

Robert Muir Graves

Respected Golf Course Architect, Author, and Educator Dies at 72

The fraternity of golf course architects lost one of its most beloved and respected members when Robert Muir Graves passed away Saturday, June 28, 2003 of complications from cancer.

Graves began his career in 1955 as a landscape architect before slowly transitioning into golf course architecture on a full time basis in 1960. His first three major works of note came close together in the early 1960's. They were the redesign of Lake Merced CC in San Francisco, and the original designs for both Carmel Valley CC in Carmel, CA and Big Canyon CC in Newport Beach, CA. Graves went on to build a design portfolio that included over 75 new golf courses around the world, but his best-known work is located in the Western United States. In 1972 he designed the Big Meadow course at Black Butte Ranch in Oregon. The resort course went on to receive numerous awards from the golf media and remained a life long favorite of its designer. The Sea Ranch Golf Links on the Sonoma coast north of San Francisco was also opened in the early 70's and is recognized as one of the first, modern examples of "natural" or "minimalist" architecture. His La Purisima GC, in Lompoc, CA has hosted numerous professional events and is probably the best course from the latter part of his career. Never shy about taking on the tough assignments, Graves designed both the popular Port Ludlow Golf Course, and Canterwood Country Club in the Puget Sound area of Washington.

Graves went on to become a longtime and active member in the American Society of Golf Course Architects. He served as president of the ASGCA in 1974-75. He was elected a Fellow of the ASGCA at the organization's 2003 meeting in Pittsburgh. The California Golf Writers Association honored him when they elected him to the California Golf Hall of Fame in 1994.

In the early 1980's, he teamed with noted east coast golf course architect, Geoff Cornish, to teach a series of seminars on golf course design throughout the United States. The first seminars were taught to PGA golf professionals and golf course superintendents. After several years of teaching together, the

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popular duo was asked to join the faculty of the Harvard Graduate School of Design where they educated hundreds of students on the basics of golf course design. Their teaching led to their collaboration on two books on golf course architecture, *Golf Course Design* and the recently published, *Classic Golf Hole Design*.

Graves took great pride in sharing his knowledge, and providing opportunities for the young design associates he employed. Notable examples of former associates who then went on to individual careers include Robin Nelson, John Steidel, and Neal Meagher. The firm that Graves founded continues the practice of golf course architecture under the guidance of longtime partner, Damian Pascuzzo, and design associate Andrew Staples.

Graves had many interests outside of golf. Foremost was his passion for flying. His skills as a pilot were extensive, as he had earned his instrument, multi-engine, and commercial ratings.

One favorite story that illustrates his love for flying begins with a trip to look at a potential site for a new golf course. The client took him up in their company seaplane to get a better look at the property out in the Puget Sound. Captivated by the experience of

takeoff and landing from the water, Graves came back home, and within a few months earned his seaplane rating. Over the years he flew a variety of aircraft for business, but perhaps his favorite "bird" was a restored WWII Stearman that he flew for recreation.

In 1992, he left the San Francisco bay area and moved onto a large ranch just outside of Bend, OR. While still keeping a hand in selected design projects, he was able to spend more time flying, golfing and helping his wife, Mimi, raise Morgan horses. Remarkably, he joined the Cloverdale Volunteer Fire Department at age 63 and continued to serve and respond to emergencies for the next several years.

Bob will be remembered by friends for his appreciation of fine single malt scotch, his humble attitude toward himself, and his dry sense of humor. He was once quoted in an interview as saying, *"If I live to be 100, I might shoot my age"*.

Robert Muir Graves is survived by his wife, Mimi, and daughters, Victoria Graves, Betsy Mahan, Katy Yoder and six grandchildren. He will be remembered and missed by the thousands of others whose lives he touched.

In lieu of flowers, the family has requested that donations may be made in his honor to the ASGCA Foundation, 111 East Wacker Drive, 18th Floor, Chicago, IL 60601.