Aspiring architects learn the ropes at Harvard

BY PETER BLAIS

"Everyone knows the Korean War was won by the infantry, except for Old Bob over there," said golf course architect Geoffrey Cornish, nodding across the room toward his co-lecturer, fellow architect Robert M. Graves. "Being an old Navy pilot, he still mistakenly believes the Navy won the war." A little later, Cornish was making an architectural point while trying to find the light switch so Graves could turn on a slide projector. "That's right, Geoff," sighed Graves after Cornish sought professional support while still fumbling for the switch. "Now just shut up and turn off the lights." No offense was intended and none taken during either good-natured exchange, or many similar ones that occurred during this year's two-day golf course design seminar at Harvard University. The two past presidents of the American Society of Golf Course Architects have become fast friends while carrying on similar seminars across the country for the past 10 years. The session at Harvard is the sixth since 1985 and has grown many in attendance, like Brent Schulz of EDAW, Inc., a landscape architectural and urban planning firm in Washington, D.C. Schulz has worked on golf course/residential projects in Hawaii and Virginia. "We're starting to get a lot more demand from our clients who want to mix a course into their residential design," explained Schulz of his presence on the Cambridge, Mass., campus. "They want us to do as much work as we can in-house and get more involved in the routing of courses."

But the class was not limited to landscape architects. Stanton Abrams, president of Senior Tour Players, Inc., which represents such well-known senior players as Sam Snead, attended the session along with Snead's son, Samuel Jr. Sam Sr. is among the growing list of senior players trying their hands at course design. "Dad wants to get back to the classic designs, along the Donald Ross mold," said Sam Jr. "I want to hear what Geoff and Bob have to say because I'm going to be working with my father." Clubhouse architect Bob Bacon, president of Stadio Inc. in Phoenix, Ariz., said he would be putting his newfound knowledge to work immediately. "I'm flying to Hawaii Friday to meet with the developer, planner and Jack Nicklaus on a new course we're doing on the South Kona Coast of the Big Island. The golf course and resort must be in balance if a golf resort is going to work. You need to know the architect's objectives and constraints and he needs to know mine."

"We have the original plans, but it will be nice to know what goes through his head when he designs a course," said Berard. Graves said he is pleased at the cross-section of professionals and their varying interests in the field. As for those aspiring to careers in golf course architecture, "I just want them to appreciate how difficult it is to do a good job," he said. "Anyone can route a course in 15 minutes. But it's a good job. There's so much to it from start to finish. People come up to us after two days and say they never knew how much work there was in laying out a course."

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