

Dasher leaves Hills, goes solo

By MARK LESLIE

WINTER PARK, Fla. — His background encompasses 16 years and more than 40 golf course projects as a lead designer for Arthur Hills & Associates. His territory is "any point that's a nonstop airline flight from

The 225-yard 12th hole at city of Port Orange, Fla.'s Golf Club at Cypress Head, shows the elegant shapes designed by Mike Dasher while with Arthur Hills.

Orlando." His philosophy is to build a golf course "that works with the land."

Mike Dasher is on his own now, and defining points for Dasher Golf Design are crucial.

Starting his own design firm, Dasher said, has "always been on my mind. It was never a question of 'if' but 'when.'"

"I didn't get analytical. It just seemed like a good time. Art and I separated on a very amicable basis. He has some good young guys on staff and I think they will be able to pick up the slack."

Dasher has been Hills' lead designer in the Southeast for years, getting "a lot of exposure to a lot of great work," he said.

He will continue involvement in certain Hills & Associates projects that are under way. Besides those, he has signed to do his first solo

design — a course that will be announced soon in the Orlando area.

Averaging 2-1/2 courses a year during his time with Hills, Dasher intends to design two a year on his own, saying: "I'd like to stay a one-man show."

In his designs, Dasher said, "my goal is to create a routing that works with the topography... And I have always felt strongly about routing to create a course that's walkable."

Speed of play is also important in his designs, Dasher said. That is one reason he places tees close to greens and designs those greens on the small side. Small greens speed up play and "make more interesting targets," he said.

He invests major interest in bunker style. "We've been doing the same basic bunkers — low-lying, flat-floor sand bunkers," he said. "I like those because of the feedback from clients, how well they hold up and are easy to maintain."

"Certain sites might call out for a more Mackenzie-style — abrupt, jagged Cypress Point-type bunkering. But on most sites the flat-floor features are more appealing and do a better job staying put."

He takes a cue from Donald Ross, who wrote that golfers shouldn't complain about bunker locations because "it is every golfer's duty to avoid them."

"I like, somewhere on the golf course, to throw in quirky things that make you wonder about them," Dasher said. "Like 'Why is that bunker there?'"

Among his favorite designs, Dasher said, are the municipal Cypress Head in Port Orange and Seville Golf Club in Brooksville.

"I spent a lot of time on Cypress Head," he said. "It gave the city something that works for them. It's got large greens because of a lot of play, but most greens are segmented into smaller targets. If you get on the wrong side of those greens you're not done yet. They can maintain it to high standards and yet it's very challenging."



Mike Dasher



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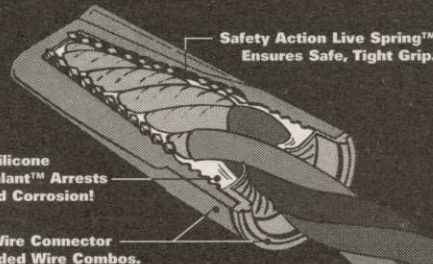
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