

# Forward to the past

## Course architects push for a return to traditional design

By Mark Leslie

"Tradition is history ... and we're adamantly traditional," says golf course architect Gary Panks.

Tradition is on the rebound, says colleague Rees Jones.

"Tradition has been lost," retorts Pete Dye, considered by some the ultimate traditionalist and by others the consummate renegade.

Even as many in the golf world have bemoaned the passing of "traditionally" designed golf courses the last 20 or so years, architects are either returning to that look or redefining the word.

"It's time we kicked out a few windows and let in some fresh air... and go back to tradition," said architect Jay Morrish, who works with former Tour golfer Tom Weiskopf. "Dings, dents and dimples everywhere may be a thing of the past."

The definition of "traditional" itself is critical to the discussion.

Most agree it is defined at least as much by how a course plays as how it looks.

Morrish said the old-time "masters" designed courses to force the golfer to use all his clubs. "You can usually bounce the ball to a portion of most of their greens," he said.

"These architects would allow you to play to your strengths rather than dictate the kind of shots you had to hit to the green. Think of Augusta National and the trouble around the greens. Many times you have three options to play on a hole: You can chip it, pitch it, or put it.

"But on the modern courses, if you miss the green you reach for a wedge... So that was removed, and that is what I refer to as the traditional part of the game."

Jones said, "Basically, the definition of traditional would be that it uses the site as it lays to its optimum rather than forces a course onto the site and builds greens where they shouldn't be built. That's why you have the old traditional courses because when people looked at sites they would look at five or 10 and pick the ideal one... They found the site that was the easiest to build on, that would need the least amount of earth work, that was the most natural in many cases. Today there isn't that much choice of sites."

Jones said the traditional courses "were built in valleys. When you looked for that ideal site you found a receptive landing area. It would



Photo by Bob Spiwak



Photo by Peter Blais

Pete Dye was asked to design PGA West in La Quinta, Calif., above and to the left, to be the toughest course in the world. Features he used to accomplish just that included a sand trap close to 20 feet below the green, and traps that on some holes ran hundreds of yards long.

be a little concave, like the links courses in which they built all the holes in valleys. They contained your shots better. They allowed

you to bounce the ball on (the green) rather than hitting smack into a wall if you hit it short.

"The architects used to build

ramps into the greens. They'd lose their grass in the summertime because they didn't have automatic irrigation and the grasses were

## Some claim developers share 'blame' for circus courses

Developers share the blame with golf course designers for courses loaded with contrived features and that are too difficult for the average golfer, say architects.


"They'll (developers) tell you, 'I want greatest, most beautiful golf course' in the state of Arizona, or Australia, wherever you are," said Gary Panks of Graham/Panks International in Scottsdale, Ariz.

Architect Rees Jones of Montclair, N.J., explained: "Developers are trying to get their courses rated highly. And hard is thought to be good."

In the case of PGA West, for which Landmark Land Co. asked Pete Dye to design the world's most difficult course, Jones said: "That wasn't a bad idea because they have five other courses. And it was the standard-bearer of the project and drew people. But it is not the type of diet you want every day."

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— Rees Jones

mostly poa annua. So if you tried to fly the ball in, the greens were too hard to hold. But if you bounced it in and let it roll in, you were more apt to get on the green.

"They'd protect part of the green with a bunker of hollow and allow you to roll it in on another part of the green... The old-style courses preferred the bump-and-run."

#### WHERE DID THEY GO?

So what happened to those old-style courses?

Paul Fullmer, executive director of the American Society of Golf Course Architects, said: "Sites almost demand some of the changes in design. Oftentimes, architects' only choice is to move earth, build mounds, and create some character. Therefore you end up with a course you could label target golf."

Morrish said the golf course look changed after World War II.

"We had the old-time architects — (A.W.) Tillinghast, (Donald) Ross, (Alister) Mackenzie, George Thomas. Then, after World War II we really had a drought in architects except for Robert Trent Jones Sr., Dick Wilson and Geoff Cornish.

"Then along came a group of others, namely Pete Dye, the Fazio's and, a little later, Nicklaus. They started putting different looks in, but I have never considered any of their looks traditional. Pete is as close to being traditional as anyone, and I guess Tom is. I would not call Nicklaus' look traditional."

Panks, who works with Tour golfer David Graham, another "adamant traditionalist," said, "In the '50s, '60s, '70s and '80s everyone was trying to reinvent the wheel and come up with something different."

Jones agreed, saying many architects in the last 20 years started "creating artificial

plateaus, both to the greens and the fairways, which really almost cut your target in half... They built these vertical walls and unmaintainable features, which led to unplayable conditions. I don't know how that style got into vogue but it seemed to stay in vogue.

"Maybe it came through TPC (Tournament Players Club) or PGA West. But the public outcry was such that from a supply and demand situation, that was not what the public wanted," Jones added.

Dye, whose courses include PGA West (designed specially to be the toughest in the world) and such traditional layouts as The Golf Club of Columbus and Crooked Stick, refuses to take the blame for lost tradition.

He placed it squarely on the heads of improved equipment and the American public's demand for extremely well-manicured courses.

Clubs and balls that add 20 or more yards to drives, and mowing equipment that cuts turf to 32nds of an inch demand that courses be designed longer, Dye said. Bentgrass has replaced bluegrass in many areas. The heavy watering needed on bentgrass leads to softer turf and eliminates the traditional bump-and-run game, he said.

Dye and others contend that the middle and short games have changed because of the greater distance a ball can be hit.

"The courses have become so short to the professional players that all they do is hit an iron off the tee and an 8 iron to the green," Dye said. "So tradition has been lost... You once built two, three or four par 4s out of the 10 (par 4s on an average course) that required the great player to hit a big drive and a 3 or 4 iron to the green. They've taken that part out of the game... I haven't changed. They have. I'm perfect and they're wrong,"



*It's time we kicked out a few windows and let in some fresh air... and go back to tradition.'*

— Jay Morrish

he said with a chuckle.

"We've taken away the shot values ... because we've created a bowling alley effect. Everything's the same — the fairways, the greens... The old Scottish courses had one variety of sand in one bunker, another kind in the next."

"I wonder what Mr. Ross would have done to Pinehurst #2 if he'd known that the greens would be cut at (a Stimpmeter speed of) 10, that Greg Norman was going to fire it off the tee at 310 yards. I wonder if he would have kept it at status quo or plowed the whole thing under and started all over again.

"He might have put the first tee back in the parking lot on the other side of the clubhouse."

"If you're trying to envision a golf course like Mr. Ross had envisioned at Pinehurst, you'd have to add another 500 or 600 yards easily to even come remotely in the same ball game."

Dye did not want to design longer courses. "I had to. I was forced into it," he said.

Average golfers can play the forward tees on his new 7,600-yard Ocean Course on Kiawah Island, Dye said.

He said he designed the course to enhance a bump-and-run game but doubts it will work because of several conditions.

"State-of-the-art in maintenance is to flood these fairways. The only place you can get (hard) turf in our country is in Maine, Vermont, some of Long Island, and northern Michigan, where you can grow fescue on sand. The big problem with bentgrass fairways, which we have in the Midwest and all the way out through California, is the turf is not resilient.

"At Kiawah, we have short grass in front of the greens. They're wide open. At 14 greens you can roll it in. I've even put in Tifdwarf. I've done everything I can to make it look like a

bump-and-run course. But I guarantee that after three or four years, that Bermudagrass will build up enough that it will not work."

Perhaps Dye's work at Kiawah is a precursor of things to come.

"I think what happened for a while was that the frame became more important than the painting," Jones said. "And now we're getting back to making sure the painting is what we're designing."

Jones feels the 1988 U.S. Open, held at the Country Club of Brookline, which he had just remodeled, "may have been the turning point architecturally."

He said the Open showed a course with "basically good routing, rudimentary design using the lay of the land, with greens coming in flush to the fairway quite often, fairly small greens, subtle contours, to some degree open approaches, could still test the best players in the game... It showed you didn't have to have steep banks, super elevated greens and built-in plateaus. You could build courses in the old traditional fashion and they would still be a test."

Curtis Strange said afterward it was nice that 6 under par could win the most important tournament in the world and members could go out and play the same course the next day.

"Golf courses are built to be played every day. That's why we're getting back to the traditional designs. In order to make it viable, even if you're building a public golf course, you have to design it so that people want to play it on a repeat basis," Jones said.

Panks said: "I think we need to be concerned with building courses that are affordable to build, affordable to maintain, pleasant to play, and pleasing to the eye. A lot of the

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## Environmental laws may mandate return to the basics

Environmental laws may cause a "natural evolution" back to the traditional bump-and-run golf courses, some feel.

"There's going to be a natural evolution because of water shortages, which will bring back the bump-and-run," said Gary Panks of Graham/Panks International in Scottsdale, Ariz. Panks explained that golf course superintendents in Arizona, Southern California and elsewhere face water restraints that will probably result in harder, drier courses with more bounce.

Architect Rees Jones agreed, saying: "With more environmental and water restrictions, maybe we won't be able to keep the grass as lush, and the golfer will have that option to roll it on or fly it in."

Panks referred to the Arizona regulation allowing no more than 90 acres of turf and 4.8 acre feet of water per year for courses.



# More architects pushing for return to 'tradition'

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courses that architects are building today are none of the above."

Superintendent Tim Heirs cites architect Tom Fazio's work at Johns Island in Vero Beach, Fla., as an example of how design should be done. He said: "When you start putting in some of these (modern) design features, you're not only talking about a significant cost increase, you're talking about increased liability because you're hand-mowing significant slopes. You're also talking about environmental concerns because some (architects) espouse using certain grasses. And the simple rule-of-thumb is that every time you add a different grass you have to add different chemicals, and that's not the way to be going."

"And when you add severe slopes, you're adding increased potential for runoff... There are severe slopes out here (at Johns Island) but not that many."

## NO MAGIC NEEDED

Panks said "there's no magic" to designing a "traditional" course.

"Augusta National is a great example," he said. "You play from the member tees and it's a wonderful course. All they have to do to challenge the pros is move to the back tees and increase the speed of the greens, and suddenly you have a championship test for the best players in the world."

"And you don't even need rough there. You can add that element of rough on some courses—not penal rough but enough rough so that you put driving accuracy back into the game."

In the areas of the country Dye cited, the bump-and-run game is viable.

Jones said his new Atlantic Club, which will open next year on Long Island, "will keep the approaches dry so the golfer can bounce it in."

Jones said: "I think you'll see a lot of people building more concave fairways rather than convex. And the mounding will be emulating the dunes."

"If we can get away from plateau golf courses so you can have more latitude to miss your shot, that will help. Plateaus cut that landing area in half... My designs penalize the shot to the degree it's missed. That's what this concave, bowl-type design does for you, rather than the convex design..."

Dye said: "If you can just get the member player off the tee, then everyone has the strength to chip or blast around the green. I generally try to keep landing areas open, but not around the green, where they don't need strength."

"You can make anything hard for the members. But to make it hard for the pros about the only thing you can do is throw them another 1,000 yards."

Morrish, whose courses with Weiskopf are winning more accolades each year, said, "We have decided (traditional design) is the route we want to take."

What does it mean?

Using bunkers as an example, Morrish said: "It's a feeling — that windswept, wind-blown feeling. The fingers are twisted, tilted, some high, some low, some coming out of the high points off the green, some out of the low points off the green. They're canted, torqued. This is something that everybody has gotten away from over the years."

Heirs said that at Johns Island, Fazio used roughly 105 acres of a 215-acre site. "And that includes a lot of sand," Heirs said. "Basically all the sand that is in the bunkers is what was out here, both yellow and white."



*"I think we should rework this elevated tee!"*

"We did what they used to do in old-time architecture. Very little dirt was moved (approximately 135,000 yards), and most of that was moved to comply with regulations in terms of building a couple of fairways to a certain elevation."

"The topography is what was already here. Tom designed the course to take advantage of those (58-foot) elevations and the vegetation. We minimized the removal of trees... None of these areas were contrived. They were here. We have not touched them."

While saying only time will tell how far back architects have come toward designing traditional courses, Jones added: "I don't think anyone ought to change. The mix is good."

Fullmer, of the ASGCA, said: "I think it's good to have a little variety in life. That's what golf course architects will give you... There

will always be a few gimmicks around. And that's good, too."

Morrish took a Baskin-Robbins approach to the question.

"I hope everybody keeps doing it the way they're doing it, because I think we need a huge variety," he said. "That's why we have 31 flavors of ice cream — because people like different feels on a golf course. It would be boring if we all tried to do it the same."

"Maybe that's some of the reason people got away from some of that traditional look to begin with."

Morrish said golf design is "very subjective. It's not like building a road where it's either right or wrong. It's always a matter of somebody's opinion. And I have no idea who's right and who's wrong. I think we're all trying to do a good job and make a living. We just are

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— Paul Fullmer

ASGCA executive director

doing a little different things than some of the others."

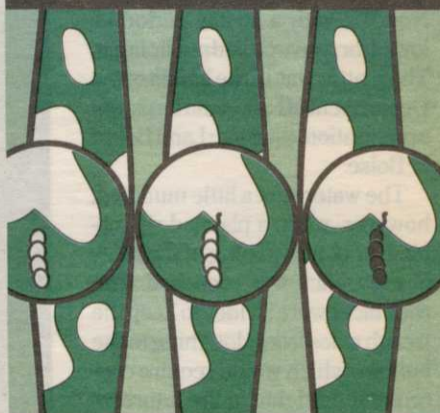
Morrish likened hiring a golf course architect to buying a painting.

"If you like van Gogh, you buy a van Gogh," he said. "If you like Renoir, you buy a Renoir. What you don't do is hire van Gogh and tell him to paint you a Renoir, because he doesn't know how to do it."

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