

Novice course architects have firm beliefs on design

By MARK LESLIE

Golfer-friendly, eco-friendly and economic — that's what novices in the design game believe in.

"I want to make sure I've used as many of the natural features as I can," said William Bradley Booth. "I want to enhance those features, as opposed to being contrary to them... I want the shot values to feel natural, too."

At Austin, Texas' new municipal course, designer Randy Russell will use 57 acres of manmade lakes as "wet ponds to filter out nutrients and pesticides if we make any mistakes." The course will be irrigated with reclaimed water. Prairie buffalograss, which requires little or no irrigation, will be planted in the roughs.

Environmental and natural sensitivity was tantamount at Tidewater Golf Club and Plantation in North Myrtle Beach, S.C., which has five holes on the Intercoastal Waterway and four on the ocean

inlet at Cherry Beach.

"Golfers [at Tidewater] are going to feel at peace, at harmony with nature, not like they're out in a violent ocean," said designer Ken Tomlinson.

Booth described his design philosophy as "naturalized."

"I like to see things blend. I think some of the greatest architects were able to make their courses look natural, but were also very subtle," said the Maine man, who described himself as a "foot-to-soil" designer.

"A lot of people can do a routing just looking at a contour map. But I find those to be very contrived golf courses. This particular site is extremely hard. It's a woodland site with an elevation change of almost 200 feet. When you have that kind of elevation movement, it's very difficult to find golf holes. And unless you put foot to soil you really can't know what it's going to feel like once you get a golf hole out there."



W. Bradley Booth

Tomlinson said: "My philosophy is, if it doesn't make sense don't do it. Tidewater has no buried elephants or chocolate drops. I tried to make it look like I didn't do anything — like it naturally flowed. In some places it didn't. I'm proud of the 3rd and 4th holes along the marsh. They were as flat as a pancake, so we had to work in some areas to make it look natural."

Tomlinson sees balance as crucial to his design. "I want to see if a hole is asymmetrical — in balance, but done so because of a mixture of shapes and forms," he said. "I think you're born with

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— W. Bradley Booth

that ability. I can look at a fairway or green and tell if it's in balance. You can't take credit for that."

Good golfers, all, these designers know another important factor to architecture: how to execute great golf shots.

"You have to know how to hit great golf shots in order to design great greens to reward the very best golf shot. That's the scientific part of the playing strategy," Tomlinson said.

"Every single shot at Tidewater is there for a purpose. You can elect to hit it to a place you get rewarded on the next shot, or you can bail out. But

I'm going to force you to have a good time. What appears off the tee to be an easier, safer place, could get your blood pumping on your next shot.

"I think I'm in a vast minority in that regard. Architects I've talked to say people don't want a hard golf course. If they shoot 80 at home they want to be able to shoot 80 elsewhere. I don't believe that. I think it's a game, it's for fun and I want to get their blood pumping."

Russell said his maintenance background is very important. "A well-maintained course will hide a lot of design flaws," he said. "If an architect gives a superintendent a lot of problems in order to make a course dramatic, the superintendent is left trying to make it look nice."

"On the other hand, it's going to be a dull world if you strive strictly for maintenance. You have to strike a balance and that's determined by the use."

For some, course design is a dream come true, for some it 'just happens'

Continued from page 23

would love that look and feel. I saw courses people were building today. They were wonderful. But I don't like manmade obstacles. I wanted to make sure people liked my course and would play it. And, rather than asking celebrities to change their style of architecture while I was paying them, this was more simple."

Asked if he were going to design another course, the practical Tomlinson said: "It's a mistake that I haven't designed another here at Myrtle Beach. It would have networked well businesswise."

Although he likes the idea of working for himself ("I got paid very well."), Tomlinson said that "without question" he would design another course — in an area that does not compete with his.

"I've enjoyed what I've done very much," he said. "Now that I've done it and sacrificed as much as I have to learn the technical aspects, it makes sense from a business standpoint to do it, especially here. People would say, 'Let's see what this crazy lawyer has done this time.'"

What about elsewhere? "That, I would love to do. For someone who would appreciate the natural look of Tidewater," he said.

Tomlinson does admit to other reasons than business for wanting to put his fingerprint on another tract of land.

"It's lasting. Most of my life has been spent in generating money. Once you spend it, it has no lasting effect. A golf course is there forever," he said.

NOT A NEW GAME FOR RUSSELL

The idea of designing a municipal golf course for his employer — the city of Austin, GOLF COURSE NEWS

Texas — was a welcome challenge for Russell, division manager of operations for parks and maintenance.

Russell put his turf management degree to work with O.M. Scott and for five years with [Ron] Kirby-[Gary] Player and Associates. He then joined Austin's payroll 15 years ago. He said he had input into design concepts with Kirby-Player, but mostly field work.

When Austin decided to reclaim a 194-acre sewage treatment plant property, the golf advisory board decided to keep project costs down and name someone inhouse to design the course.

"It sounded like the most fun," Russell said. "I have done a couple of small remodeling jobs on my own out here — one to correct drainage problems, and a full-scale remodeling of Swope Park in Kansas City."

Russell said the board also believed he "understood golf in Austin and we'd get the right kind of course... Having operated golf courses, I have an added perspective: making the course maintainable and fitting it to your clientele and purpose. Golf course architects know that and understand that. But it's harder to relate to unless you've worked on the other side. I've been a pro, an architect and an operator."

Does Russell envision Austin's new course, on which construction began in mid-October, as a springboard to a new career?

"It depends on how this one comes out. If it's successful, like I hope and think it will be, I wouldn't rule that out," he said. "Getting the first one in the ground is crucial, and 'remodels' don't do that. As for a career change? I'd think about it very seriously. There's no question

I'd enjoy doing it. The other question is, could I make a career doing it?"

BOOTH TAKES PLUNGE

A career is exactly what Booth intends to make out of designing — and earth hasn't even been turned on his first job.

A club assistant pro 20 years ago and the owner of the turf management company, Lawn Technologies, in York, Maine, Booth said course design "has been a life-long ambition of mine and probably of a lot of people. But I've felt I had the talent for it. The thing about golf course architecture is, you need the first one."

"Many people get to the point in their financial careers where they can do it themselves. I was never in that position. So I feel very fortunate to have an opportunity — and an opportunity in my backyard to boot."

The developer of The Ledges in York heard that Booth had remodeled the 18th hole at York Golf and Tennis Club while he was green chairman. "He called me in. We interviewed. He liked my philosophy (I'm a very foot-to-soil person — foot-to-soil). And he hired me," Booth recalled.

Ground should be broken on The Ledges next spring.

Booth gives major credit to his "mentor," former American Society of Golf Course Architects President Geoffrey Cornish of Amherst, Mass. "Geoff came in for a consultation at York Golf and Tennis Club," Booth said. "When we asked him to remodel the 18th hole he looked at me and said, 'I think you should do that.'"

Cornish has continued to help Booth. Booth took the Cornish-Robert Muir Graves golf course design class at Harvard University, and Cornish has advised on routing and other specifics.

DEMANDING JOB

Golf course design is taxing physically as well as mentally, and that is exacerbated when you don't have scientific background, these three found.

"I studied night and day," Tomlinson said. "I may have learned more in the last eight years about golf courses than others do in a lifetime because I worked so hard. And I had a lot of help. I talked to everybody. I constantly relied on the USGA [United States Golf Association] and its books for help. Now I'm on

the USGA Green Section Committee."

Golf course architects are not overpaid, Tomlinson added. "If I were trying to build \$1 million homes, a Nicklaus or Palmer name, for instance, would sell them. If you want to appeal to the more affluent market, I can't imagine going any other way."

"I think you just have to evaluate each instance. You can't generalize. There were times when I would have loved to have Rees or Bobby [Robert Trent Jr.] Jones, or [Jack] Nicklaus there to help me."



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