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DEFINING AN ARCHITECT

In previous columns, I've written about professional golfers being called golf course architects. Alert readers know I don't consider most of them architects, which begs the question, "What's a golf course architect?"

The American Society of Golf Course Architects defines the term in its membership process as the person most responsible for the final form, look, character, etc., of the golf course via the routing, plans and field work. The architect must possess a unique combination of artistry, engineering, knowledge, training and experience in all (or most) of the disciplines required to take an idea from concept through construction, including:

Golf, golfers and golf history – Most architects study historic golf courses to learn the game's strategies, shot values and subtleties. We know how it's played by the best and the worst. We make realistic design decisions based on the understanding of the limits of players and equipment. We also know club members and club politics well through our experiences and help guide everyone involved through an emotional process.

Landscape architecture – Architects are often trained in landscape architecture, which has close parallels to golf course design, including land sculpture to create visually appealing courses. Aesthetically pleasing courses are most likely designed by someone with rare God-given artistic flare who chooses to apply that flare to golf course architecture. It's difficult to put a dollar value on artistic flare, but it's a necessary part of great golf design that most people don't have.

A professional design also means creating a technically sound golf course with properly built greens, tees and bunkers, effective drainage and turf, proper safety buffers, good circulation and dozens of other items that few golfers realize are important but which must be incorporated into the design seamlessly.

In addition to basic design skills, golf course architecture requires substantial knowledge in areas such as:

Environmental science – Well-designed courses are compatible with nature, properly feature and preserve natural landscape surroundings, and meet stringent environmental codes and regulations.

Civil engineering – Translating great design ideas into reality requires knowledge of surveying, land planning, site design, construction regulations, aerial photography and topographic maps, irrigation hydraulics, pumps and piping systems. The old axiom of "drainage, drainage, drainage" applies, and golf course architects can plan drainage that keeps the course in play and meets environmental guidelines. Even cart paths – so distracting and yet so integral to modern golf – require experience and thought to properly lay out for aesthetics and convenience.



Agronomy – An architect must provide a golf course superintendent with the right tools in terms of irrigation, drainage and soil mixes to provide optimum conditions, and must understand agronomy and water quality.

Cost estimating – Sooner or later, a project comes down to money. Using knowledge gained from past projects and specific plans and specifications for a project, an architect can present realistic budgets nec-

essary to obtain adequate financing, often with great accuracy early in the process.

Contracts, plans and specifications

– Few businesspeople would undertake multimillion dollar ventures without proper contracts, and golf course construction is no different. Golf course architects create detailed plans and specifications covering all phases of golf construction to protect a club's interests. They assist with negotiating the best possible terms and price with contractors who have more experience in these contracts than a typical club.

Project management and construction – Proposing designs that can be built cost effectively and regular construction monitoring for quality control require an understanding of golf construction components, including heavy earthmoving. To minimize down time and optimize grassing windows, project scheduling also is critical to success.

While great players, average players, superintendents, club managers, historians, committee members, contractors and suppliers can make valuable contributions to golf course development, all have limited perspectives, and none has the aforementioned skills. Through professional training and experience, architects use those inputs to create realistic, quality and long-lasting designs and construction specifications that work well in all aspects, either using their own design ideas or acting as the musical conductor to orchestrate the members of the band to move the project in the right direction.

It's difficult to measure, but architects earn their fees by avoiding mistakes or unsatisfactory designs that often require rebuilding, providing competitive bids from contractors to assure the lowest qualified price and monitoring construction to assure the client gets all he paid for. It's more likely the client will enjoy years of trouble-free golf and spend less money long term.

The best way to save money is to use a golf course architect to design and head a construction project, rather than saving design fees and paying later for unsatisfactory designs and construction projects. **GCI**