After the ‘new’ wears off

BY BOB SPIWAK

COEUR d’ALENE, Idaho — While routine golf course maintenance like mowing and turf protection provide the steak for the golfer, on-and-off-course beautification adds the sizzle. And more and more courses, old and new, are adding colorful flowers and plants with pizzazz to set themselves apart, or gain a reputation.

“Augusta National is known for its azaleas,” said Coeur d’Alene Golf Course Superintendent John Anderson, “and we want the thousands of juniper tams and geraniums we plant every year to be identified with Coeur d’Alene in the same way.”

“We use a lot of color, both annuals and perennials, and this is one of the things people enjoy most about Pebble Beach,” said Ted Horton, vice president of resource management for the Pebble Beach Co. “We want this place to catch peoples’ eyes,” said Gerry White, the superintendent at Point Sebago Resort in Maine, “and the way we do it is by being creative” — which means the use of native rocks and plantings to accent the course.

Beauty isn't always the single, overriding reason for renovations at a golf course. Over the years, a property can begin to show its age. Plants die. High-traffic areas turn from turf to mud. Original ideas of course design may, in use, turn out to be liabilities. In these, and many more instances, renovation is necessary.

“Many golf courses need help in renovating key landscape and

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Solving poa annua problems from El Niño

BY PATRICK O'BRIEN

The abundant rains and warmer temperatures this winter from El Niño have caused a prolific growth of poa annua at many golf courses in the Southeast. Superintendents fear this weed grass the most, especially if it appears in putting greens. In most instances, cultural and chemical control is reliable and cost-effective on tees, fairways and roughs.

Unfortunately, battling poa annua on bentgrass putting greens is a complex topic.

Weed Southeastern scientists. Drs. Fred Yelverton at North Carolina State University and B.J. Johnson at the University of Georgia-Griffin Station, are trying to help superintendents control poa annua on putting greens with a cost-effective and reliable program. Both agree that using growth regulators is the preferred strategy on bentgrass greens.

“The Turf Enhancer (paclobutrazol) product has provided the best control and suppression of poa annua from our work at NCSU the past five years,” said Yelverton. Both researchers agree on the application rates and timing for the Turf Enhancer program on bentgrass greens. They suggest fall and spring treatments at the rates of 1/4 pound

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USGA’s Green Section splits West Region

SANTA ANA, Calif. — The U.S. Golf Association Green Section’s West Region has been split. The new Northwest Region encompasses Alaska, Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Wyoming and Hawaii. The Southwest Region consists of California, Arizona, Nevada, Utah and Colorado, and is headquartered at 505 North Tustin Ave., Suite 121, Santa Ana, Calif. 714-542-5766. Pat Gross, an agronomist for the Western Region since 1992, has been promoted to director of the Southwest Region, working with agronomist Mike Huck. Larry Gilhuly, previously director of the Western Region, in director of the Northwest Region at 5610 Old Stump Dr. N.W., Gig Harbor, Wash. 98332, tel. 253-858-2266.

Hoffman turns a passion into reality

BY MARK LESLIE

BRAINERD, Minn. — Scott Hoffmann was able to turn a hobby, passion and dream into not just a reality, but a national award-winning golf course. When Golf Digest picked The Classic at Madden’s Resort as the third-best New Upscale Public Golf Course in North America last December, it was a feather of huge proportion in Hoffmann’s cap. Not because he is the superintendent of Madden’s four golf courses — which he is — but because he designed The Classic.

There was his name, beside such golf course architects as Tom Fazio, Pete Dye and Robert Trent Jones Jr., Yet, Hoffman shares the acclaim with others. Though he routed the 18-hole layout and designed the elements of every hole, he credits advisers including architect Geoffrey Cornish; Minnesotan and former U.S. Amateur champion John Harris; Warren Rebolho, who had just retired as executive director of the Minnesota Golf Association; and his assistant, Pat Marstad, who is now the head superintendent at The Classic.

“We had done the initial clearing through the woods.

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When ‘new’ wears off

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hardscape areas that have overgrown, or simply worn out,” said Mark Sosnowitz, owner of Mark Eliot Design, Inc. in Greenwich, Conn., who specializes in renovation design, budgeting, construction management and supervision.

Working with superintendents, managers and/or greens chairmen, Sosnowitz walks through the course with camera in hand, later presenting a proposal emphasizing rehabilitation of problem areas. He examines the site at night as well as daytime in case night lighting is necessary for safety, or merely to enhance a landscape feature, especially at the entryway to the course.

Signage is considered at the entry, bag drop, tees, interiors and even trophy boards. Sosnowitz said tee areas, even slightly elevated, can pose a safety hazard with the increasing use of plastic spikes, and he recommends installing steps. In many cases, existing steps have been badly chewed up over the years and should be replaced.

“Every situation is different,” Sosnowitz said, “along with every budget. Some clubs do the renovation all at once. Others work off a long-range plan.”

While Sosnowitz minimizes the use of annual plants so that superintendents don’t get locked into yearly planting chores, the opposite is true at the Coeur d’Alene Golf Course. Anderson said that each year 27,000 “Red Tango” geraniums are mass-planted around the clubhouse and at various places on the course “where they can be seen from three or four holes.”

Even Coeur d’Alene’s famous floating green sports a mass of brilliant red contrasting with green grass, blue water and white sand.

On the hilly portion of the course, thousands of juniper tams, interspersed with wildflowers, carpet the slopes. Anderson said tee areas, even slightly elevated, can pose a safety hazard with the increasing use of plastic spikes, and he recommends installing steps. In many cases, existing steps have been badly chewed up over the years and should be replaced.

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Hoffman wins accolades in design

To his credit, Hoffman put his knowledge of agronomy, golf and the land itself to best use. The 1975 graduate of Michigan State’s two-year turfgrass school made certain all the greens receive morning sun, there was surface drainage everywhere, the right root-zone mix and varieties of grass were used on the greens, and the best irrigation system was installed.

"The one thing I had hoped would happen," Hoffman said, "was this experience might open a door for some other superintendents to do design projects. Not that a superintendent is qualified automatically to design a golf course, but he has a lot of the qualifications. You need turfgrass knowledge as a basic."

While overseeing maintenance of Madden’s Pine Beach East, Pine Beach West and par-3 Social Nine, Hoffman also spent 15 years cross-country skiing and walking the land that became The Classic at Madden’s.

"I was intimate with the property," he said. "After 15 years, you get familiar with every little 2- or 3-foot rise — and I used it.

"We were only moved about 50,000 yards of soil. You save a lot of money and it looks so much more natural — because it is." A golfer, Hoffman has long studied course design, absorbing books on the topic, making it "a hobby and passion."

"I had been dreaming about this golf course for at least 10 years," he said. Long considered the No. 1 golf resort in Minnesota, Madden’s saw Grand View Lodge Golf & Tennis in Nisswa build The Pines and Rutgerts Bay Lake Lodge in Deerwood build The Lakes. All of a sudden, Madden’s was pushed out of its elite position, Hoffman said, "so Brian [Thuringer] and I had a great desire to bring Madden’s back to the forefront."

The Classic has done that. "The one missing link the owners felt they needed, and guests wanted, was a true championship-length course," Hoffman said. "That’s what The Classic brings us. It gives the golfers an opportunity to see what Tour players experience on a weekly basis. It’s more challenging than the typical resort course."

Playing many of the country’s great resort courses was a major influence on Hoffman’s own design, he said. "A highlight was playing with Pete Dye at La Romona Country Club next to Teeth of the Dog [in the Dominican Republic]. Pete probably got sick of me because I was asking a lot of questions."

What did he learn? "Use your ability to create and be imaginative and to let your mind go," he answered. "Pete is such an artist and so creative. Because we have long-standing traditions doesn’t mean you can’t try something new and different."

Asked which architects have most influenced his thought, he said: "As far as style of look, Tom Fazio. As far as strategic design, Alistar Mackenzie or George Thomas."

With Robert Trent Jones Jr. designing 45 holes and Arnold Palmer another 18 in the vicinity, Madden’s Thuringer has spoken about building another course, this one links-style, in the future, Hoffman said. And he would welcome the opportunity to design it.

Beyond work at Madden’s, he said: "The owners have told me they wouldn’t mind me doing a [design] project one, at a time... I don’t want to make a career out of it, but I wouldn’t mind doing a project here and there if the opportunity arose."

"I feel fortunate just to be able to do this once in my lifetime," Hoffman added. "When I look back at the experience and compare it with being a superintendent, I think being a superintendent is every bit as challenging, if not more so. And the guys out doing it deserve a lot of credit. I’ve had the opportunity to be the general contractor, the architect and the superintendent, and being a superintendent is the toughest job of all three."

When ‘new’ wears off

When players hit your course, it’s only natural that they expect the greens to be, well, green. If they’re not, it could be time to treat with Sprint® 330, the iron chelate micronutrient from Becker-Underwood. Sprint’s strong chelates protect iron availability in soils with pH levels up to 7.5 for beautiful, long-lasting green turf. It also brings out the color in flowers, ornamentals and shrubs. For easy measuring and mixing, Sprint is available in a highly soluble, concentrated powder that offers excellent tank mix flexibility with NPK and plant growth regulators.

Sprint: it’s a different kind of colorant from the color experts at Becker-Underwood.