It's time to return to old design/build technique

By LISA MAKI

Before the 20th century, few men practiced golf course architecture. St. Andrews, Prestwick, and Carnoustie are relics of the natural links. Mother Nature was their creator, with little assistance from a designer or a builder.

Astounding growth in the game, diminishing ideal terrain, and major technological advances led to the first generation of "golf course architects," practitioners trained in disciplines associated with golf course design, beyond just playing the game. It was a time when brilliant men "designed and built" renowned tributes to golf on both seaside and parkland sites. Golf flourished.

Then came a time when opportunistic developers and lenders appeared. They preyed upon the game's dramatic settings to attract resort guests and real-estate buyers. Funds were readily dispensed, and monuments were built.

Architects began to realize they were compromising their futures by designing courses with vast waste bunkers, radical hazards, geometric features, forced carries and treacherous greens.

Many architects returned to their roots, to design more traditional courses. This resurgence has caused many golf course architects to distance themselves from developers, and to return to the design/build technique.

Robert Trent Jones, dean of modern architecture, practices as his forebears did. He believes it is necessary to control not only the design, but also the building of a project. Thus, the family owns and operates "Design-Build" companies. Robert Sr. once made the following statement in reference to his Design-Build company, "You have to do that [design and build] or you don't come up with what you are after."

His son Rees concurred, stating that "the hardest part [in designing a golf course] is transferring the idea from the architect to the builder and having it come to the satisfaction of everyone."

Pete Dye is another practitioner of the "Design-Build" approach. He refers to himself as a job foreman, overseeing both design and construction. He is a creator of golf courses, cut straight from the hip, boots-in-the-muck mold, often rerouting courses in the field. Dye believes he "develops the best possible course, faster, for less money using the Design-Build approach."

As Rees Jones and Dye affirmed, no matter how talented a golf course architect is, it is impossible to create a flawless three-dimensional design when working in a two-dimensional medium of pen and paper, or even digitalizer and monitor. Inevitably, alterations to the design must be made on site in response to actual conditions. A Design-Build company can implement these changes quickly and economically, virtually eliminating the dreaded Change Order, as this approach allows for flexibility within a fixed budget.

What other benefits are there for the Design-Build client?

• There is single contract for a fixed price.
• Solid budgets enable job costs to be determined from start to finish.
• There is efficiency in dealing with one firm (no overlap of budgets or schedules and changes can be implemented faster).
• Clients' needs are transmitted to one person responsible for the project.

The Design-Build legacy has been preserved by a number of the esteemed architects. They are not typical golf course designers, in the fixed role of professionals who produce designs and supervise their execution. Instead, they own and operate businesses that provide both design and construction services. Developers should consider a historic approach to designing and building courses, as a novel solution to providing an open, on-budget, quality product.

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