Partition plantings
The ‘walls’ of the course

A golf course without partition plantings would be much like a house with no inner walls.

If we were to define partition plantings, we might say it consists of those plants which separate one playing area from another on the golf course. They do the same thing on the golf course that the inner walls do in our homes. They create an atmosphere of separateness or privacy as you move from one hole to another.

The total function of the partition plantings is very important if you want to consider your course not only a true test of golf, but an area of beauty.

How do they affect play?

First of all, they definitely play an important part in the safety of the game. They keep balls from flying from one playing area into another. Most of us cut our teeth on some nine or eighteen hole course where there were very few trees on the entire layout. How easy it is to remember the flying objects, in this case identified, going from one fairway onto another. I can recall that my first feeling about the game of golf was that it was a very dangerous pastime.

Often the probability of a hooked or sliced ball from a nearby tee will very much determine the density of the planting and the height of the planting in these partition plantings.

Secondly, trees in partition plants along major impact areas, both for the high handicapper and the low handicapper can really affect the difficulty of playing each hole, by opening up or tightening up the hole as might be required to improve the play of the hole.

What will the wind do?

Partitions also play an important part when it comes to the wind factor in relation to the game itself.

Some partition plantings act as funnels for wind depending on the orientation of the fairway in relation to the prevailing winds in that part of the world while others act as wind breaks.

Along those fairways which must go with the path of the prevailing winds, the partition plantings would ideally be a more open nature with more breaks in the trees, than a partition which would serve to buffer the wind and, thus, be more dense with fewer breaks.

Awareness of aesthetics

As for the aesthetics of the partition plantings, they certainly create a special relationship between the course and the golfer himself. For those golfers who are not out there trying to break par every day or for those who are not professionals, the total golf course really should be a place of recreation for the mind and soul. This is especially so for people who work and live in the city or even in condominiums or townhouses and then go out to the golf course to get their batteries recharged so to speak.

It’s the composition of these partition plantings along with the border plantings which we spoke of in the previous article that really makes or breaks a course as far as natural beauty is concerned.

The differences between the sparse golf courses in Scotland and the British Isles plus a few of them in this country, and those courses in our lush eastern and gulf states stand out like the difference between black and white. We realize that we have to put up with our winter season but if you were a member of a judging team judging golf courses for their natural beauty, it is a foregone conclusion that the course with a goodly amount of trees on it would have a better chance of gaining the higher scores from the judges.

Design of the partitions

Naturally many courses in states where there are trees to start with are hacked out of forest areas. Other courses are started on open acreage and then landscaped with trees.

Some of the courses that are constructed in a wooded area have a feeling of age to them by the time play is started while others have been seriously impaired by the lack of knowledge or vision by those who made the decisions as to which trees to discard and which of those to keep. Therefore we will have to discuss both kinds or origins in this article to help you realize the full potential of the beauty to be had through the proper design of these partition plantings.

If we started with a bald 150 acres with all the fairways and greens and tees in place, we would have to make a decision as to which way we were going to go on the long range appearance of this course. We would
Landscape designers and architects refer to certain types of plants as “accent plants”. These are used to either break a monotonous silhouette created primarily from the trees left standing that are all the same height, or on barren areas where new plants must be added. These accent plants are used to add interest to the man-made composition. A good example of an accent plant would be the tall narrow form that we refer to as either fastigate or pyramidal or columnar. Just having a group of tall trees with clean boles (trucks with no branches coming out) would look pretty much like a series of fence posts with very little interest. Therefore, to add interest we add what are known as “understory” trees. These are smaller growing trees and sometime large shrubs that have the natural ability to compete with larger trees without spoiling their general appearance and habit. Where dogwoods grow, this would be the prime example of an understory tree. If you are familiar with the Viburnum prunifolium (Blackhawk), that small tree/shrub would be the ideal example of a plant which would do well as an understory specimen.

Interest and composition can be added by selecting those trees that have a conspicuous bloom on them at certain times of the year. Here again you must know (1) what the color of the flowers would be, (2) what time of year will they be in bloom, and (3) do you use them as single specimens or do you mass them to get the best effect.

In addition to flowers, we can work interest into the partition plantings through the use of conspicuous colored bark on the trees. In this manner they can be of interest twelve months of the year. The classic example here, of course, would be the...
plants are called

It may seem strange but the knowledge beforehand of fall color of the foliage and deciduous plants is even more important than the flowers on a tree. (1) They usually last longer and, (2) they are more brilliant and spectacular because every leaf on the tree is in a state of unbelievable beauty.

Also, you must take into consideration the golfer, if he should hit a ball under or near one of these smaller growing trees. Some multitrunked species, and those which have branches to the ground constitute an unfair hazard for the player.

Minimum maintenance is desirable.

When new trees are decided upon for these partition plantings, the designer, whoever he may be, must have a vision of the minimum twenty years down the road. These trees will be here perhaps as long as the golf course remains. Therefore, maintenance of these trees should be one of the most important factors in his decisions when he makes his selections of trees.

Such items to be considered include the type of foliage in relation to damage to the turf when they drop to the ground in the fall. The larger or the flatter they are, the more danger they can be to your grass. If you can't get out there and rake them up almost on a daily basis, especially if you get caught in a wet spell, the more possible damage will occur to your fine turf.

You must know what kind of seeds or fruit these trees will set in relation to your greens, tees, fairways and the roughs. You must also know what this fruit lying on the ground would do to the game of golf since there are certain rules that the golfer must follow in relation to impediments around his ball.

Disease can be deadly.

Not enough can be said on the importance of the ability of trees that you select to withstand the onslaughts of diseases and insects. This can be the undoing of many trees as it was in the process of doing in the 70's on the East coast with the Austrian pine, (Pinus nigra). Not only golf courses, but our home grounds, our parks, our highway plantings, are suffering severely from the effects of the airborne disease Diplodia. The question here would be, do you want to plant such a tree that will die in the next generation, or do you cross them off your list and use other conifers that are able to continue their normal life span. Not only is knowledge and timely application of preventive treatments necessary, but wise tree selection is also helpful. In addition, the approach of keeping diversity of species in the partition plantings is a good one to follow. Then, even if a disease should hit specific trees, it will not be able to wipe out an entire planting, as has happened in the past.

Perhaps in summation, we might again go back to the comparison of the inner walls of your house to the partition planting on your golf course and ask you to imagine every wall in your house to be completely blank. This would mean no pictures, no draperies, no shelves, nothing.