

Her job is to get the details right

Jan Beljan has parlayed a stint as an assistant superintendent and a GCSAA scholarship into a position with one of the world's foremost architects

BY BRADLEY S. KLEIN

Jan Beljan's job is to get the details right. She's a design associate with Tom Fazio and spends a lot of time at her drafting table. From her office in Jupiter, she draws up routing plans, specifies the clearing, grading and bulk earth moving, works on irrigation and landscaping, and keeps track of everything from cart paths to environmental regulations.

She also heads off into the field. Whether knee-deep in the mud or back at the office with pen, pencil and paper, Beljan is at home putting together all those things that must work well if a course is to make it from sketch board to playing field.

Today, Beljan shares credit for such achievements as PGA National in Palm Beach Gardens, Pelican's Nest in Naples, and Lake Nona in Orlando. She's also a careful student of her craft, having taken extended visits to Asia and the British Isles, where she explored classical and contemporary architecture.

She grew up on golf courses and now she's

making her life with them. This past spring, her career received a big boost when the American Society of Golf Course Architects, meeting at Spanish Bay in California, voted her in as an associate member, a status she shares with Jay Morrish, Jack Nicklaus and 18 other designers.

In a way, she has been preparing for the job since childhood. Next to the Palmers, the Beljan family is western Pennsylvania's best-known golfing clan. When Jan was born in Pittsburgh in 1953, her father, George, was pro at a driving range. His four brothers — Jan's uncles Willie, Carl, Andy and Joe — were all renowned golf pros. In 1955, Jan's dad left his job to take up a new project — the design and construction of Mannitto Haven golf course in New Alexandria, Pa.

"Nine holes were opened," recalls Beljan, "but the second nine fell through because of a change of ownership. Dad stayed on and ran the whole show and that's where I learned golf."

Jan lent a hand anywhere she could.

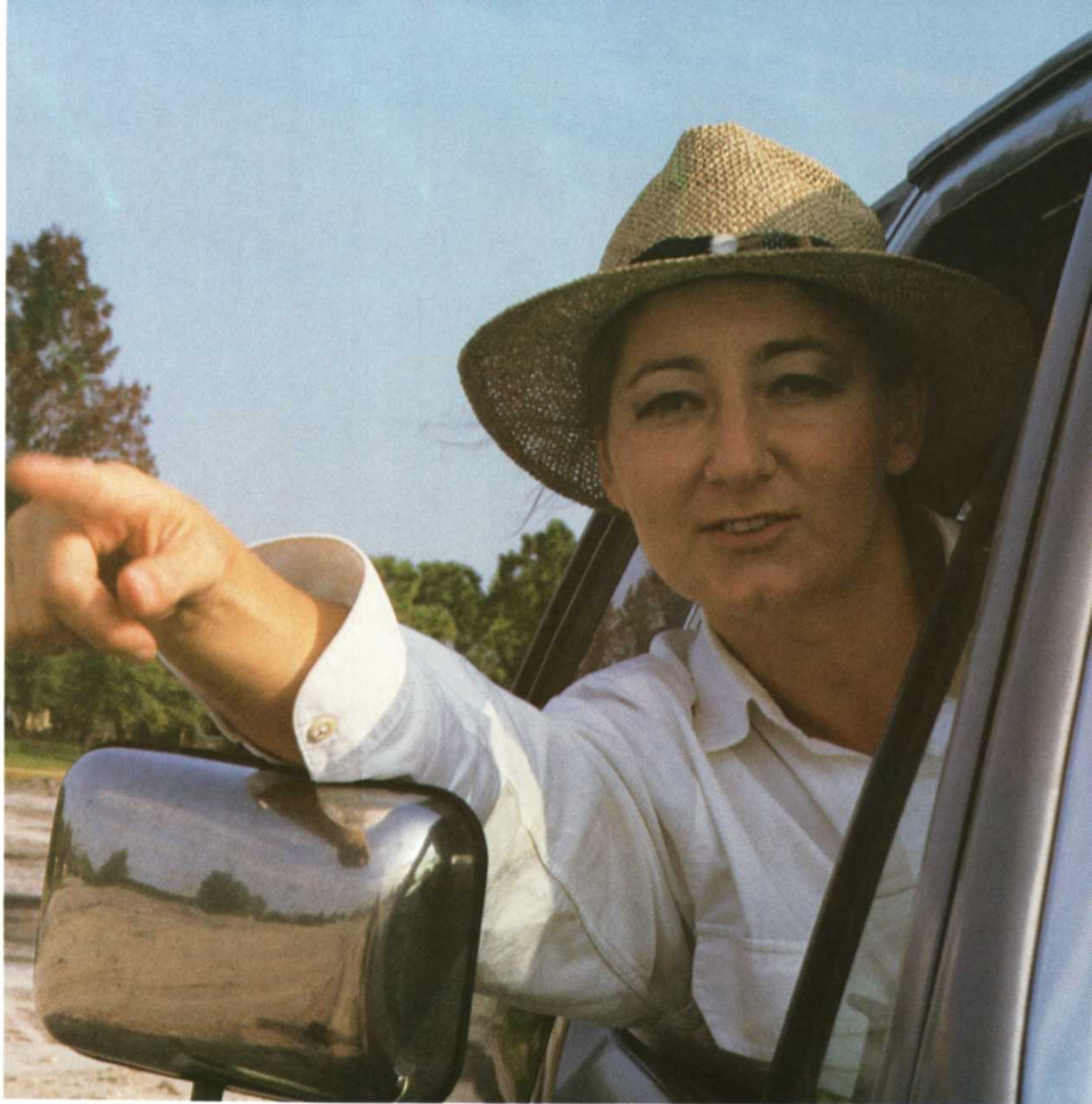
“It was a year-round family club, a weekend retreat for Pittsburghers. First I ran the riding stable, then I began my work in golf. Mornings I would mow greens, then I’d shower and make a quick change and spend afternoons and evening in the pro shop, doing the typical routine.

This was before the computer, so I had to figure handicaps.”

Beljan says that the experience taught her a lesson that has helped her to this day.

“Golf is not just how the course looks. It’s planning, maintenance, employee relations. It’s being friendly and customer service. Golf operations are successful when all of these facts are recognized.”

After completing high school, she attended West Virginia University in Morgantown. Among the scholarships she had was one from the GCSAA. In 1976 she graduated *cum laude* with a degree in landscape architecture. All through college she worked at Preston CC in Kingwood, W. Va. Initially, Jan worked in the pro shop. She soon moved on to become assistant superintendent.



During summers she was out there seven days a week, 14 hours a day. The only break from this routine was an hour spent in church on Sunday.

The practical skills she developed in the field complemented her formal studies. She was working with grasses, equipment, chemicals and all the other day-to-day matters that golf courses call for. What had been part of her family lore was now part of her everyday routine.

With college behind her and while still working at Preston CC, Beljan took an additional job with a professional lawn care company. Besides working as a sales representative, she was applying pesticides and fertilizers. One of her clients, Jack Mahaffey, turned out to be greens chairman at Oakmont CC, and he introduced Beljan to Tom Fazio during the 1978 PGA champion-

Jan Beljan's been preparing for her job all her life. In Western Pennsylvania, her family name, like Arnold Palmer's, is synonymous with golf.

Photo by:
Larry Kieffer

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ship. A few weeks later, Fazio called and offered her a job. Beljan has been with him ever since.

From the very beginning, Beljan has been immersed in every aspect of golf course development. Her intimate understanding of what goes on in the maintenance yard serves her well not only at the drafting table but also in the field. Beljan explains that in the Fazio shop, "we spend a lot of time drawing plans and writing specs.

But in design work, you have to be prepared to make changes in the field and work with the land and the client. The only way to do that is to work closely with the contractors and shapers. Ultimately, you have to keep in mind how it's all going to be maintained.

"We couldn't have golf courses without superintendents," she says. "They maintain the integrity of the architect's design. They are responsible for the course appearing in its best light of all times. Without proper mowing and maintenance, you wouldn't see all those beautiful pictures. The ultimate sales person for any development is the superintendent."

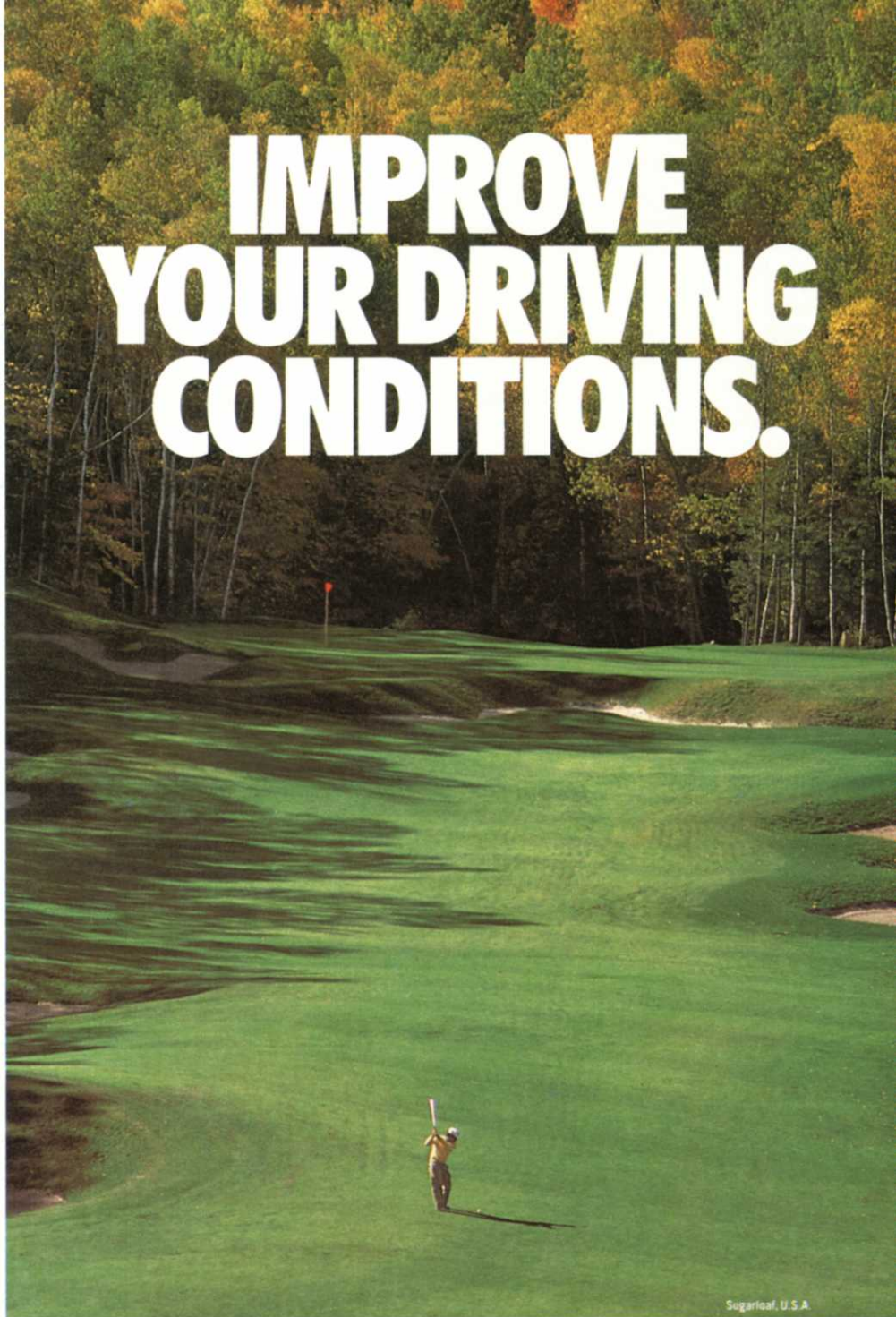
Fazio courses have been well-received because they are designed with maintenance in mind. Beljan, like the whole Fazio operation, receives high marks in the industry for a willingness to work carefully at the outset with superintendents. After all, they are the ones who are held responsible for how the course plays.

Frank Cook, superintendent at both the Bardmoor North GC and the Bayou Club in Largo (until this year the home of the LPGA/PGA Tour's mixed championship, the JCPenney Classic) has been working with the Fazio company on a new nine for the Bayou.

"They confer with us on maintenance all the time. Jan is in here every two

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weeks or so and works with Fazio's field supervisor, Charles Feeley. They spend a lot of time discussing the specifics of a hole, whether it's going to be a maintenance problem."

For many marquee-name architects, what counts is high-profile publicity, usually on opening day. But it's one thing to have designed a "best new course." It's quite another to have to live with it years afterwards. Florida courses are especially susceptible to criticism because they are open year-round. Snowbirds can be especially demanding of course conditions, though perhaps less concerned with what happens the six or seven months of the year when they are not in town to play.

As a lot of Florida superintendents know, the result of all the demands upon them can be an annual maintenance budget that approaches (and in a few cases, passes) \$1 million. But few facilities can afford such levels of care.

"Fazio and Beljan definitely try to stay away from severe slopes that would require manual labor and expensive handwork like fly-mowing and the use of weed-eaters," says Cook. "They understand initially what causes problems and they plan and adjust so that we'll get it right. I haven't had to change anything at The Bayou."

But Beljan acknowledges that "sometimes extra handwork is required to take best advantage of a natural setting." At the par-three third hole at The Bayou, "only a long bunker with steep, Fly-Mo slopes would accent the green. The bunker is set in a narrow area framed by oaks and palms. The only way to avoid fly-mowing there would be to build a bland hole, and that wouldn't do justice to the golf course."

Learning to work with, rather than against the land is basic to golf architecture. Like many designers, Beljan

...You have to be prepared to make changes in the field and work with the land and the client. The only way to do that is to work closely with the contractors and shapers. Ultimately, you have to keep in mind how it's all going to be maintained.

has sought inspiration from the past in order to confront the future.

She made her first visit to the classic British courses in 1986 and hasn't been the same since. For three weeks she studied, played and photographed over two dozen venues — among them Ballybunion, Muirfield, and Royal St. George's. She came away with an enhanced understanding of classical design features and of the very different conditions governing U.S. architecture.

Beljan saw that golf was made to be played while walking. Players judged distances without markers. Deception, she found, was not so much built in as allowed to reveal itself naturally.

"Despite — or maybe because of — the simplicity of the features there, challenges to depth perception confront every golfer. Architects couldn't move much dirt back then, so they were selective in siting tees, bunkers and greens. Small mounds, large dunes, that's what the player relies upon to aim and judge distances.

But while one can learn from these courses, says Beljan, it would be a mistake to try to copy them outright.

"Those courses are 60 to a hundred years old," she says. "They were built on the best land with the least possible means. By contrast, we build courses on less than the best land with every

means possible. In the U.S. we have so much more to work with technically. The question is how to make all the pieces fit."

Of late, Beljan has been sharing that commitment with industry leaders involved in the Florida Golf Summit (page 13). She points to government-industry interaction as part of the plan and is pleased that the Sierra Club and Audubon Society are among those environmental groups that have been asked to participate in developing a long-range plan.

Beljan's work with the Florida Golf Summit is a further step in her emergence as an influential voice in U.S. course design. A growing community of designers and superintendents is finding out about Beljan's experience and her concern for the game. 🐦

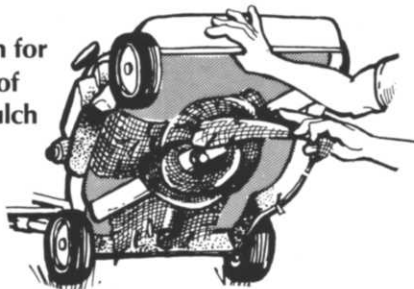
Jan Beljan's Florida Work

1979	PGA National, The Haig **	.....	Palm Beach Gardens
1980	PGA National, Championship**	.....	Palm Beach Gardens
1981	Mariner Sands, Gold*	.....	Stuart
1981	PGA National, Squire**	.....	Palm Beach Gardens
1981	Eastlakes CC**	.....	Juno Beach
1981	Bluewater Bay**	.....	Niceville
1985	Pelican's Nest**•	.....	Naples
1986	Long Point GC**	.....	Amelia Island
1986	Golden Eagle GC**	.....	Tallahassee
1986	Bluewater Bay, New 9**•	.....	Niceville
1986	Bayou Club at Bardmoor, New 9**•	.....	Largo
1987	Lake Nona**	.....	Orlando
1988	John's Island West*•	.....	Vero Beach
1989	Westinghouse Gateway **	.....	Fort Myers
1989	Pelican's Nest, New 9 **•	.....	Naples

Key: * Preliminary Routings
 ** Design and drafting of construction documents and specifications
 • On-site construction supervision

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Wayne Miller, center, business manager of The John's Island Club in Vero Beach, last summer presented a \$6,000 research donation to Bob Yount, executive vice president of the Florida Turfgrass Association and vice president for development of the Florida Turfgrass Research Foundation. Holding a plaque recognizing the second annual \$6,000 gift is Trevor Wright, club general manager. "We are concerned about protecting the environment and are anxious to support turf research in Florida," said Wright.