Welcome to DESIGNER’S FORUM. I trust that your visit into the world of the Golf Course Designer will be both entertaining and informative. Since this is a trade journal, the emphasis will be on the informative. The subjects discussed will always be topical, tend to be technical, and undoubtedly at times, be controversial.

In the material that I submit I will be personally candid within the bounds of professional restraint. Additionally, Ron Morris, Managing Editor of GOLF BUSINESS, has consented to publish the rebutting point of view on those sensitive issues. In fact the entire spirit of this feature is to examine all issues related to the golf industry, both pleasant and disturbing, with the ultimate goal of improving and ensuring the longevity of golf. To reinforce the idea that this column, complete with disclaimers, is one of printed dialogue about subjects that may be ignored by the popular golf magazines, I have suggested that the feature name include the word forum.

As you know, the forum was the public square of the ancient Roman cities where political and social issues were openly discussed. Your readership and written thoughts will always be welcome in the FORUM.

With that preface, I’ll fire the opening round by giving my view of the current state of the golf course design profession.

The profession of, and the market for, golf course design is constantly changing in response to new technology, environmental, wage and zoning laws, and available money. A decade ago when the majority of golf course clients were resort and housing developers, there existed a mentality that resulted in what I call the Hollywood Era. The then prevalent attitude was to build something more colossal then the next guy and “don’t worry about cost, the homeowners or guests will pay for it.” The Hollywood Era produced golf courses with lots of tinsel and glitter with little thought given to cost, long term maintenance, or future golfing markets.

Then, in 1973, the Arab Oil Embargo shocked America with talk of gas rationing, fertilizer shortage, and scarcity of any synthetic product. The cost of building a golf course soared as a result of threatened shortages of fuel and building materials, accelerating wage increases, and climbing interest rates. All of this was confounded by the philosophy of design set in the Hollywood Era. Predictably, the number of new golf course starts fell sharply, for now the cost of construction was beyond the means of most individuals, developers, and corporations.

These events produced a time of austerity that was only slightly buoyed by increased activity of governmental agencies and the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation (BOR) funding programs. The golf course designer was forced to adapt to a less exotic market. Now, more than ever before, most of his clients are governmental agencies who expect financial responsibility and carefully engineered plans and specifications. The modern Golf Course Architect must efficiently utilize technical principals founded in fact not fancy. No longer does the Golf Pro or Superintendent, no matter what his ability or expertise, possess the knowledge and skills to efficiently build a golf course with limited time, tight budgets and extreme accountability. The Golf Course Architect has evolved into a blend of technician and artist concerned with both aesthetics and long term maintenance. In recent years, the American Society of Golf Course Architects (ASGCA) has initiated a program of formal seminars on design-related subjects to insure members continue to offer the most professional services in the industry.

No longer is the professional Golf Course Architect simply an earth sculptor attempting to build something more grand than anyone else (although a few are still of this persuasion, they are in the minority). The competent architect is sensitive to budget limitations, the projected golfing patron, and long term costs of labor, interest and money.

The competent Golf Course Architect is well versed in such subjects as aerial photography and mapping, surface and subsurface drainage, golf course irrigation, the theory and physics of interior greens construction, latest turfgrass cultivars, earthmoving equipment and its’ limitations, pond and lake construction, the game of golf as played by all classes of golfers, and has a strong working knowledge of golf maintenance and agronomy. Further, members of the ASGCA are guided by a set of ethics that are above reproach, and a deep concern for the history and future of golf.

The modern professional designers are men who have devoted their life work to studying, contributing to, and innovating golf course design. They do not practice golf architecture as an avocation or just one of many services offered, but rather they are committed to a full time pursuit of excellence in design and constructions. As in the past the future of golf course design will be a response to existing economic, social, and physical influences. The professional Golf Course Architect will adapt his design philosophy to accommodate the restrictions and requirements placed on him.

Since the beginning of civilized bartering, the axiom has been “Buyer Beware” and, if anything, this truism becomes more valid with increased civilization. Choosing a Golf Course Architect must be done with the same serious thought that you would use to choose a surgeon. Interview several and scrutinize them for present skills and knowledge and not just for performances done in a different climate of money, machinery and people.

The opinions expressed in Designer’s forum are those of the author and not necessarily of GOLF BUSINESS. We welcome opposing viewpoints and will print them, reserving the right to edit material to our standards.