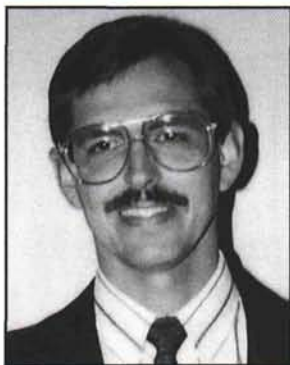


Director's Column



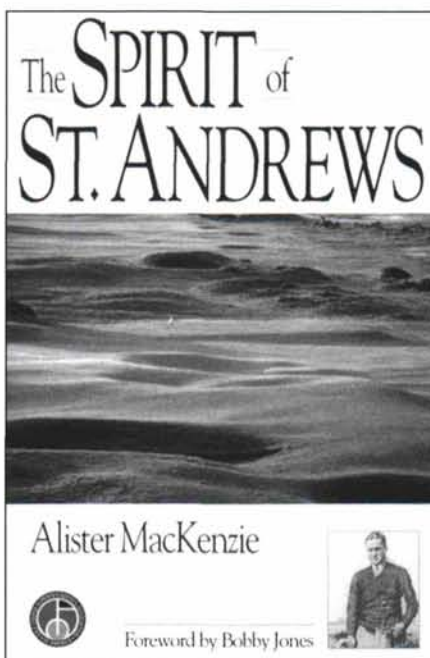
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BOOK IT!

I recently finished reading a book that caused me to reflect on the business that we conduct and how self-serving influences have negatively impacted the great game of golf. The book is Alister MacKenzie's *The Spirit of St. Andrews*. While we have time for reflection and renewal this winter, I would recommend it to anyone.

I must confess that it sat on my shelf unopened for several months until the club's chairman of grounds brought it to my attention as a book that he was reading. Shortly after that, I picked it up and I couldn't put it down. Although it was written in 1934 and wasn't published until this year, it contains such a wealth of information pertinent to modern day golf courses that I think it should be required reading for every person who ever finds themselves in the position of voting on or dictating changes in course features or maintenance. My grounds chairman shared this same sentiment strongly enough that he purchased copies of the book for every member of the golf course planning committee and asked them to read it before they cast a vote on future changes to the golf course.

In the book, MacKenzie talks with reverence about St. Andrews as the ultimate achievement (divine intervention?) in golf course architectural strategy. He dwells on the importance of what he calls the "line of charm," which is the direction that the architect has designed for you to play the hole, versus the "line of instinct," which is the direct route to the hole.



He also talks about minimalist design and the problem of the overuse of bunkers. One of his most interesting observations is that his measure of a good or great golf course is not one that you enjoy the first time you play it. In fact, he felt that if you didn't like one of his golf courses the first time around that it was probably a good sign, but that you would come to appreciate it after four or five times around.

MacKenzie devotes an entire chapter to Greenkeeping, and it is fascinating reading. So much of what he believes in architecture also applies to the maintenance of

the golf course. He took an attitude of minimalist maintenance, bemoaning the overuse of fertilizers and the overgrooming of turf. In fact, he relates a story of how an overmanicured golf course takes away from the charm of the game because if you never have a bad lie, you cannot appreciate a good one. I couldn't agree more. I have long felt that we have overmanicured our golf courses to their detriment, to the point where even hazards, such as bunkers, are supposed to produce perfect lies every time. He talks with affection for the differing shades of green on the unfertilized fairways of some of his favorite courses. I have been lucky to work at a club that has an old, established golf course that over the years has produced this same effect. I think it is beautiful, much more so than the monotonous display of color that I am treated to on many of the resort courses that I have played.

I am not immune to pressures to make the golf course fit someone else's ideal. I do believe that we must give our members/patrons what they expect, within reason. But, I also agree with MacKenzie's observation that "Too many cooks spoil the broth," and that the individuality of the greenkeeper (superintendent) should be encouraged and not interfered with. I have succumbed to the pressures of increasing green speeds when I knew it wasn't in the best interest of the golf course. We all spend a lot of time pondering our shortcomings, and I guess the bottom line question is, "Am I giving my club's membership what they're paying for?" Boy, I sure hope so. I wouldn't give up so much of my life to the pursuit of these goals if I didn't think they were worthwhile. ■