



Everything You've Always Wanted Your Shop To Be

Several years ago, Bill Eschenbrenner had an opportunity not many golf professionals get — he had a chance to build his own dream shop.

When the decision was made at El Paso Country Club in Texas to move the pro shop into a free-standing unit connected to the club, Eschenbrenner sat down and decided what the most important factors were. The solution he came up with provides service to the members, allows him complete control of traffic and offers flexibility for merchandising in the shop.

Previously, the shop had been in an older part of the club. Storage was relegated to a shack completely separated from the shop, and this limited the service that could be offered quickly to the players. In addition, no one in the shop could see any of the golfers who went onto the course. Even though there was a mandatory reservation system in effect, Eschenbrenner estimates that he missed about 30 percent of the players who would go right onto the course. Also, fixturing in the shop was in permanent positions and display facilities were limited.

"When I started to think this through," Eschenbrenner told GOLFDOM, "I really didn't know where to turn. But I found a design consultant at the PGA Merchandising Show that helped me a lot."

Bill Eschenbrenner of El Paso Country Club in his pro shop.

Club officials at El Paso Country Club in Texas decided it was time to build a new pro shop, and Bill Eschenbrenner took the opportunity to design in what was important to him. The result — his own dream shop.

Using suggestions from the consultant as a base, he began working out the design. One of the unique features of the shop is that it is elevated, and from his office, Eschenbrenner can see the entire putting surface on the ninth, 10th, and 18th greens, as well as have clear vision of the first and 10th tees. Further, it is possible to stand anywhere in the shop or at its counter and see the practice putting green.

This is important for several reasons. "We wanted control of the play," he said. "And the layout was designed accordingly. No more onesomes cutting in front of a foursome." Another factor is that Eschenbrenner can work from his office and see the entire shop, or one man can run the shop between 6 p.m. and 9 p.m. with full vision of play.

The complete setup, including the sales area, the office, bag storage and caddy room was built in an arc form. The sales area takes about 1,600 square feet, about double the

size the old pro shop, and about one-quarter of the entire area. The back storage holds 420 standing bags, and is right behind the office, with the club repair room next to it. The air-conditioned caddy room has locker and toilets within the room. Underneath the entire pro shop is floor space for about 60 electric golf carts.

It is within the shop's sales area that he feels he has been most successful with his design. "I guess the key word to the entire operation is mobility," he said. "I can change anything in this shop at any time within a day's time. In most shops there are two or three fixtures at least that are permanent. Other than the walls, floor and ceiling, we have nothing that's permanent. This means I can move the counter to give the shop a new look at any time. And I can redirect the flow of traffic any way we need."

In terms of fixturing, all units are on rollers, including the counter. The unique counter design is composed of three portable pieces which fit together into an octagonal shape with one part missing to allow entry into the behind-the-counter area formed by the contour. The entire unit measures 7½ by nine feet. Each of the counter octagonal sections is 20 inches in depth and 44 inches in width on the outside, tapering to 28 inches on the inside. These units alternate with counters that are 19 inches inside with a 19-inch width outside.

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The counter's glass top display has an overhang which has an important function. This allows the players to come up to the counter and have a place for their shoes without hitting the bottom of the counter. Maintenance is enhanced because scratching and other damage is avoided at the foot of the unit.

He has opted for a glass top on the entire unit, except at the register, as he plans to keep all the merchandise off the counter. Instead, he places on the top registrant's list, posting sheets, telephone, pencils, etc. In this way, he feels the players will have to look down into the case while they are signing in, and will be

more aware of merchandise than if it were on the counter, out of their line of vision.

The counter is the kingpin in terms of merchandising as far as he is concerned. "One of the things that I wanted to be certain to avoid," he said, "is to let people get in the habit of feeling the merchandise is in the same place all the time. If they get that feeling, all they do is go directly for what they want, and they never stop and look at anything else. If we keep moving everything around, they will have to look at all the merchandise. That way, they will think of two items — what they want, and what they see."

Eschenbrenner has utilized a flagstone, wall-and-glass combination. Standards are screwed into the stone and concrete wall using mollies that spread out, and hold inside the wall. The wall shelves can be changed according to need, size and height of merchandise, and rods can even be used in place of the shelves in case for hanging merchandise. Other units are also flexible. The slacks are on rollers, and the shoe racks are on cannisters and can be pulled as needed. The wall space separating the office from the sales area has been utilized to line up sample golf bags.

In terms of electrical fixturing, he has tried for flexibility as well. For example, there are three floor outlets as well as wall ones which have been spotted throughout the sales area. The value to this is that when the counter is moved about, the telephone plug-in and the announcement mike can move with them. Track lighting is used for the lamp power, and he uses four spots for highlighting merchandise. The spots can be moved to hover over the counter or any of the racks as they are moved about. "We put spots over the hat rack," he said, "and sold three the first day. That clued me in. Now, whenever I want to push an item, we just highlight them with a spot. And they move."

Unlike many other pro shops, he does not go along with the philosophy of filling up the walls with club sets. "All you really need is one set to show the players," he said. "Clubs have a turn of two to three times a year. You have to fit the club to the man anyhow, which means that they have to be presold over a

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period of time. All you need is to remind the player with one display. Why waste the space?"

As a result of this thinking, Eschenbrenner is able to use his walls for shirts. The seven standards can hang five shelves, and he has even gotten into the dress shirt and tie lines. The flexibility of "mobile space" — as he calls it — has worked to his benefit in allowing other merchandise to be added. "Before we showed 50 pairs of slacks," he said. "Now we have 350 out on the racks. But even more important, we can now carry the in-between sizes like 35 and 37. Also, we have the fitting room right here. No more having to go to the locker room. We can fit every customer, and fit them right here and help them out. Frankly, I don't know how we got along without a fitting room."

Another facet of the shop is that it has allowed variety and depth in all items — "... like crazy hats that are strictly impulse and fads," he said — and to emphasize styling. The shop has also been able to move more and more into a true haberdashery look. "Dress shirts are a good example," he said. "Also shoes. We now have three styles of dress shoes. Everyone expects you to carry a golf shoe line. But they are surprised when they see a dress shoe. Immediately, they ask you what else you have. And then you can move right into dress slacks and dress shirts. It's a whole new world."

There is one point that he likes to emphasize. "We try to keep the clothing floor displays at a minimum," he said. "The more floor space you have, the more people you can get in. That's why we use as much wall space as possible. We put up 26 shirts on one line alone, and 28 different kinds of hats and sizes on another shelf."

How does he work the traffic flow?

There are several points he makes. First, portable fixtures are used to direct the traffic. For example, the counter can be moved to one side during the tournaments. Golf club display as well as the racks can be lined up so that people have to move either in circular fashion,

linear, or rectangularly. "We can set the pattern as we want for any kind of event," he said. The next point he makes is that portable fixtures can be patterned so that he avoids a straight pass-through traffic flow. "The one thing we found that is death to sales is setting up the pattern so that they go straight through the shop, and right onto the green. We've worked it out so that we always have triangular traffic. From the parking lot and club house entrance into club storage or vice-versa. But you must pass through the merchandise somewhere along the line."

Eschenbrenner explains what might seem like an inconsistency in

what he says and what he does. The maxim is to avoid floor displays, and develop wall space as much as possible. Then why have a clothing bar on the floor? "Easy enough," he said. "This is a wall as far as we are concerned. It is utilized to direct the traffic flow. Or else we place it right next to the window when we want central space. However, even though I push the idea of as much floor space as possible for people, I don't want one big empty space. That would just let everyone go helter-skelter. That is why we put up the golf club and the pants racks. We minimize the floor display and maximize the floor traffic. But that doesn't mean we lose control of it."

Satisfied? "Why not?" Eschenbrenner said. "Wouldn't you if you were building your dream shop? And finding it turn out right." □

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