

Q&A: The century's best architects

Who do you think are the top five architects of the 20th century? Ben Crenshaw has his thoughts.

"I'd have to start with [Donald] Ross, [A.W.] Tillinghast and [Alister] Mackenzie," he said. "I would have to include Charlie [C.B.] Macdonald. I might put Harry Colt in there. It's tremendously difficult to leave some people off that list. How do you leave out Perry Maxwell, or [Englishman] Herbert Fowler?"

Crenshaw's course design partner Bill Coore added: "If you asked who influenced or guided course architecture, I would choose those names. But if you asked who had greatest impact, Pete Dye has to be up there with any of them."

"If you ask about 'influential,' Bill is right," Crenshaw said. "No question, Pete and Robert Trent Jones Sr., too. Those were the dominant guys. Mr. Jones, starting in the 1950s and 1960s, and, from the mid-1970s through the 1980s, everyone was influenced by Pete in some way. Whether they agreed with him or not, he shaped what was happening in terms of golf architecture more than any other person."

So, if all these people were alive today, who would Crenshaw hire to design a course?

"I can never put Ross or Tillinghast over Mackenzie or Macdonald," he said. "Can you do a composite?"

But Coore said he would hire Mackenzie. "He was so artistic," he said. "And on top of that he got some of the most fantastic pieces of land — Cypress Point, Royal Melbourne, Crystal Downs... To get extraordinary sites like that and to work them as he did, along with Perry Maxwell and the others who worked with him, is incredible. And they not only work for golf, but from an artistic standpoint are as inspiring as any courses."

The Ryder Cup, the Country Club and Carnoustie

With the British Open at Carnoustie in Scotland in the recent past, and looking ahead to the Ryder Cup at The Country Club in Brookline, Mass., where he would captain the U.S. team in September, Ben Crenshaw was asked to compare the two designs.

"I opted not to play in the British Open this year," he said. "But I have played Carnoustie. And The Country Club is so entirely different. Carnoustie was a very difficult course before this year. The setup [for the Open] was amazing. It was unbelievable to watch it on TV. A links course like that, to me, should have a little more room to play. My gosh. So far as the shot values, Carnoustie remains one of the toughest courses in the world. The Country Club is a totally different proposition. Bill Flynn and Howard Toomey were two wonderful architects. It is very natural and they have beautifully depicted shot values on that terrain. Their bunkering is wonderful — the positions, the things you are required to do with the ball, the contouring. You feel you are playing against New England terrain."

Carnoustie has always been a harsher test of golf. There are some very difficult holes at The Country Club, but it's pleasurable and thought-provoking, too."

Asked which type of course favors Americans and which their opponents, Crenshaw replied: "Most people would say we need a straightforward American golf course. But that was the way Oak Hill [in Rochester, N.Y.] was set up, so I don't really know these days. There's no doubt about it: Whoever gets the best feel for the golf course will come out on top. It's always a question of how quickly you adapt to those conditions."

"It's so terribly subjective. If the Ryder Cup match were staged at St. Andrews, we've had some outstanding performances there. You drive yourself nuts thinking about it, what has worked, and what future sites should be. That's the fascinating thing about golf. No matter what battleground you have to play, you have to prepare hard."

Did Crenshaw have any input about how The Country Club will be set up?

"The only thing I said was that somewhat minimal rough would lend itself to more exciting match play," he said. "There are more choices to be made playing into those smallish greens. The bottom line is, their team and ours have their hands full playing that golf course."

"By the same token," said Crenshaw, "Charlie Macdonald and Seth Raynor did courses that remain in your memory long after you experience them. They did things in the grandest scale. The National is a fabulous piece of art, but the ideology behind it was to elevate, in Raynor's mind, what he thought golf architecture in this country was in the very beginning. He tried to lace it with a flavor of the British Isles, which was tried-and-true principles."

Asked which of these men had the most

profound effect on his own style, Crenshaw replied: "I don't think there was anyone more artistic, or who did more supremely natural work than Mackenzie. He preached it, but he did it. Perry Maxwell did it as well. They both worked with the land as much as anybody. We try awfully hard to do something that remotely resembles nature. That's the aim of everyone."

"We try hard in green detailing and bunkers. Those are the two most integral parts from an aesthetic standpoint."

Green, Aaron and Mahaffey team up

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namment play was to bring in the guys who have been winning the tournaments."

The nine by Green, Aaron and Mahaffey will have distinct identities reflecting the styles and experiences of each man.

Green, a 19-time winner during his 26 years on the PGA Tour, worked with Fuzzy Zoeller in designing the Tournament Players Club at Southwind in Memphis, Tenn.

"I've tried to utilize my experience from playing some of the best courses around the world — to create a course here at Glenview that is challenging, yet memorable for those who will play it," Green said. "The greens will be large enough to accept a shot and open enough in the front to allow for a golfer to run the ball on to the green."

"In the end, there should be enough variety to bring the players back again and again, and I feel we've been able to accomplish this with my golf course."

"I feel very proud with the results of my course at Glenview," he said. "There is plenty of variety throughout, with a good change of direction on each hole. We've incorporated some water features and trees in the strategy to provide a challenging yet aesthetically pleasing experience for the golfer."

"As part of my design philosophy, I tried to incorporate a strategy that would accommodate all skill levels of golf," said Mahaffey. "My intentions were to design a course that is enjoyable for high-handicap players, yet under the right conditions, challenge the better players."

"I feel the course is aesthetically pleasing and detailed enough to eliminate complacency for those who will play. Golf should be fun and enjoyable — and, in the end, an experience you want to repeat."

The three are scheduled to play the course at a grand opening set for Nov. 30.

Q&A: Crenshaw & Coore

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meaning keen and fast — the distance has so much effect that the shot values are a little bit lost and the defense is reduced. That's sad.

GCN: Have you been asked to design any Tour-type courses?

Coore: We have had the opportunity, but circumstances did not permit it. But designing those types of courses probably is not our strength. If someone asked us to design just a very difficult golf course, we would encourage them to speak to someone else. Our courses are more based on detail and strategy that requires play and the correct club selection. We try to do courses that are challenges for the best, but we try to accomplish that with the detail work, like placement of greens and bunkers. We give people options of playing around hazards. In most instances you have to risk the hazards in order to get the best shot to the green and score well.

GCN: Do you and owner Dick Youngscap intend to add 18 holes at Sand Hills?

Coore: There's always talk. But I don't know that it will ever happen. People think we can just drop holes anywhere out there, but there's more to it than that. It's the old adage: Sometimes less is more. ▶

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