

The fairway is the picture, the green is the focal point. Trees form the frame.

Carefully chosen trees can center views of each hole

By J.A. French and R.P. Korbobo

Many times the frame around a picture is as important as the picture itself. It is there to help center the viewer's attention on the painting or photograph. If it were not there, the viewer's attention might wander all over the wall space around that unframed picture.

On a golf course, the landscape architect works to make each hole a special entity unto itself. The entire hole is a "painting" and the green is the "focal point". Any painting, flower arrangement, well-designed garden, etc. has a focal point - so - in essence the fairway is the picture, the green is the focal point, and the trees form the frame.

Generally speaking, there are four areas or locations where we use trees to frame vistas, pictures, views, etc. on a golf course. They are (1) Up-front (meaning the area in the immediate vicinity of the tee), (2) at the Mid-fairway point (approximately half the distance to the green), (3) the immediate areas just before and to the sides of the greens, and (4) any dramatic views, either on or off the golf course. (See illustration 1).

Up-front

Under ideal conditions on both public courses and private ones, all 18 holes should be framed. This does not necessarily mean it will slow the game of golf. If done correctly, it adds nothing but improvement to the appearance of the hole.

The reason for this thinking is because the trees, if properly placed would practically never be in the way of a shot off the tee.

The trees that will frame the picture of the fairway from the tee can sometimes be placed in a planting with two trees of the same species out in front of the tee, one farther



Eighteenth green at Echo Lake Country Club in Westfield, New Jersey.

from the tee than the other. (See I,1) Or, you can do it in an asymmetrical arrangement whereby either you have a tall tree on one side and a group of smaller trees on the other (See 2A), or you can have a large, spectacular tree on one side.

When framing the view of the hole from the tee, you must be careful to use only those trees having the proper structure. The ideal type would be that of the American elm. We use this as an example even though the American elm apparently is destined to be wiped off the face of the land. However, most people know what the American elm is shaped like so we use it as the classic example of a vase-shaped, high-

arching branched tree. This would be the ideal form of a tree to be used up near the tee. Since the ball coming off the golfer's clubhead usually starts out at a low trajectory on par four and par five holes and the high arching branches of this form of tree would never interfere with a good golf shot.

On the other hand, you must be more careful with tree selection and placement on a par-three hole, especially very short par-threes, where the trajectory of the ball will rise quickly in a very short distance off the tee. Appropriate trees for this area would include such high arching branched trees as honeylocust, Chinese scholar tree,

Katsura-tree (in older age), and Kentucky coffeetree, to name a few. The type that would be absolutely inappropriate for this location would be the beech. Its beauty comes from its lower branches bending right to the ground. You can see that in a few years these branches would block the area through which the ball must travel.

Next in order of preference would be the upright rectangular trees characterized by the sugar maple, the sweetgum, the ash, and the littleleaf linden.

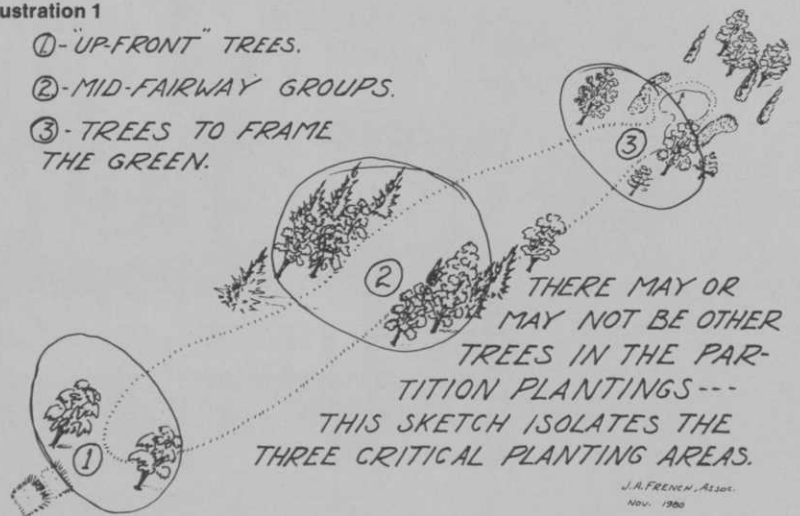
When trees are planted at a relatively small size (fifteen feet high or less) they may look out of scale and too alone. However, we dare not make the mistake of going for a quick effect by placing in closer to the tee in order to frame the view in a short period of time. This would be disastrous both from a time standpoint as well as a financial investment. You cannot afford to fool yourself when you locate trees on a golf course. You must know in advance the characteristics of a tree and its potential size in order to be positively sure that it will not interfere with a properly struck golf shot.

The next thing to take into account is the average life span of the tree that you select. A few trees have an extremely short life span such as the birches, aspens, and Lombardy poplars. Some trees, on the other hand, have extremely long life spans. These are represented by many of our hard woods as well as some of our coniferous trees (cone bearing) such as pine, hemlocks, and spruces. Some of the longer lived trees are represented by the oaks, maples, sassafras, ash, sycamores, etc., etc.

Another consideration is the fact that certain trees completely change their structural form as they grow through middle age into old age. A classic example is the Pin oak (*Quercus palustris*). You might also include the Katsura-tree (*Cercidiphyllum japonicum*). These two trees start out as cone-shaped trees for their first 20 to 35 years. Their lower branches, if you were not to prune them off, would bend right to the ground. They would almost be shaped much like the classic "Christmas Tree". However, after 30-35 years, they begin to change their growth habits. By the time they are 50 years or older, they develop a clean bowl (trunk with no branches) and a wide, spreading crown. So you can see they would ul-

Illustration 1

- ①- "UP-FRONT" TREES.
- ②- MID-FAIRWAY GROUPS.
- ③- TREES TO FRAME THE GREEN.

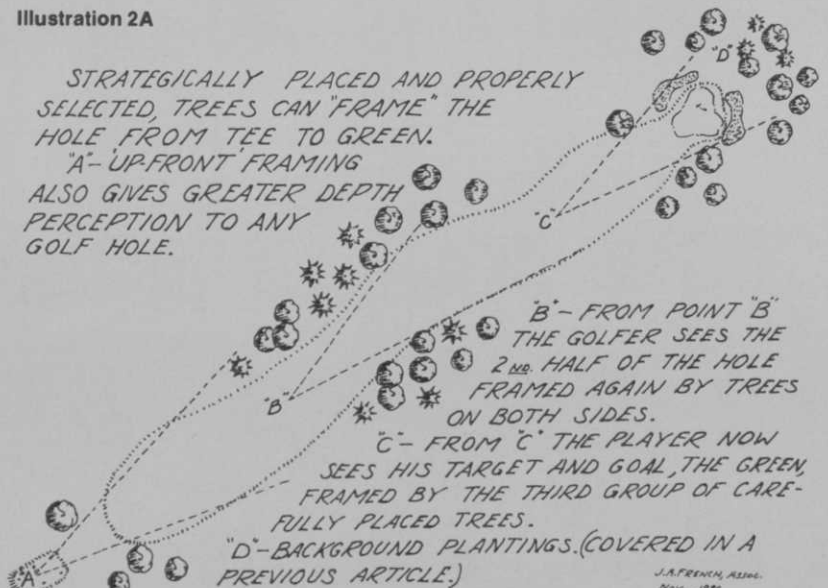


J.A. FREEMAN, Assoc.
Nov. 1980

Illustration 2A

STRATEGICALLY PLACED AND PROPERLY SELECTED TREES CAN "FRAME" THE HOLE FROM TEE TO GREEN.

"A"- UP-FRONT FRAMING ALSO GIVES GREATER DEPTH PERCEPTION TO ANY GOLF HOLE.



J.A. FREEMAN, Assoc.
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timately form the ideal shape we described a few lines back. We bring this to your attention because it is very critical for you to understand everything about any tree that you place on your golf course.

Not only would trees used up near the tees give the aesthetic framing effect to the hole but they would also add the third-dimensional perspective that would be lacking if there were no trees around. Have you ever noticed post cards or travel posters trying to attract your attention to spectacular scenery? Invariably, there will be something close to the camera, such as an archway or overhanging tree branches that give a feeling of tremendous distance as you look at the focal point of the picture, such as a sailboat out in the

water. This is the other reason for using trees "up-front". It adds that all-important perception of depth to the picture.

You may never have thought of using trees for these specific reasons. Once it is explained, it becomes apparent why we get so precise in our choice of trees. If the wrong tree is planted at the wrong place, that mistake is rarely corrected. People for the next 150 years afterwards will suffer through these mistakes that we make now if we are not careful. Many times when we are working on golf courses, we recommend the removal of wrongly selected trees, especially when they are young, so that these mistakes can be remedied quickly and economically.

It is possible to use some conifers

as up-front framing trees if you are willing to exercise patience. The white pines (*Pinus strobus*), for example, common in many of our states, do not lose their beauty when you cut off some of the lower branches. Of course, this should wait until the tree is at least 12-15 feet in height. Each year you can remove an additional whorl, or tier, of branches from the bottom since the tree adds to its height each year. We are not saying that these lower branches must be cut off. If and when they begin to interfere with properly hit balls, then and only then, should they be removed. Therefore, in a period of only 15-20 years you could use a white pine as a framing tree off the tee with overhead branches well up out of the way of the flight of the golf ball. Of course, the advantages of a tree such as the white pine are twofold. One, it is a year-round tree as far as green foliage is concerned, and the other is the picturesque characteristics it takes on as it struggles through old age, high winds and ice and snow storms. This is one of the few trees that can improve its unusual beauty while it is literally torn apart by the elements.

On the west coast golf courses, of course, there are the famous Torrey pines. They are the classic example of weather-beaten plants that get more beautiful as they grow older and become more contorted. These picturesque trees are priceless on a golf course if they are located in the correct places.

Then, of course, there is the additional bonus from trees around the tee of giving shade on hot days, especially when there is a waiting time on a par three hole.

Mid-fairway area

The next places where we will consider using framing trees are those farther out along the fairway. A par four, or par five hole can become very monotonous if there are practically no trees acting as partition plantings along one or both sides of the fairway. It appears to look more like a pool table than it does a beautiful golf course.

The precise location of these trees are so varied that it would be impossible to give typical examples, so therefore we will simply call it mid-fairway placement. This area can cover anywhere from 100 yards out all the way up to 300-350 yards. In fact, many times, in place of fairway



Two sets of framing trees—the "up-front" and a group coming in close to the cut fairway, creating the Mid-fairway framing.



Mid-fairway framing trees as the golfer turns the dogleg to his left. Canoe Brook Country Club, Summit, New Jersey.



A striking setting for a green that is lower than the golfer's lie.



Relatively young trees frame the par 5, 18th hole at Oak Hills Championship Course in Rochester, New York.



Up-front framing job being done with two young trees at Canoe Brook Country Club.



A classic example of "up-front" framing of a hole as well as the mid-fairway framing trees further down.

sand traps, trees are used to affect play. At the same time, however, they can be used strategically to frame the remainder of the hole which includes the picture of the green.

The same landscape principles hold true here as held true back at the tee. It is better to design an asymmetrically balanced, or unbalanced, framing of trees at the mid-way point. It would be inappropriate to plant one sugar maple exactly 200 yards off the tee in the left rough and then another sugar maple directly opposite it in the right rough at the same distance. This would be too stiff, too formal, and too unnatural. So therefore, even though we could (and often do) use the same species on both sides of the fairway, we try never to make the groupings identical. We try to keep the planting looking as natural as possible.

Sometimes a visual balance can be achieved with one tree in the left rough and three or more smaller trees over in the right rough. On a course that hardly has any trees at all, you can use groups that contain as many as fifteen or more trees.

Avoid straight "walls"

On courses that have been cut out of a dense woods or forest, many times the partition plantings look too much like perfectly straight walls. In these cases, the framing trees at the mid-fairway point not only act as framing trees but can also be used to break up that straight line effect left after the bull dozers went home. Correcting such deficiencies on a golf course can make the difference between an average landscape and an excellent one.

Check with the club pro

If the hole is playing too easy and the Green Committee wants to toughen it up, then we discuss it with the entire group. In this manner we know precisely where the general impact areas of the majority of the club members are and we also know that we will have the approval of all concerned. We then decide whether to toughen the hole or keep it as easy as possible, depending upon where we locate these groups of trees. For example, if you wanted to narrow the fairway, we could "hourglass it" by bringing extra trees in closer to the cut fairway in groups that would be generally opposite each other.

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Now the golfer would have to thread his way through this constricted area.

If, on the other hand, the hole was already playing tough and we just wanted to add to the beauty of the hole, we would not put these groupings of trees opposite each other but, instead, we would stagger them. One group would be closer to the tee and the other would be farther down the fairway. This would allow the golfer to play through a wider safe zone than would be the case in the previous example.

Know your trees' growth habits

Again, we have to be careful of the type of branching structure we use here since the golf ball will be in the air on its way toward the next target. Once more, we must stay with the type that goes relatively straight up. In these situations, we must avoid the vase-shaped trees since they may some day hang out over the fairway too much. Now we should go primarily with accent trees such as cryptomerias, fastigiata pines and fastigiata hardwoods that are bred to go up in a column. These we rarely

use singly and are usually mixed in with other more or less upright growing trees. The upright rectangular silhouettes of the ash group, the sugar maples, the ginkgos, the tulip poplars, the littleleaf lindens, eucalyptus, the palms and the sweetgums would be suited for the best results. Hickory trees (*Carya*) also fit into this category as well as the relatively new one on the scene - the dawn redwood (*Metasequoia glyptostroboides*).

A most spectacular tree where it is native or where it will grow, is the sassafras (*Sassafras albidum*). It is a medium height tree reaching 35-40 feet at maturity. But it provides spectacular show of color in the fall. It can be used singly or in groups of from 5 to 30 or more to achieve a "grove" effect.

Use trees to control play

The golf course laid out on almost perfectly flat land can be made as easy or as difficult as the golf course architect and the landscape architect would want it to be, by strategically locating these trees. The landscape architect should know what the golf

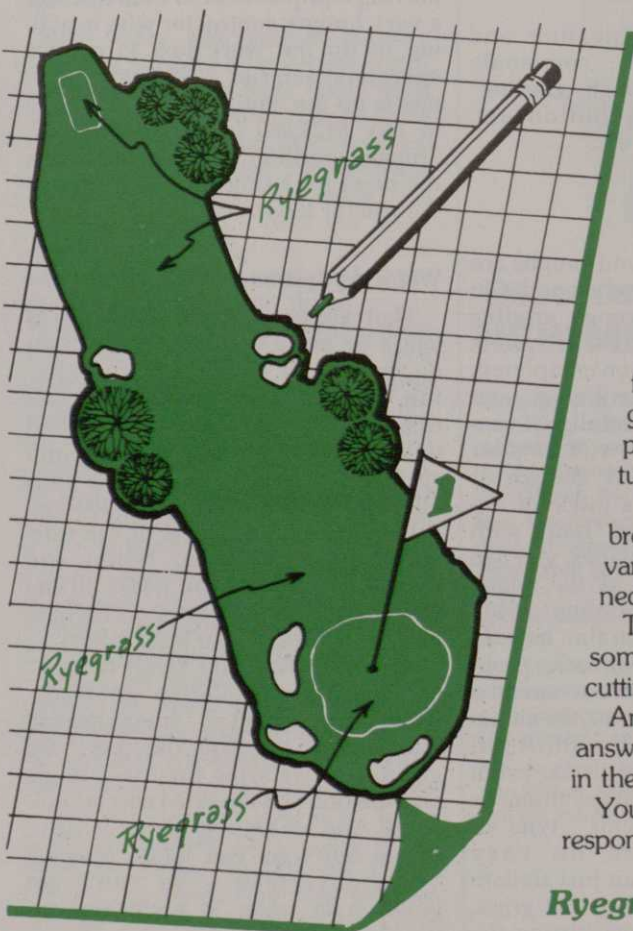
course architect had in mind for each hole, in order to landscape it so it can be played according to its handicap.

In those areas of the country where both deciduous and coniferous trees can be grown, it is often desirable to try to make these groupings a combination of the two types. It is much easier to attain a "composition" when the two types make up the grouping.

Very often on holes that border the out-of-bounds territory, the placement of these framing trees can have a beneficial effect for the golfer by tending to steer him away from the out-of-bounds.

In other unusual instances where a fairway slopes from left to right or right to left at an extreme angle, you certainly do not want to place trees that would make it impossible for the good golfer to spot his ball on the high side so that by the time it stops rolling it would not be down across the rough into the next fairway. All of these things must be taken into consideration when locating trees on your golf course.

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Make the green the focal point

The third general use for using framing trees is to create a spectacular view of the green. (See 2C) Here great caution must be used in the initial location of the trees so that many years down the road the trees' branches will not interfere with a properly hit ball from the cut fairway onto the green. Here we have to consider the branching habit as it comes out of the ground. We also must know the ultimate height of the tree, whether it will be a single trunk tree or a multiple trunk tree, an extremely narrow tree, and will the debris from the tree throughout the season cause troubles on the putting surface? All of these things must be taken into account when placing any tree near the green.

Roots

Another factor is the root systems of various trees. There is a great variation in the growth habit of the

root systems of different species. The willows, maples, and mulberries, for example, have extremely aggressive root systems that travel great distances beyond the drip line of the tree. They are right up on the surface and, many times, above the surface. It is obvious that trees with such root systems should never be used near the greens.

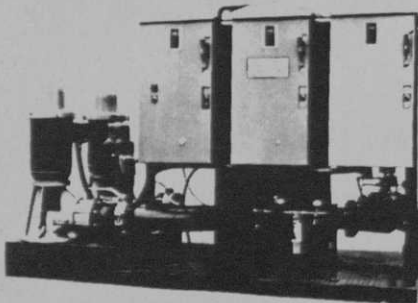
Trees also have what we call "teleological" abilities in that we give them the quality of human thought. The classic example is the green that is irrigated and the tree that sits 75 feet away from it in a non-irrigated area. Given enough years, the bulk of the root system will find its way over into the irrigated area of the green. Now any experienced golf course superintendent will know enough not to use that kind of tree near the green.

Also, how many times have you had to clear your own private little "boulevard" from your ball on the putting surface up to the hole? This

debris could be created by maple seeds or ash seeds from trees as far away as 200 feet or more, if they are floating on the prevailing breezes that are blowing towards the green. They spin such as little helicopter blades. We have even seen oak trees whose large overhanging branches actually hang over the putting surface. When the acorns fall, being heavier than air, they drop straight down on the putting surface. Other trees have a habit of constantly "pruning" themselves of small twigs. These are no trees to have near a green because, even though the twigs are heavier than air, a strong wind can blow them a good 50-75 feet before they land.

The conclusion of "Carefully chosen trees. . ." will appear in the February issue.

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