

# The shape of things to come: The men behind architects' creations

By MARK LESLIE

Part artist, part blueprint follower cum mind-reader, part heavy-equipment operator yet with a soft touch. Golf course shapers are all these things — and more.

"They put the heart and soul into a golf course," Jan Beljan of Fazio Golf Course Designers will tell you.

"They're the prima donnas of our industry. They're crucial to us," said Bill Kubly, president of golf course builder Landscapes Unlimited, Inc.

"You can't overdramatize how important the shaper is," said architect John LaFoy.

"Shapers literally are architects," said Dana Fry of Hurdzan Design Group in Columbus, Ohio. "They often are designing as they go on a bulldozer."

To golfers, the big names are the Nicklauses, Fazios, Joneses, Palmers, Hills, Morrishes and Cupps of the design industry.

To those designers, the big names are the Truman Williamses, Sonny McNeils, Don Thomases, Lewis Stones and Lou Cappellis of the shaping world.

These are the men who fine-tune their creations — who turn two-dimensional drawings and verbal directions into three-dimensional earth forms.

When the Vintage Club decided to do a renovation, the owner asked architect Tom Fazio to make sure he sent shaper Cappelli, who was instrumental in building the original design.

In Puerto Rico they call Cappelli "Louis the Magnifico," Fazio said.

"It shows they like your work and attitude. Workmanship means a lot," said Cappelli, the late George Fazio's personal shaper, who has perhaps worked on more golf courses than any man alive.

"If you do everything else right and you don't have shapers capable of doing what you want, the finished product can be entirely ruined," said LaFoy, of Greenville, S.C. "The final six inches is what the golfer sees."

"With several architects, we get projects because we have certain shapers," Kubly said. "The architects try to instill in the owners the importance of the shapers. A lot of times the owners will say they can get a local earth-mover. 'Why hire shapers?' they ask. It makes a world of difference."

"They can recognize and help you overcome problems, like surface drainage, that you haven't noticed," said architect Ted McAnlis of North Palm Beach, Fla.

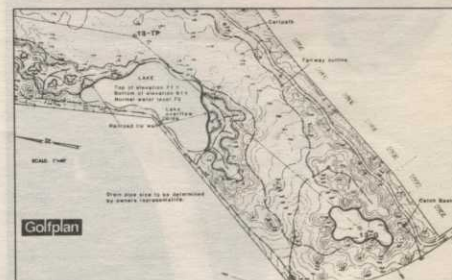


Ponko of Ponko Construction Corp. in Virginia Beach, Va., who worked 10 years for Robert Trent Jones Sr. before forming his own company in 1985, said: "You can only put so much on paper. Someone has to interpret the architect's plans and implement them. You can set everything up with grade stakes with a certain amount of artistic freedom that makes it all work... A topo map can change quite a bit after removing the trees, stumps and topsoil. You're often two feet lower."

Ponko said shapers perform some common sense tasks that make a course work — "such as elongating slopes to fit in with areas you're not disturbing, or taking care of surface drainage that was not indicated on the plans but common sense tells you to surface-drain, or drain to a point."

"You have to have a natural knack," said Marvin Schlauch, who has worked with a number of architects

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Above is an example of a working drawing showing contour sculpturing for an individual hole — provided by Golfplan.

Johnny Christiansen, a shaper for golf course builder Landscapes Unlimited, won the prestigious Building Congress Award for Craftsman of the Year in the Baltimore metropolitan area, for his work on the course at left — Caves Valley. The Craftsman of the Year Award is usually presented to masons who work with their hands. Christiansen receives the award in November. Bill Kubly of Landscapes Unlimited said 12 people from the Building Congress inspected the site of Tom Fazio-designed Caves Valley, the first golf course built in environmentally stringent Baltimore County, Maryland, in 25 years. The project management company explained to them what Christiansen did with the bulldozer to shape the course.

Photo by Hal Phillips

## California wins 'honors' as Toughest State for Permitting

By MARK LESLIE

California is the runaway sweeps takes winner, staking claim to the title of Toughest State in Which To Gain Golf Course Permits.

According to a Golf Course News poll of leading course architects and builders, California is in another zone altogether from other states. The Golden State got far more votes than second-place Florida, third-place New Jersey and fourth-place Maryland.

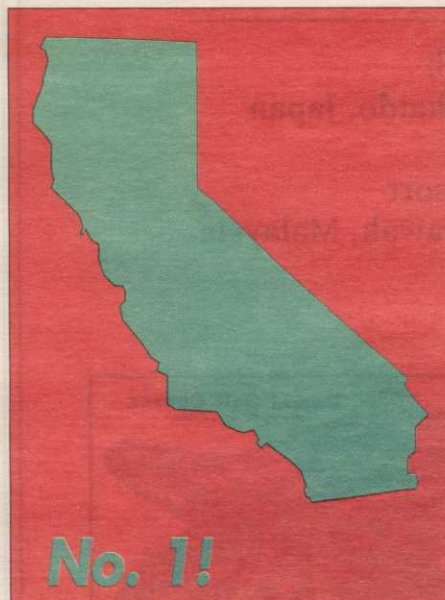
Of the 40 people responding to the questionnaire, 15 tapped California as the toughest, while New Jersey received six first-place votes, Florida five, and Maryland four.

Little consensus was found for easiest permitting state, however, with Texas receiving the most votes among 32 nominees. Nebraska and Louisiana tied for second place.

"It's not 'easy' anymore," wrote architect Clyde Johnston of Hilton Head Island, S.C.

The survey asked for the three toughest and three easiest states. First-, second- and third-place votes garnered three, two and one points, respectively. Among the toughest states, California totaled 62 to Florida's 33, New Jersey's 27 and Maryland's 17.

Voting was so sparse for the easiest states,



that leading Texas had four first places and 17 points. Nebraska had three first and Louisiana one in tying with 12 points apiece.

An intriguing result of the voting — showing that individual experiences can vary widely — is that eight states were named on both lists: Arizona, Connecticut, Georgia,

Michigan, Mississippi, Pennsylvania, Tennessee and Texas (Austin, specifically).

Also interesting was that the two states with the most golf courses — California and Florida — were the two most difficult in which to obtain permits. And Hawaii received only one first-place and four second-place votes — perhaps because so few architects and builders do work there.

### THE FALLOUT

"California. California. California," responded architect Maury Miller of Golf Resources Inc. in Dallas. "No one else comes close."

"Honolulu is tougher. Over there we're not even allowed to ask," joked builder/architect Perry Dye. He added that already difficult California regulations became even tougher when the Coastal Commission increased its power to 10 miles inland because of salt marshes.

Architect Bob Cupp of Atlanta, Ga., and Jay Morrish of Tulsa, Okla., had particularly harsh words for California.

"The inmates are running the asylum," Morrish said. "The Sierra Club has a strong toehold there. I'm not saying they're bad but they're swaying people's opinions. The

Coastal Commission is really difficult to work with. And there is a general group of environmental whackballs who are against everything. They're always malcontent."

"The higher the population the more complex the approval process and the more crazies you have," Cupp said. "You have people who are ultimately determined to be activists ... not to necessarily stand for anything; just to be activists."

Robert Trent Jones Jr., whose worldwide practice is headquartered in Palo Alto, Calif., said "obstacles (in his home state) are far more difficult than any other place in the country."

Speaking of San Mateo County's 17-year effort to build a public course, Jones said: "It's brutal to get anything built there. It's 60-percent open space, but that doesn't matter to the environmental movement or anti-growth people. Getting a permit is like climbing Mt. Everest with tennis shoes."

Dye said: "In California the gnat catcher and San Francisco garter snake are having almost as many rights as people."

"The spotted owl put 500,000 people out of work and we wonder why it's hard to get a golf course built?"

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## Toughest states

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American Society of Golf Course Architects President Arthur Hills of Toledo, Ohio, gave Florida his vote, noting that his concern there is not the difficulty but the "considerable time" it takes to obtain permitting.

Hills said California's coast is important and should be protected, but is very time-consuming. He pointed to one project he is involved in on the Pacific Ocean that has been languishing in the approvals process for 3-1/2 years.

Miller attributed California's attitude to pro-active environmentalists in that state since the 1960s, combined with bad experiences with poorly built homes, and "some things done to the landscape that were unruly."

He added that construction practices at some courses built in Florida decades ago brought about environmental regulations felt today.

Steve Smyers, an architect in Tampa, Fla., said New Jersey is the toughest state and defended Florida.

"Florida's attitude is pro-development," he said. "This is a young and growing state. It has rules and regulations. Abide by them and you'll get the permits. You have to have your act together, so to speak."

Smyers said in Florida all the people reviewing applications are professionals.

That is the opposite of New Jersey. Therein lies the difficulty there and in other Northeastern states, he said. "Town selectmen are reviewing projects, and they are not educated or well-versed in the areas they need to be."

Bureaucrats nationwide were singled out as a problem.

For instance, Baltimore County, Maryland's development regulations were "written by a totally no-growth administration—by bureaucrats whose mission in life is to stop development at any cost," said David Locke, a landscape architect and land planner who is vice president of Daft McCune Walker, Inc.

Hills is optimistic things may change. He said he's not sure the permitting process is getting tougher or longer around the nation.

"Maybe the pendulum has swung as far as it is going to and now we should organize [permitting] in a rational way so there is a procedure to follow to a reasonable conclusion. I think there is always a concern about the environment on the part of all parties, and golf courses are as well-suited to complement those concerns as any form of development," he said.

# It's time to return to old design/build technique

By LISA MAKI

Before the 20th century, few men practiced golf course architecture. St. Andrews, Prestwick, and Carnoustie are relics of the natural links. Mother Nature was their creator, with little assistance from a designer or a builder.

Astounding growth in the game, diminishing ideal terrain, and major technological advances led to the first generation of "golf course architects," practitioners trained in disciplines associated with golf course design, beyond just playing the game. It was a time when brilliant men "designed and built" renowned tributes to golf on both seaside and parkland sites. Golf flourished.

Then came a time when opportunistic developers and lenders appeared. They preyed upon the game's dramatic settings to attract resort guests and real-estate buyers. Funds were liberally dispersed, and monuments were built.

Architects began to realize they were compromising their futures by designing these monuments with vast waste bunkers, radical hazards, geometric features, forced carries and treacherous greens.

Many architects returned to their roots, to design more traditional courses. This resurgence has caused many golf course architects to diminish the distance between office and site, to interact directly with the land as the pioneers of their profession did, to practice Design-Build.

*Lisa Maki is president of Golf Design Services of Round Hill, Va. She was a golf course designer/project manager with Links Design, Inc. of Lakeland, Fla., from 1984-1989.*



*Bilberry Inc. and Golf Design Services International Inc. built Stoneleigh Golf Club in Round Hill, Va., using the design/build technique*

Robert Trent Jones, dean of modern architecture, practices as his forefathers did. He believes it is necessary to control not only the design, but also the building of a project. Thus, the family owns and operates "Design-Build" companies. Robert Sr. once made the following statement in reference to his Design-Build company, "You have to do that [design and build] or you don't come up with what you are after."

His son Rees concurred, stating that "the hardest part [in designing a golf course] is transferring the idea from the architect to the builder and having it come to the satisfaction of everyone."

Pete Dye is another practitioner of the "Design-Build" approach. He refers to himself as a job foreman, overseeing both design and construction. He is a creator of golf courses, cut straight from the hip-boots-in-the-much mold, often routing and rerouting courses in the field. Dye believes he "develops the best possible course, faster, for less money using the Design-Build

approach."

As Rees Jones and Dye affirmed, no matter how talented a golf course architect is, it is impossible to create a flawless three-dimensional design when working in a two-dimensional medium of pen and paper, or even digitizer and monitor. Inevitably, alterations to the design must be made on site in response to actual conditions. A Design-Build company can implement these changes quickly and economically, virtually eliminating the dreaded Change Order, as this approach allows for flexibility within a fixed budget.

What other benefits are there for the Design-Build client?

- There is single contract for a fixed price.
- Solid budgets enable job costs to be determined from start to finish.
- There is efficiency in dealing with one firm (no overlap of budgets or schedules and changes can be implemented faster).
- Clients' needs are transmitted to one person responsible for the

## Commentary

project.

- Communications are good, therefore the need for final drawings is reduced.
- Information is shared about project intentions, needs, materials and labor costs.
- The efficiencies gained in the process allow the client to become a major player in the design process, and to have more control over the entire process.

- The designer and the builder have cross-purpose goals (not just designer-beautiful and contractor-profitable). The credibility of each side enhances the other. Their entire reputation is invested in the job from creation through construction.

The Design-Build legacy has been preserved by a number of the esteemed architects. They are not typical golf course designers, in the fixed role of professionals who produce designs and supervise their execution. Instead, they own and operate businesses that provide both design and construction services. They are not considered unprofessional, or undesirable, or suspected of adjusting their rates of service and costs of materials.

Unfortunately, Design-Build is not the norm in the profession. Designers practicing it are often looked upon as black sheep. Why shouldn't the more budget-conscious developer have access to the same scope of services as the affluent developer? Today's tight markets necessitate cost-effective alternatives. Perhaps, developers should consider a historic approach to designing and building courses, as a novel solution to providing an on-time, on-budget, quality product.

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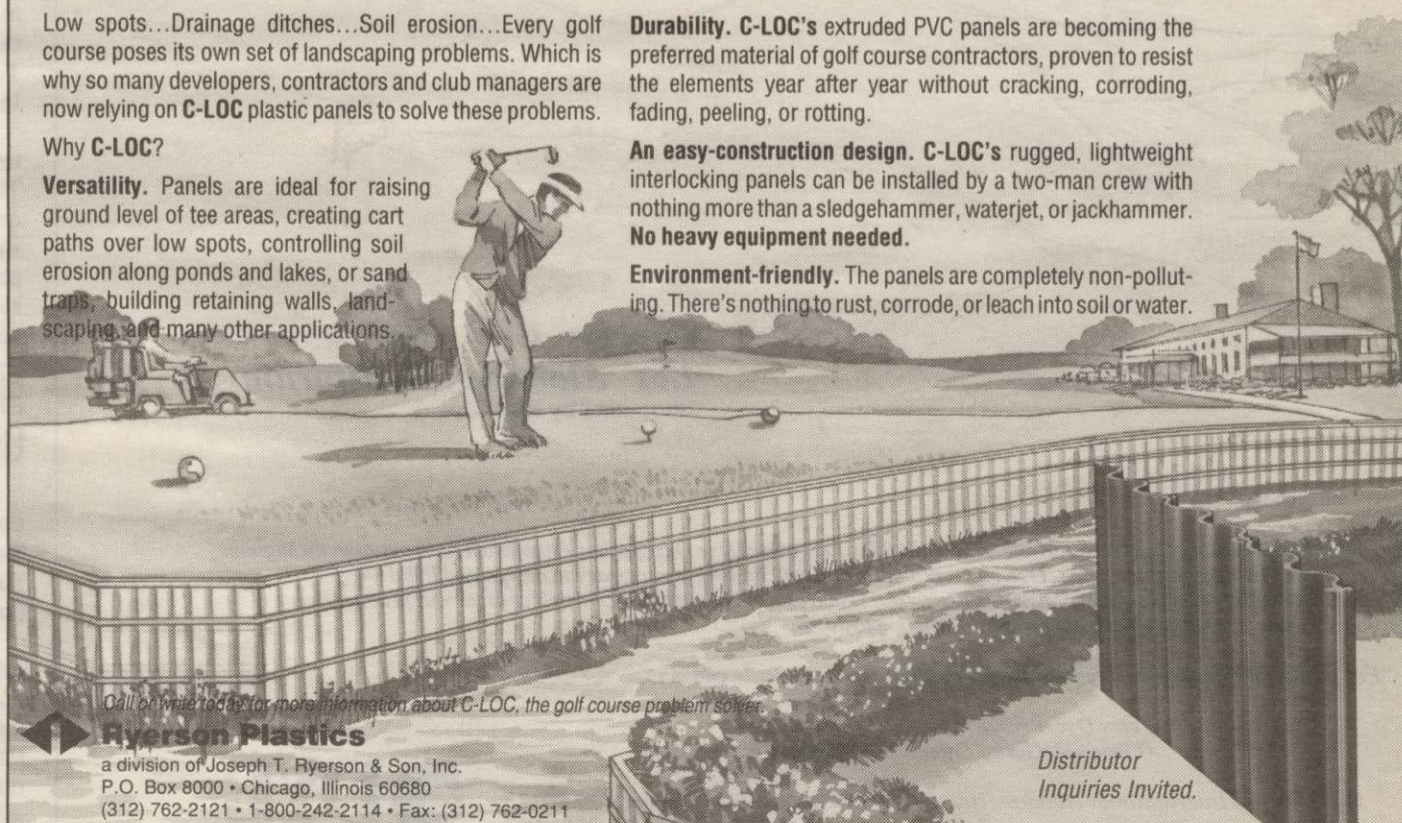
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