



PASSING THE TORCH

With the passing of Geoff Cornish on Feb. 10, we lost our last link to golf course architecture's Golden Age of Golf Course architecture, and intimate knowledge of all golf design eras as researcher and co-author of "The Architects of Golf" with Ron Whitten.

Despite his historic knowledge of design, Cornish's courses reflected the practical needs of his clients more than golf's historic roots. He designed more for the present and future to create affordable and profitable courses.

While Trent Jones, Dick Wilson – and later, others – grabbed headlines, Geoff spent a career delivering what he preached – solid and playable courses, flying under the radar, and yet, responsible for much of the golf in New England and introducing perhaps over a million golfers to the game.

As Geoff's last partner, Mark Mungeam, ASGCA, said: "He was a true gentleman and had wealth of knowledge on golf design and golf in general. He brought so much to public golf as he wanted to create courses that people could really play. Golf, especially in New England, would not be the same without him."

Geoff sent many letters to those in the business, and I got a letter from him just months before his death, asking me to address an issue in my GCI column. I am only happy to pass on his wisdom. He wrote, in part:

I am sure that sooner or later we will have to address this profound problem.

Long ago ROBERT TRENT JONES said "golf course architects have made it a game of relaxed recreation and limitless, enjoyment for millions and a demanding examination of exacting standards for those who seek to excel".

Since then, course architects have made golf courses the most beautiful large landscapes ever created by our species. Yet these beautiful creations are somehow discouraging beginner and forcing older players to give up the game.

Introducing the subject verges on the traitorous in light of what course architects have wrought. Yet ECONOMICS dictates that we in THE AMERICAN SOCIETY OF GOLF COURSE ARCHITECTS must do so.

If Geoff swore (and he didn't — in fact, he was the type you would have your kids hang around hoping some of his class would wear off on them) the "short

version" would be, "We make golf courses too damn hard!"

Geoff wrote of the "design triangle": playability, maintenance and aesthetics. He believed every design should address each appropriate to a course's proposed function (entry level, public, club, etc.) Most Cornish courses boasted a balanced triangle, often favoring ease of maintenance and playability by average golfers. Of course, working mostly in scenic New England, aesthetics were usually a natural "given" and he took advantage.

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I haven't heard the phrase "design triangle" lately, and too many recent designs lean towards playability (for good players) and aesthetics, while under valuing maintenance concerns. That I have several bunker reduction projects right now speaks to the fact that current architects have largely ignored the practicality which Geoff knew was so important to "permanence."

I believe he was distressed that my generation of architects largely kicked his core beliefs to the side of the road, favoring "tournament tough," "highly aesthetic" and sometimes, technically poor and difficult maintenance designs, all in the name of designer awards, visual excitement and instant impact over concern of how they affected golfers every day for a long time.

At the height of the golf boom, we viewed some of his and his contemporaries' work as "pedestrian." However, some newer courses have proven less popular, and have suffered renovation or abandonment while his courses soldier on, still feeling as comfortable as an old sweater. His style is coming back in fashion.

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All of those things are a great legacy any architect would be proud to have. **GCI**