

Feelings, Nothing But Feelings

By Bob Costa

Last fall, I had the unique experience of designing and constructing a golf hole from scratch. The circumstances which resulted in this opportunity were remarkable in itself. What had been the former 495 yard, 12th hole on Rancho Cañada's East course had been literally washed away during the night, another casualty of the 1998 "Boy of the Year" - El Niño.

Having been fascinated with the design process for a number of years, this was an unfulfilled dream come true. Before me, was an opportunity to create a golf hole that I hoped would be both challenging and memorable. As the concept for the hole began to take shape in my mind, I realized that there was more to this process than I had imagined. Was there a common denominator for good design, I wondered? Was there a single ingredient that was a part of every great golf hole and golf course? I quickly concluded that great design was about feelings and emotion, often times subtle, although occasionally dramatic. Indeed, if my hole was to be special and capture the emotion of its players, its form would have to include elements of strategy, challenge, aesthetics, and conditioning. If great design is all about feelings, then just what is it that makes us feel good?

Variety - Have you ever played a round of golf where the only thing that distinguished the holes apart from one another was that some were longer than others? That kind of experience is not likely to keep you awake at night replaying your round. Variety implies change. In golf design, this is accomplished with sand, water, elevated greens, doglegs, shotmaking and strategy. It's what often makes for a memorable round.

Condition - Course condition is a by-product of design in the sense that it can enhance or detract from its value. Striking fairway contours, cleanly edged bunkers, pristine lakes, and greens that roll true all add value to any design. By contrast, a well designed, but poorly conditioned course is analogous to a slip that protrudes from a beautiful gown or an untucked shirttail from a tailored tux.

Aesthetics - Nowhere is the phrase "*That is some kind of ugly*" more appropriate than in golf course design. When I speak of courses or holes that have feeling, much of what I'm referring to is aesthetics. A beautifully framed green, striking bunkers, the contrast between maintained turf and the natural landscape, panoramic vistas, and dogwoods and azaleas in bloom, all are a part of the visual experience that makes for good design.

Challenge - Regardless of skill, there is nothing like a good challenge. If you succeed, the feeling is exhilarating. If you fail, you get to come back and try again. The excitement comes from trying to hit the perfect golf shot, or series of shots to make birdie

or par. You may find challenge in the form of length, doglegs, forced carries, deceptive greens, landing areas, water, elevated greens, trees, or bunkers. One thing for sure, you'll know it when it's there.

Topography - Unlike lawn bowling, when it comes to golf, flat is boring. It's no secret that some of golf's finest architecture can be found on older courses, where little dirt was moved. Each hole simply followed the lay of the land. Modern architecture, often stuck with inferior property, is forced to rely on bulldozers to create natural shapes and forms to the land. Unfortunately, most architects can't compete with mother nature. Those who can, quickly distinguish themselves from those who can't.

Arrangement of features - It may not be as obvious, but the manner in which bunkers, water, and trees are arranged can often distinguish a hole or course. Cypress Point is a course that comes quickly to mind.

As you can see, great design is much more complex than it may appear, requiring a blending of each of these elements to achieve success. Interestingly, as much as great shots and great scores are what the game is all about, for me it is the course design that completes the experience and enhances my enjoyment of the game. It's the *feelings* during a round of golf that form my memories, causing me to replay the experience over and over again in my mind. ♣

Reprinted from the NCGA News

Naumann's NorCal News

Chad Scott has accepted the Superintendent position at Carmel Valley Ranch. He is replacing Bill Goodman who has moved on to another position. Chad was the assistant prior to his move . . . **Tim Sedgley** has accepted the position of Superintendent and Director of California Maintenance Operations for OB Sports. He will be the Superintendent at Winchester Golf Course in Auburn. Winchester is a new 18 hole Robert Trent Jones Jr. golf course . . . **Steve Carlton** has left Mather Golf Course in Sacramento and is now at Crystal Springs Golf Course in Burlingame. Replacing Steve at Mather GC is **Bill Kissick**. Bill has been in Egypt building golf courses. . . .