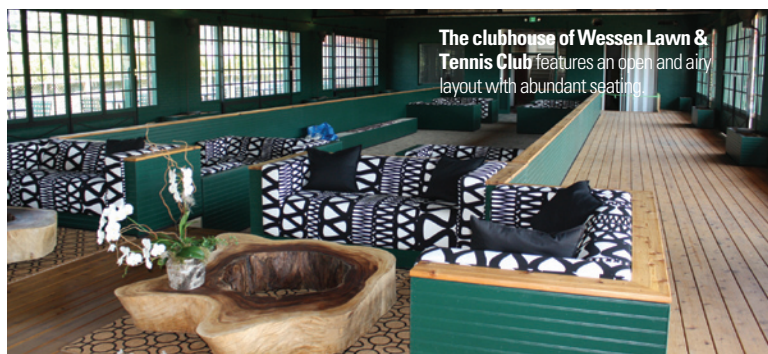
Wessen Lawn & Tennis Club Owner & Founder Bill Massie with his convertible Mercedes that serves as the marquee for his new tennis complex in Pontiac, MI.



One of Wessen Lawn & Tennis Club's 24 natural grass courts with the clubhouse in the background. The original building was constructed in 1919 and served as the Pontiac waterworks.



Just like at Wessen's inspiration, Wimbledon, players must wear all white.



The clubhouse of Wessen Lawn & Tennis Club features an open and airy layout with abundant seating.



Wessen Lawn & Tennis Club uses a Jacobsen SLF-1880 large-area reel mower to maintain its 24 natural-grass courts.

ARCHITECT BUILDS *NATURAL* GRASS TENNIS COMPLEX

Editor's note: This article was written by Jacobsen's public relations staff

What started as an afternoon musing during a tennis tournament turned into an obsession for Bill Massie.

"In 2008, while watching my 13-year-old son play in a tennis tournament at the beautiful Longwood Cricket Club outside of Boston, I thought to myself, 'I'm going to go back and build something like this in Pontiac,'" recalls Massie, an architect by trade.

The first thing Massie did upon his return was build a perennial rye test court. Other than mowing fairways on a

golf course for one summer during his youth, Massie had no experience or training in growing grass.

"I leaned heavily on Joe Vargas, professor of turfgrass science at Michigan State University," said Massie. "We threw the traditional golf-centric, sand-based agronomics out the window because this is literally a whole different ball game. A sand-based grass surface would never hold up to the rigors of tennis."

After mastering his ryegrass skills, Massie decided to take it to the next level. He purchased an abandoned recreation center and 50 acres of surrounding property in Pontiac, MI just outside of Detroit.

"It was an ideal site for what I wanted to do. There was an existing pool and clubhouse that we renovated extensively," said Massie.

With his architecture background and experience, Massie was able to prepare the site for tennis courts himself, doing much of the laser leveling and drainage work.

"I built a 14 x 80-foot trench that's about 10 feet deep and filled it with crushed concrete from the old building foundations. When it rains, the water runs off these courts almost immediately," said Massie. "I put a slight grade on the whole thing but it's a perfect plane so you would never notice. From one side of the property to the other, the turf actually drops a total of 18 inches."

The attention-to-detail can be seen all over the property. From the etched metal water fountain to the vintage tennis ball cans inlaid into the clubhouse bar, every inch of Wessen Tennis club has been meticulously and thoughtfully planned.

But as Massie will tell you, not all the Wessen plans went smoothly.

"It was the second week of September last year and we were sitting on \$6,000 worth of grass seed," says Massie. "Conditions were ideal and there was just a small rain shower in the forecast for that evening. We put all the seed down and almost on cue, it rained. And it never stopped. It rained an inch and a quarter in one hour and washed every last bit of seed into the river."

Heartbroken but not defeated, Massie knew the window was closing on the chances for a 2014 opening. He had new seed shipped from Oregon in just 3 days and had full turf growing by October.

"We dodged one bullet but got hit with another as the worst winter in decades followed," said Massie. "I thought we'd be able to do more to prepare for the cold but it came so quickly we couldn't do much of anything. We had record snowfall and record cold but as you can see, the ryegrass survived quite nicely."

"People tried to convince me to try other grass varieties but I knew ryegrass was the right choice, especially with the wear patterns and toughness," said Massie. "You

We put all the seed down and almost on cue, it rained. And it never stopped. **It rained an inch and a quarter in one hour** and washed every last bit of seed into the river."

could use bentgrass, but it would get very stressed from the wear. Also, ryegrass has no thatch, so you really get a good ball bounce. And it's no secret that these courts are really modeled after Wimbledon, which is also ryegrass."

To maintain the ryegrass on the 24 courts, Massie and his crew use a Jacobsen SLF-1880 large-area reel mower. They keep the grass at a height-of-cut of .375 inch, which would be considered fairway tournament height for a golf course.

"I love to get out there and mow, but there's a lot of pressure to finish the clubhouse and the pool, so I've been very busy with that," says Massie. "But I do look for-

ward to getting back to working on the turf side of things, that's fun for me."

Massie already has 105 members with a goal of 150 founding members by the end of summer. Like Wimbledon, players must wear all white on the courts.

Massie's plans for the future include bringing an ATP-level tournament to Wessen and have junior and pro players train for grass tournaments like Wimbledon.

"When people come out here and play, it's something completely new for them," said Massie. "And that was the vision all along of Wessen Lawn & Tennis Club: to give people a truly unique tennis experience on natural grass." ■



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