

FEATURE I

Gregory Martin, *Martin Design*

# Magic is not Obvious but Infectious



*Golf course architects come in many shapes and sizes, from different places and with different perspectives. Golf course architecture should be a reflection of the wonderful variety this game provides. The game of golf is played on distinct and unique playing fields—and architectural variety is what makes the game so grand.*

This is nothing new. Golden age architects, Bell, Tillinghast, Ross, McKenzie each had a unique style and offered varying perspectives on how golf course architecture should react to the land and expose the game. But their success was based upon some simple and shared ideas about golf and golfers.

Architectural perspectives still come in different shapes and sizes. This variance is what gives golfers the fodder for discussion about golf courses and golf course architecture.

I have the greatest admiration for Pete Dye. He has created some of the most extraordinary golf courses of the modern era. His “diabolical” efforts have been examined, dissected and detailed. The professional player is harassed and the average golfer besieged. Some of his more distinctive designs were those that offered an extraordinary level of intimidation. From all angles, there was much to observe, much to understand and a lot to digest. Beautiful and engaging, these courses like TPC Sawgrass, Whistling Straits and PGA West are oddly harmonious while simultaneously menacing - bombarding every golfer with continued dread.

Interestingly, golfers of all types have had great rounds on these golf courses. This past year, a professional posted a 64 at TPC Sawgrass, even with a double bogey. He played as if with blinders, never seeing the trouble or allowing that trouble to affect his play. When I played there, I began my round with a series of pars, a bogey and a birdie. I was even



after eight holes. On the ninth hole, I made a mistake, and never regained a level of the most basic competence – overwhelmed and fearful for the next 9 holes I became a terrified golfer.

His designs are equal parts strategy, heroism and pressure. Play the right shot to the right spot and you can play well: do not let the massive bunkers, steep grades, or insidious hazards affect your play. Play the wrong shot, or play to the wrong spot and you will be penalized. Simple, right? But once you make a mistake, the blinders are off. You will see everything and it will interfere with clear thinking. Only the most talented thoughtful golfers can recover. This is the genius of Pete Dye.

I am an admirer of Pete Dye, but my design philosophies come from the opposite direction. My instincts as an architect are to allow the golfer to ‘play away’ with little care, and a wide berth, but generate subtleties and surprises that offer challenges enticing and goading the golfer into carelessness. Each shot is presented with challenges, some easier than the next, and each providing subtle demands requiring attention, or even recovery. I believe golf should be a challenge - equal parts fun, strategy and difficulty. Other architects use different equations.

These same philosophies are inherent in the designs of Perry Maxwell. He managed to create some wonderful golf

*(continued on page 7)*



courses that adhere to strategic principles while providing a simply beautiful challenge. It is both fair and tough. The Maxwell rolls are the most notable aspect of his courses. The greens are filled with pitches and curves, rolls and ridges. Yet, even with these heavily contoured greens there is subtlety and nuance to his designs; there is charm and timelessness that is revealed slowly and evenly. The course grows as a friendship, with characteristics that are at the same time polite and puzzling. There is magic to these golf courses. The challenges are not obvious, but they certainly exist. That magic is charming.

Every golfer should learn to read a golf course...to take the clues from the architect and determine how the hole should be played. Pete Dye offers lots of clues that are intended to overwhelm the senses. Perry Maxwell provides few clues, but with equally destructive results.

Like magic, good golf course architecture does not have to be obvious. It can be obvious and menacing, or it can be subtle, simple and simultaneously captivating. **-OC**

