

# Prince of Naples

BY BRADLEY KLEIN

*Within the immediate community of designers, builders and superintendents who have worked with him, Arthur Hills gets high marks for his meticulous craftsmanship and attention to detail.*

**G**olf course architect Arthur W. Hills has not acquired the reputation that his work deserves. Within the immediate community of designers, builders and superintendents who have worked with him, Hills gets high marks for his meticulous craftsmanship and attention to detail. Yet to wider golfing circles, he remains largely an unknown figure.

The public has seen his best Florida work, even if it cannot identify the architect. Last winter in a PR man's dream come true, Arthur Hills-designed golf courses were featured in three consecutive weeks of national golf tournament telecasts.



*Sensitivity to the environment won Hills international acclaim for his work at Bonita Bay.*

On Feb. 17-19, 1989, the Senior PGA Tour set up shop for the GTE Suncoast Classic at the Tampa Palms G&CC with ESPN televising the proceedings. The next week ESPN showed the seniors in Naples for the Aetna Challenge at Bonita Bay. On the third week NBC telecast the Honda Classic, played on the TPC Course at Eagle Trace in Coral Springs.

Each of these courses is ranked by *Golfweek* among Florida's top 50. So too is another Arthur Hills design, Coral Oaks Municipal GC in Cape Coral. And Hills is one of only nine active architects with a course — Bonita Bay in Bonita Springs — ranked among *Golf Digest's* top 100 nationwide.

Hills has designed so many fine courses in Southwest Florida that he has been dubbed "The Prince of Naples." But his demeanor is anything but royal. He is a quiet fellow who prefers to go about his work rather than promote it.

Born in 1930 in Toledo, Ohio, he played on the golf team at Michigan State University while earning a degree in horticulture. After a stint as a landscape contractor, he took a graduate degree at the University of Michigan, writing his thesis on golf course design.

The path he took into the business was, in Hills' own words, "pretty mysterious." He got his first taste of course design in 1966 when, following up on a friend's suggestion, he built nine new holes for the Orchard Hills CC in Bryan, Ohio. By then he had five children and was making a pretty good living, so he was reluctant to make a career shift. But while working as a landscaper, he put a listing in the phone book as "golf course architect" and the phone began to ring. It hasn't stopped since.

Now Hills is secretary of the American Society of Golf Course Architects. He has designed nearly 60 new courses, two dozen of them in Florida alone. Among his dozens of renova-

*Most of Hills' Florida work is in the southern Gulf area*

tion projects are such prestigious assignments as Oakland Hills in Birmingham, Mich., the Inverness Club in Toledo, and Oakmont outside Pittsburgh.

His main office, 10 miles west of Toledo, comprises three buildings on an old farm. Much of the land neighboring the property has been heavily developed, but characteristically for Arthur Hills, he holds his ground against such "modern" encroachment and prefers to surround himself with

the comfort of shady old trees.

In the Toledo headquarters, Hills is joined by chief manager Steve Forrest and a number of landscape architects and draftsmen. Together, they keep track of the 10 to 15 projects that are under way at any one time.

Normally, Hills personally makes at least six on-site visits per project. Other members of the firm will look in periodically to oversee plans and to carry out the changes that are frequently in order. To help him keep

**New courses completed**

Bonita Bay Club _____	Bonita Springs
Club at Pelican Bay _____	Naples
Coral Oaks Municipal _____	Cape Coral
Countryside at Berkshire (Executive) _____	Naples
Cross Creek (Executive) _____	Fort Myers
Foxfire CC _____	Naples
Gator Trace _____	Fort Pierce
Imperial CC _____	Naples
Ironhorse _____	West Palm Beach
Jonathan's Landing (Old Trail North) _____	Jupiter
Myerlee CC (Executive) _____	Fort Myers
Palmetto Pines CC _____	Cape Coral
Pine Lakes CC (par 3) _____	Naples
Quail Creek CC _____	Naples
Seville _____	Hernando County
Tampa Palms _____	Tampa
The Meadows (Groves walking course) _____	Sarasota
TPC at Eagle Trace _____	Coral Springs
Vista Gardens (Executive) _____	Vero Beach
Vista Royale _____	Vero Beach
Wilderness CC _____	Naples
Willoughby _____	Stuart
Windsor Parke _____	Jacksonville
Wyndemere G&CC _____	Naples

**New courses under construction**

Bonita Bay Club (second 18 holes) _____	Bonita Springs
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**Renovation projects**

CC of Florida _____	Boynton Beach
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**Courses in planning stage**

Collier Tract #22 _____	Naples
The Reserve _____	Port St. Lucie
Wulfert Point _____	Sanibel Island



close contact with projects, Hills relies upon Keith Foster, an ASGCA member and superintendent by training who works out of the Phoenix office, and Mike Dasher, a civil engineer and ASGCS member who works out of Orlando. With all the paperwork that flows through the company, however, nothing goes out the door without Hills lending his hand and giving his approval.

Hills has acquired a reputation for environmentally sound design. Bonita Bay is a good example of integrated wetlands. Here environmental concerns serve not as a detriment but as a plus in the design. The natural-looking beauty of the marshlands is preserved by setbacks that keep the most sensitive areas out of direct play. By using multiple textures of grasses for the rough and surrounds, Hills was able to delineate buffers for wetlands at Bonita Bay. The effect is to have softened the punitive character of the water hazards while drawing upon them to frame each hole.

At Coral Oaks Hills had the task of building a public facility for the city of Coral Springs on a very limited budget. Construction costs as well as subsequent maintenance budgets had to be held down. By specifying in advance the earth-moving requirements and desired gradations in fairways, tees and greens, Hills was able to ensure a close relationship between bids and final costs.

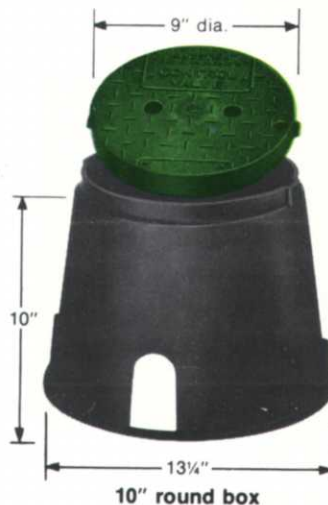
As many architects like to say, once the basic shaping has been done, a wave of the arm here or there to move a mound or change elevations can

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***Hills does not design the kind of “signature hole” which is more suited to being photographed from a helicopter than to being played on the ground.***

cost \$5,000. Hills regularly details a master plan that will determine between 90 and 95 percent of what will actually turn up as the golf course. Greens contours are detailed down to elevation changes of two and a half inches (0.2 feet). The whole plan for Coral Oaks, including clearing and grading, elevations, tee shapes, water bodies, contours and mounding, was then bid out, with Ryan Eastern Inc. of Deerfield Beach finally getting the contract.

Right about the time the bids went out in December, golf course superintendent Don Stewart was brought on board. Throughout the construction process, he served as mediator between the architect and the contractor. By participating in the earliest phases of the golf course, Stewart also was able to consult with the designers on an appropriate maintenance plan.

Coral Oaks was the first golf course that Ryan Eastern had ever built, so special attention had to be paid to communicating the designer's intentions to the earth movers and shapers. By Stewart's account, field rep Dasher visited every two weeks for a day or two. Together they walked the course, kicked stones, consulted on which trees to save, and worked out plans

for grassing and maintenance. They also assessed shot values and sight lines — aspects of courses design that no blueprint can fully anticipate in advance of actual construction.

Ground was broken at Coral Oaks in March, 1987. Hills and Dasher had examined the site from the air, had walked the center-cut lines, and had also consulted topographic maps in determining their routing plan. But because the land had been overgrown with thick Brazilian pepper, the architects could not get a full view of the terrain until the actual clearing began. Only then did they discover the real beauty of the native oak trees on the site.

A few subtle shifts in the placement of fairways and greens sites were needed in order to protect the maximum number of specimen trees. The biggest changes were that the 15th hole was shifted to the west to accommodate a stand of oak, and the 14th hole, originally planned at 325 yards, was shortened so that now it checks in at 283 yards. Hills' view is that “once a par four is short, it doesn't hurt to make it shorter” in order to acquire other assets. By way of compensation, the green at 14 was toughened up a bit in terms of slope and bunkering.

By the time the golf course was planted, Stewart already had a good idea of what it would take to keep Coral Oaks in good shape. The greens

are all Tifdwarf, the tees are 328 bermuda and 419 bermuda was used for the fairways. Sprigging was done by Grassing Unlimited of Tifton, Ga. Appropriately enough, the company finished grassing the golf course on Christmas Eve 1987. The golf course has since proven to be one of the finest presents the people of Cape Coral have ever received.

Hills does not design the kind of “signature hole” which is more suited to being photographed from a helicopter than to being played on the ground. Thankfully, he does not stamp a golf course with a trademark, such as Italian marble bunker walls or lakes that spray champagne. Instead, Hills builds courses that speak for themselves in terms of their design integrity, their accessibility to players of all skill levels, and their maintainability at reasonable annual budgets.

At Coral Oaks Hills has created bunkers that are not ominous. His preference is not to present the sand in an intimidating manner, but rather to build the bunker floor low to the ground and to make a minimum of sand visible. By stretching out bunkers horizontally, Hills creates the illusion of more hazards than actually exist. These bunkers can be maintained readily with mechanical rakes. By rolling down the bunker faces slightly and by altering their pattern around the perimeter, Hills is able to avoid a formulaic look.

His bunkers neither terrify approaching golfers nor make escape from the sand impossible.

The strategic placement of hazards is crucial when building a course for

public play. Sand needs to be used to define appropriate lines of play while not unduly penalizing those who stray from the preferred paths.

At Coral Oaks, for instance, players can run the ball up to every green. When golf courses are designed merely to accommodate the high "target" style of the professional's game, there are too many forced carries over sand and water. When courses are built for all-or-nothing heroic play, there is little tolerance for slack in the maintenance program. Should certain areas not be kept cut down to specifications, the golf course can quickly become unplayable.

Hills knows how to design for maintenance without sacrificing playability. At Coral Oaks this meant working with the superintendent at the outset on issues of greens speed, bunker edging and the contour mowing of landing areas and approaches to the greens.

Municipal golfers have long suffered neglect in this country when it comes to providing quality facilities. The lure of big money tempts many an architect into building glitzy, high-profile resort courses that only the richest private clubs and resorts can afford to maintain. A growing number of PGA Tour players who put their names on the blueprints of new golf courses have little interest in promoting the game from the ground up — for the entry-level and public player.

In this sense, the quite understated approach of Arthur Hills is a welcome relief from the high pressure salesmanship and hype that have come to mark the game today.

Whether at Bonita Bay or Coral Oaks, Hills knows how to work with what is already there. His fee structure and design principles are flexible enough to meet the needs of very different clients. He does not force his design upon the land, and he does not impose his own distinctive style upon an unwilling owner or superintendent.

An attention to detail and to environmental sensitivity, a willingness to work hard and to create quality golf grounds that can be maintained over the long run — these are the trademarks of Arthur Hills.

## Maintenance costs threaten industry, says Maples

Golf course architects must focus on controlling construction and maintenance costs so the cost of play will not become prohibitive, says Dan Maples of Pinehurst, N.C., newly elected president of the American Society of Golf Course Architects.

"The game of golf has experienced a strong surge of interest in the past five years," he said, "and everyone associated with the design, construction and maintenance of golf courses must work to keep the cost of play within reach of the general public.

"We cannot slip back into the image of an elitist sport."

A third-generation member of the Maples family that has played an important role in golf development in the Southeast, the new ASGCA leader has excellent credentials for discussing construction and maintenance

costs.

His grandfather, Frank, was superintendent of construction for Donald Ross at Pinehurst, supervising more than 150 men



Dan Maples

who used mules to work the Carolina sandhills into Pinehurst's first four golf courses.

"My grandfather designed much of the early equipment and was very aware of how the design could be coordinated with maintenance. He taught my father (Ellis), who soon recognized that severe slopes and deep bunkers required hand maintenance, which can escalate costs in today's environment."

Ellis Maples, who was president of the ASGCA in 1974, was a life member of the PGA of America and the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America. He designed and built Pinehurst's fifth golf course.

Ellis' brother, Henson, was superintendent at Pinehurst for 30 years. Other members of the Maples clan include professional golfer Willie and superintendents Joe, Gene, Wayne and Palmer, Jr.

"Donald Ross told my father that he (Ross) probably made a mistake by designing so many courses without the opportunity to review the construction," Dan Maples said. "He told my father that, if he had it to do over again, he would only design courses that he actually could oversee. That's something that all of us should consider in this booming era of golf course development."



Dan worked with his father on about 25 of the 65 courses with which the senior Maples was credited before he died.

"We are well aware of environmental concerns and are taking every precaution to make sure that our golf courses blend in with the environment," said the new ASGCA president. "If wetlands are used for a golf course, other wetland areas are developed so the natural habitat will not be disturbed."

## 2 Palm Beach architects join ASGCA

Two Floridians were among eight golf course architects elected to associate membership in the American Society of Golf Course Architects at the association's annual meeting in Pebble Beach, Calif., this past March.

Jan Beljan of Fazio Golf Course Designers Inc., who also became the second woman elected to membership, and Tom Pearson of Golden Bear International were among the group of new associates who brought the society's total membership to 108. Both firms are located in North Palm Beach.

Alice Dye of Delray Beach, the first female architect so honored, was elected in 1983.

In order to qualify for election, an architect must establish a record of individual work that meets with the approval of his or her peers, who also must deem the candidate "qualified to execute and oversee the imple-

mentation on the ground of his plans and specifications to create an enjoyable layout that challenges golfers of all abilities and exemplifies the highest standards and traditions of golf. He will counsel in all phases of the work to protect the best interest of his client."

The other associates elected this spring were Nai Chung "Lee" Chang, Atlanta; Robert Cupp, Atlanta; Keith R. Foster, Tempe, Ariz.; Tom Marzolf, Greenville, S.C.; W. Bruce Matthews III, Okemos, Mich.; and Mark A. Mungeam, Whitinsville, Mass.

Beljan's courses include Pelican's Nest in Bonita Springs, Windstar on Naples Bay in Naples, Bluewater Bay in Niceville and Gateway in Fort Myers. She also remodeled The Bayou Club at Bardmoor in Largo.

Pearson served as inspector of construction for Bear Lakes in West Palm Beach and Boca Pointe GC in Boca Raton and is credited as co-designer of Ibis-Seminole in Palm Beach Gardens.

Dan Maples of Pinehurst, N.C., was elected president; Thomas Clark of



Jan  
Beljan



Tom  
Pearson

Wheaton, Md., vice president; Arthur Hills, Toledo, Ohio, secretary; and Gerald Matthews, Lansing, Mich., treasurer. Other members of the board of governors include Pete Dye, Jeff Brauer, Keith Evans, Tom Fazio, Bob Graves, Denis Griffiths, Gary Kern and Ed Seay.



Members of the executive committee of the American Society of Golf Course Architects, from left: Tom Clark, Wheaton, Md., vice president; Gerald Matthews, Lansing, Mich., treasurer; Robert Trent Jones Jr., Palo Alto, Calif., immediate past president; Dan Maples, Pinehurst, N.C., president; Arthur Hills, Toledo, Ohio, secretary.

## USGA commits \$3 million to research

The United States Golf Association last month made good on its promise to aid golf's environmental battle by committing \$3 million to research of the subject over the next three years.

Specifically researched will be the effects of fertilizers and pesticides.

The project will be managed by the Green Section Committee with the cooperation of the GCSAA.

The USGA committee which oversees research has been expanded to include recognized authorities from environmental agencies and has been renamed the Turfgrass and Environmental Research Committee.

The USGA also announced plans to appoint a wildlife ecologist specifically to assist golf courses in developing and preserving wildlife habitat.

"Right now, the game is threatened by the lack of knowledge about the environmental impact of pesticides and fertilizers used to maintain golf courses," said USGA President C. Grant Spaeth.

The work will be done by universities throughout the United States, assuring that studies are relevant to a variety of conditions.

Spaeth said the USGA will enter the program with no preconceptions. "We must maintain a position as the honest independent broker," he said.

Studies also will be geared toward the development of alternative and non-chemical pest control, and the influence of golf courses on people and wildlife.

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