

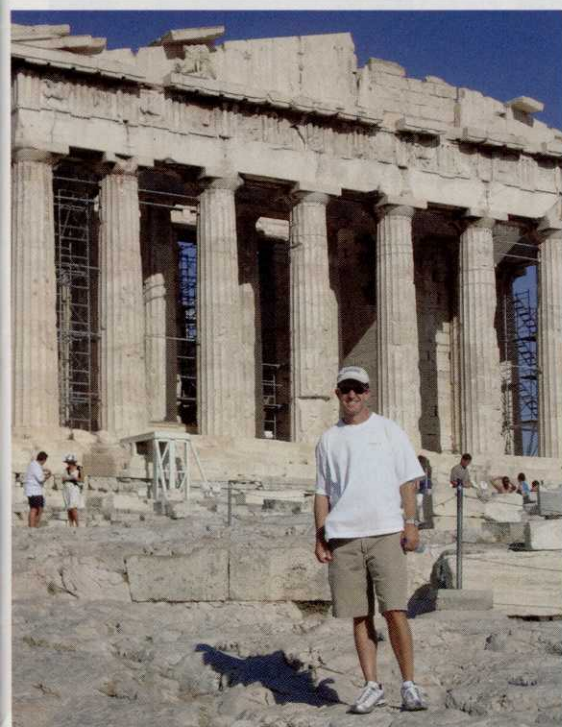
As the architecture business in the U.S. and Europe has withered and died the past five years, business has boomed in Asia. giving Dana Fry the opportunity to see the world.



By Pat Jones

Go East, Young Man

Lots of architects are traveling to Asia to find work. Dana Fry is moving there.



The legendary bank robber Willie Sutton was once asked by a reporter why he robbed banks. He famously replied, “Because that’s where the money is.”

Dozens of golf course designers are following Sutton’s philosophy as the architecture business in the U.S. and Europe has withered and died the past five years. They are following the money to Asia, where course development in China, Vietnam and India is booming.

That said, doing business in these developing regions can be tougher, riskier and even more dangerous than sticking up a bank. Stories of unpaid bills, institutional corruption and even physical threats abound when these itinerant architects get together over a beer or two.

Our friend Dana Fry has been globetrotting for the past two years to reinvent Hurdzan Fry Environmental Golf Design as a leading international firm. For him, that led to a decision to not just travel to Asia, but to move there.



Fry is now living in Hong Kong but working extensively in China and across Asia. That's a complete turnaround from just five or six years ago when his partner Dr. Mike Hurdzan told me they really weren't that interested in international work. Things do change, don't they?

His story to now is similar to many leading designers. Loved the game, good player, discovered architecture sort of by accident and then found a career in it. Fry's best works include Calusa Pines (arguably the best course in south Florida that gets little recognition), Devil's Paintbrush in Toronto and, of course, Erin Hills, the site of the 2017 U.S. Open.

We were curious about why Fry would leave Columbus,



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Ohio, and completely reinvent his life and his business in Asia. The answer was, in one word, passion. When you're completely passionate about one thing – golf course design – you do whatever it takes to pursue that passion. Even when it's 5,000 miles from home.

We caught up with Dana via e-mail due to the difficulties of a phone interview halfway across the globe. Here's what he had to say.

How'd you first get started in this crazy business?

I was playing golf at the University of Arizona and met Andy Banfield, one of Tom Fazio's lead designers, who got me interested in the idea. I worked for Fazio as a shaper from 1983 through 1988. I then went to work for Dr. Michael Hurdzan. I became a partner in 1996. Currently, we have projects under contract and in different phases of design and development: 12 in China, two in South Korea, two in Thailand, Indonesia, Vietnam, two in Italy, France, Costa Rica and two in Brazil.



Fry: "The sights and experiences have been fantastic, but what I cherish the most are the great friendships I have developed all over the world."

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What prompted the final decision to relocate?

In 2006, 100 percent of our income was in North America. In 2008, more than 80 percent was outside of North America. Now more than 90 percent of our income is from outside of North America. Most of that income is from Asia. It was an obvious decision from that standpoint.

How hard was it to make the decision?

It was very difficult. I seriously thought about this move for two years. Luckily, my kids are all grown up and in college. It's very difficult for my wife, but she does realize that to keep things going it will be much easier if I have a full-time presence in Asia. I will move to Hong Kong full-time starting April 1, 2011.

We've followed your travels on Facebook and it seems like it's been amazing.

What's it been like in reality?

The sights and experiences have been fantastic, but what I cherish the most are the great friendships I have developed all over the world. To see first-hand these incredible places and to hear from folks in person what their countries have gone through have been very eye-opening. Like most Americans I used to think the world revolved around us but I now realize that we really are just a part of a global community. I will take these experiences with me forever. My opinions about the world, other people and their cultures have been changed forever.

What are the big lessons you've learned about doing business in Asia?

By far the most important thing I have learned is how important it is to make friends first with potential clients. Business comes later. In some cases it takes several months or longer and many meetings, dinners, etc., before business is even discussed. Golf in the U.S. is also relationship-driven, but not nearly like it is here.

What are the opportunities for superintendents in China?

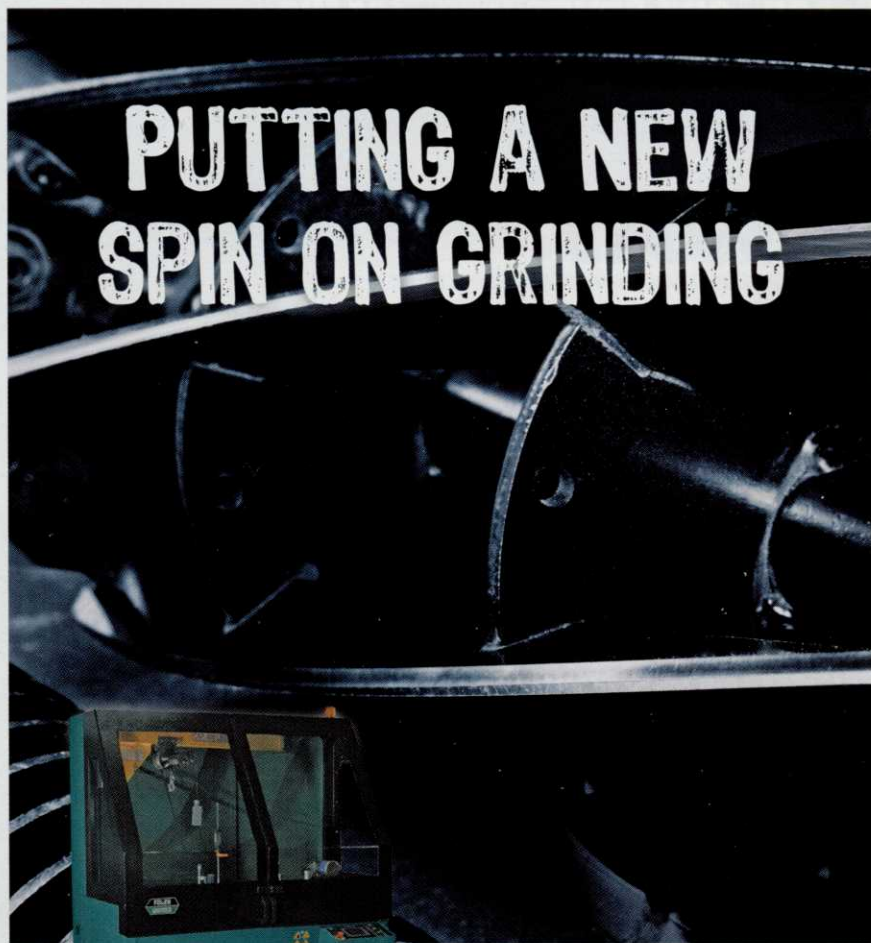
The opportunities are there but breaking into the business in China is not easy. Getting your foot in the door is tough but once you're in there are lots of opportunities.

What caveats do you have for people rushing over there to work?

Good luck. Anyone who thinks they will just make a trip or two over, send a few emails and then sign a deal... well, good luck! It takes a major commitment to succeed in China. I have spent more than 30 weeks each year in Asia for over four years now... and I still don't feel that was enough. It is very important to the Chinese and other Asians that you have a full-time presence. I feel the commitment I am making will cement that commitment and help us secure more work. I love the energy in China right now and I'm tremendously excited to be a part of it.

How does the process work?

In most cases the architect is not involved in the permitting in jobs in Asia. In most cases the projects are negotiated and done behind closed doors. I'm kind of glad I'm not part of that process. I can only imagine the things



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that are done by clients to help get their jobs permitted.

How have you and Mike regrouped the firm in response to all the changes?

It has not been easy on any of us. Most the people working for us have been with us for years. We consider them family and we both agreed that we would do whatever we could to keep all of us together. For me that has meant a great deal of travel. For Mike it has meant more travel than he wanted at this stage in his life. There's obviously been financial pressure and, for the guys in the office, it has meant cranking out plans in a very quick fashion to keep our clients happy. At times it is very stressful on all of us but it has also been very exciting. There are new twist and turns around every corner. Stay tuned! GCI

“I never dreamed in my entire life I would travel and see the places I have the last few years.” – Dana Fry



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