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GOLF'S GRAND DESIGN

One of the American Society of Golf Course Architects ongoing missions is to foster public awareness of the profession. In August, they unveiled their newest effort, and hit a home run. Both Golf's Grand Design, the Public Broadcasting television special and the companion book of the same name are excellent additions to the field of golf course architecture. Both chronicle the stories of the surprisingly small cadre of golf architects over more than a century in America.

The project was the brainchild of current ASGCA President and Golf Digest writer Ron Whitten, who worked with WNET, the PBS affiliate in Buffalo, N.Y., to make the program, with funding by the Robert J Stansky foundation and support from the ASGCA foundation. Over the years, ASGCA has produced technical papers, articles and books about the profession, but TV is obviously the biggest media available used to date. The fact that PBS was interested in showcasing golf course architecture speaks volumes to the awareness that has come to golf architecture.

The show premiered on Aug. 3 in most markets, but several aired it later in the month. If you missed it, the PBS website has many related clips – mostly interviews with architects like Nicklaus, Doak, Fazio, Cupp, Coore, Crenshaw and David Mclay Kidd.

The show is an hour-long recap of the leading movements and ideas, together with the short lived fads in American golf course architecture. It touches on how the craft emerged and grew in America, starting with the early Scots and English who knew the craft and taught their local assistants, who gained experience and eventually struck out on their own. It covers the transformation to American architects like Charles Blair McDonald,

Donald Ross and A.W. Tillinghast before WWII, and Robert Trent Jones after the war. It then highlights the best architects of the last 50 years and the trends in architecture from “total site manipulation” to “minimalism.” It helps the viewer understand the passion today's architects bring to the projects awarded to them, and provides small glimpses into the golf architect's mind-set using interviews with top architects, intelligent narrative, and stunning video.

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It is well done and my only complaint is that an hour isn't enough time to capture much beyond the highlights. However, as familiar as I am with golf design history, even I picked up a few tidbits.

That's where the “old school” companion book of the same title comes in. Authored by Cupp and Whitten, it fills in the gaps created by television time constraints. They converse as experts and friends in over 30 short, and easily digested chapters that you can read separately. Each chapter focuses on a different architect, project and backstory about the architect and architecture. Most contain copies of the original design sketches of the architect, showing the variety of methods used. Cupp and Whitten explain the project and challenges via their inside knowledge as authors and architects to provide deeper analysis of the architectural thought process.

It is a collection of fascinating stories about an eclectic bunch of not more than a few hundred golf course architects worldwide, who come from diverse backgrounds. While the largest

group comes from landscape architecture training, others come from fine arts, engineering, agronomics, business, law, and of course, Tour players. Each brings unique insights, but must learn the other skills used daily by golf architects, which include a mixture of artistic work in dirt with large machines, golf knowledge, and grounding in less sexy design principals, such as drainage, agronomics and circulation. They must consider the proposed – or in renovations, existing– maintenance

regimen. After that, golf architects need the engineering ability to put it all together, plus background in construction to design in “constructability” on a reasonable schedule.

The combination of very different creative people, individual sites, and more challenges result is an ever-widening variety of design styles, which beckon golfers to a new challenge.

The inherent interest by nearly every golfer in the design of the playing fields is why Golf's Grand Design is so long overdue, and of interest to so many, including those golfers those who think that given the chance, they could and would create a great golf course. It takes a bit of thought to design a golf course, and greater vision to build a great one. This documentary sheds some light on the real process.

For golf architecture fans, the documentary is an entertaining show, and the companion book may be a better read. Even if you missed the broadcast, the books stands alone and the book form lets you go over the interesting parts again to absorb the ideas behind America's golf courses. **GCI**