Tool Time

To complete a successful golf course remodeling job, architects need to make sure they have the essential equipment.

BY FRANK H. ANDORKA JR.
ASSOCIATE EDITOR
Only Human

As important as equipment is to remodeling jobs, the human element is equally vital, according to Bob Lohmann, president of Lohmann Design Group in Marengo, Ill. “A tool is only as good as its operator,” Lohmann says. “If you don’t train the employees to do the job right, no amount of fancy equipment will help you do the job.”

Lohmann says anyone involved in a remodeling project, including the superintendent, should find out everything they can about a course. He says they should collect the following items before altering a design element:

• old aerial photographs of the course;
• records of green committee meetings from past years;
• drawings of what currently exist so you can compare the two; and
• an environmental investigation (to avoid running afoul of government regulations or local environmental groups).

“You need to plan before you plan,” Lohmann says. “Otherwise, the project could run into problems down the road.”

As important as the designer is to the job, however, the choice of a crew can be equally important. Bill Kubly, president of Lincoln, Neb.-based Landscapes Unlimited, says the most important element to any remodeling job is the people assigned to crews. They are critical to keeping the client satisfied, he says.

“It takes a special person to head up an effective team, and you have to know your people well enough to understand who would fit a certain job and who wouldn’t,” he says. “You want to make sure you produce the best team possible for each individual situation. Each job takes on its own personality, and it’s your job as the designer to assign the right people to fit whatever personality the job takes on.”

—Frank H. Andorka Jr.
"You want the course to look as if there had never been any renovation done."

—Bill Kubly

Continued from page 41

Your earth-moving needs against the damage you’re doing with those bigger pieces.”

Avoiding such damage is what Bob Lohmann emphasizes most when he’s working on a job. Lohmann, president of Lohmann Design Group in Marengo, Ill., says designers should never forget that remodeling projects should avoid creating extra maintenance headaches for the superintendent. To do that, architects and builders must think of the remodeling from the superintendent’s point of view.

“You have to be sensitive to what the superintendent is doing, particularly with a remodel,” Lohmann says. “You don’t want to tear up a lot of turf just to get your remodeling done.”

No matter what equipment a builder brings to a site, Lohmann insists it should have balloon tires rather than traditional treaded tires, which do extensive damage. Balloon tires distribute weight more evenly and put less pressure on the ground, he says. Lohmann adds that plywood is an often overlooked tool essential to remodeling.

“If you can’t find a piece of equipment with balloon tires — and some pieces that you will need simply aren’t equipped with them — plywood paths are your next best option,” Lohmann says. “[Plywood paths] allow you to drive to the parts of the course you’re renovating without killing other turf. Lohmann adds that plywood also gives an architect a method for clearing away excess dirt.

In addition to riding on balloon tires, equipment should also be powered by automatic transmissions whenever possible, Ristau says. Inexperienced operators working with a stick shift can destroy turf as easily as heavy construction equipment can, he says.

No matter how careful architects and construction crews are, however, there is the inevitable challenge of piecing together the old turf with the newly renovated areas. Bill Kubly,

Continued on page 44
Tool Time

Continued from page 42

president of Lincoln, Neb.-based Landscapes Unlimited, says a sharp sod cutter is critical to avoid creating seams in an otherwise flawless course.

"You want the course to look as if there had never been any renovation done," Kubly says. "You're looking for perfect edges, and a good sod cutter will help you create them so everything fits together as if there had never been any work done."

Finally, when all the equipment has been returned to the maintenance facility and the renovation is over except for the cleanup, there's nothing more essential than an aerifier to control the

Continued on page 46

Water Woes

When architects remodel a course, they discuss turf contours, green location and what grasses to use. But according to Pat Franklin, they often forget to discuss the irrigation system.

Franklin, superintendent at TPC at Deere Run in Moline, Ill., has overseen three course construction projects in his career, and he doesn't understand the inattention paid to irrigation systems.

"What always amazes me is how many construction companies forget to find out where the irrigation system is before they remodel," Franklin says. "It falls prey to the 'out of sight, out of mind' philosophy. That just doesn't make any sense."

Bill Kubly, president of Lincoln, Neb.-based Landscapes Unlimited, agrees. He believes irrigation is sometimes left out of the remodeling equation.

"It's silly to rebuild tees and greens without considering the effect that will have on the irrigation system," Kubly says. "But it happens all the time."

On the other hand, the issue always isn't inattention. Sometimes it's pricing, says Kubly, who has noticed a trend in irrigation toward high-tech gadgetry the last eight to 10 years. That has driven up prices, which leaves middle- and lower-budget courses out of the equation.

"Some of the newer systems have gotten too sophisticated for the small-budget courses," Kubly says. "(The irrigation companies) are pricing the average golf courses out of the picture, and they deserve adequate water systems as much as the high-end daily fee courses do."

Kubly isn't suggesting that development of radio-controlled systems isn't good for the industry, but he does urge the companies not to forget that the majority of courses can't spend $1 million on an irrigation system.

"Companies are going to have to go back to basics and design systems that are affordable to everyone," Kubly says. "They can't focus solely on the high-end courses because they will shrink their market if they do that, and that would be a bad move."

- F.A.
Finding a Happy Medium

According to architects and golf course builders, it's easy to find construction equipment for large jobs and small jobs. But it's difficult to find light construction equipment that adequately addresses the needs of medium-sized jobs.

"I'd like to see more equipment designed that would maximize my flexibility when I'm on site," says Tom Ristau, vice president of Pennick Armour Golf in Bryn Athyn, Pa. "There are times when my big pieces of equipment are too big, but a smaller piece of equipment is too small. There's not a lot of in-between equipment available."

Ristau says the one piece of equipment he'd like to see is a medium-sized bulldozer with a 40-horsepower engine and an automatic transmission. "This is one piece of equipment that seems to be missing from most jobs," he says.

Steve Burns, principal of Burns Golf Design in Amelia Island, Fla., says that more medium-sized equipment would prevent problems such as the one he saw on one job where the architect wanted a gently sloping rise to the green. Burns says the developer was so concerned about tearing up the turf that he didn't bring the remodeling equipment close enough to the site. As a result, the slope was anything but gradual.

"You want a mound that tapers off without any sharp edges," Burns says. "This job had greens with these sharp angles. It looked awful, and it played worse."

The argument for medium-sized equipment goes beyond convenience for the architect, Ristau says. It lowers labor costs because it takes construction crews less time to do a job than it would with smaller equipment. It would also minimize turf damage, so there would be less cleanup work after a remodeling.

"There are times when you can't take a 25-ton truck on to a golf course, but if you take anything smaller, you'd be hauling all day," Ristau says. "There needs to be some innovations that will meet us somewhere in the middle. That will help the industry immensely."

-F.A.