The future is here,' says Weiskopf of course design

By Mark Leslie

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. — Wrapping up his co-design work with ex-partner Jay Morrish, Tom Weiskopf has formed his own golf course architecture company here and declared the world is his stage.

"This is my future. This is where I want to be and what I like to do," he said of Tom Weiskopf Signature Designs. "Playing golf still remains a hobby."

Weiskopf has worked to put together a design team since last November when Morrish decided to slow down his design work and Weiskopf opted to increase his own load. He has two associates who will do working drawings and help in the field and with the routings, he said. "It's taken me some time. The choice is one of blending personalities and philosophies and expertise."

The response has been "unbelievable," he said. "I'm overwhelmed. It has given me so much confidence." Saying he already has seven course designs under contract, Weiskopf attributed the success in part to "the package I've put together in regard to promotional agreements, during construction and ongoing regard to management, by associates outside the company..."

"We're trying to keep this under one roof: marketing and feasibility studies, management and design. More than half our clients have needed a total turnkey package."

Under contract are:

- Vestosa in Tucson — a four-course project, with two public and two private tracks, that will be built out over the next five years, beginning this fall when ground will be broken on one of the public courses.
- Another course at The Dunes at Seabrook, N.J., which is under negotiation with the city of Scottsdale.
- A new private facility at PGA West, construction of which will start in late fall.

- A private, residential community in Lake-of-the-Ozarks, Mo., which will be started this fall.

Faced with this bulk of work, Weiskopf said he will continue to set Four Play aside, where it basically has remained since 1983. "This golf course design business with Jay was a full-time job," he said. "It's seven more full-time now. I will play, but very sparingly. I will never let it interfere with my responsibility to my clients. I'm not just putting my name on these projects. I will continue to respect my clients and their needs in time, not just in using my name."

"It is attention to detail that gave Jay and me our respect in the industry. I'm going to take it to another level."

He said he is interested in projects the world over — "if I have the time and they are the right people in the right market and with good land." He is involved in talks concerning courses in Australia, which he said, "is busting out," and others in South America. • • •

A key player on the Weiskopf team is former Pebble Beach assistant superintendent Dave Porter, who holds degrees in agronomy and aeronautical engineering and has helped build golf courses, including Loch Lomond in Scotland.

Q&A: Morrish on design, superintendents...

Continued from page 31

bouce the ball onto the right half of this green right here. He would close it off. We will allow you to bounce the ball to a portion of it. But we still have a nice, tucked-away pin position where you're going to have to work the ball...

GCN: To make it tougher for the pros.

JM: Sure.

GCN: Weiskopf and Nicklaus can help design for pros. But what about the influence on designing a golf course for the average player?

JM: I rely on my own instincts because I'm a mortal. I've always felt Nicklaus really doesn't understand how bad people are. To him, a bad player is a two-handicap. If you're a 15-handicap, you're hopeless. There's no sense of you even being out there.

He's never said that. That's just a sense I've gotten. I've always been the one to make certain we give poor players the easy angle on the tee shots, that we get them up close and let them bounce the ball.

GCN: You've designed courses in the desert, in the mountains, links. What is your favorite kind?

JM: Somebody asked Johnny Mercer, 'What's your favorite song you've written?' He said, 'The next one.' That's the way I feel.

I think an architect shouldn't critique his own work until the course is 4 or 5 years old. I'd say the best I've worked on of that generation are Forest Highlands [in Flagstaff, Ariz.], Troom and Troon North [in Scottsdale, Ariz.]. I think all three of those together.

I think Double Eagle [in Galena, Ohio] will prove better than those. And one we will never equal again is Loch Lomond [in Scotland].

GCN: How much does ease of maintenance affect your design?

JM: We're not creating a paradise for a superintendent. We're creating a golf course. And our courses are much easier to maintain than some I've seen. We do try to make it easier around the green, but once in awhile you have to build in a bunker that [you grounds crew] are really going to have to take care of.

GCN: Do you find a conflict between the demands of a superintendent wanting a course that's easier to maintain, and your own desires to make a course that's fun and difficult to play?

JM: My philosophy is, there are 100-and-some odd architects in our society, somebody's going to do it the way you [developer] want it done. If you like what I do, hire me. If you don't hire whoever you want. It's going to make bunkers in a way you think is unfair, hire somebody else.

GCN: More superintendents are coming on the job during course construction. How much influence does he have on design for maintenance ease?

JM: We discuss everything with the superintendent. But I'm not going to let him go out there helter-skelter and change our design. Certainly we want to be cooperative with them. We don't ever want to get the image we have created a monster to maintain.

For instance, [superintendent] Terry Buchen at Double Eagle said: 'Make it as hard for me as you can. It's a challenge. Do anything you want.'

GCN: Do you see bunkers? Do you take it to another level.

JM: [AW.] I think that a lot of American architects aren't doing) is; You'll see fingers coming out of the [developer] want it done. If you like what I do, we ask for so-and-so we usually get him. I wish I knew. I can relate to that. It's like the finger is torqued.

In maintenance, yes. Dry them out. Reduce pesticides. They may even take away some of the materials that control powdery and weeds in greens.

That doesn't bother me a bit—as long as everybody does it. I don't want to be forced to do it while the guy up the road is not. But if the whole industry does it, I think that would be great.

GCN: How about the architects taking a lead in doing that? Or is it not up to them?

JM: It really isn't. It's maintenance.

GCN: So you are putting it in the lap of the owner. Is the owner or greens committee that will tell the superintendent how they want the course?

JM: It won't work. They want green they remember a conversation I had with Byron Nelson and he said when he was learning his craft, part of the challenge was the fact that the green might put four on the Stimpmeter and the next one might put nine. You might get a horrible lie right in the middle of the fairway. You might get a great lie in the rough. You had to be very innovative. It was part of golf. He said now if they ever get any kind of a bad lie, they just scream about it. He said that is wrong. And I agree with him 100 percent.

I think golf courses are maintained too well. I'm just as guilty as anybody else. I want my course to be better maintained than somebody else's down the road.