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## CREATIVITY IN MEETING BUDGETS

**B**ack in January 2009, I wrote a column called “Noninvasive procedures,” which focused on the importance of retaining a contractor who “works clean” in renovations to reduce cost. These days, it’s just as important to retain an architect who understands the concept of minimally invasive design to get the lowest cost project, while not sacrificing design quality that golfers see as the final result.

There are design benefits to comprehensive master planning/renovation approach and starting with a clean slate. If you replace everything, you gain design, construction and maintenance consistency, which is always a goal in renovation.

However, the reality since the re-

to do a \$4-\$8 million renovation project for about \$2.5-\$3.6 million.

One strategy lies in specifying “second level” components, like buying last year’s hot driver at a discount. Regretfully, seeing how well superintendents work around, shall we say “vintage” infrastructure, often defeats the arguments for updating everything to the most modern standards.

Another tack is straddling the delicate balance of keeping recent, but somewhat questionable improvements in place, while making them work with the new design, rather than wantonly “blowing it up” for a better design. You can do more and better changes by starting with a clean slate, but every square foot of disturbed area requires earthwork, drainage, irriga-

good-as-built plans, a lot of detailed design work and a careful contractor, we can grade slightly for drainage without hitting irrigation lines. Not ideal, but it’s possible.

Last year we minimized turfing and costs by only re-grassing the fairways and rough where grades changed. However, the dramatic change to new turf is noticeable, at least initially, but it will heal and we made budget.

There is an old saying that it’s easy to build a hard course, but hard to build an easy one. It’s also easy to build a great course with an unlimited budget, but hard to build a great renovation on a limited budget. Some see minimalism as a style, but true minimalism is doing as little as possible to the course, while making it look as if it was all you needed to do.

That requires the architect’s secret weapon – creativity – which is severely tested when the need exceeds the budget. Creativity isn’t just about artistry. It’s also in selecting, designing and blending features just the right way for a successful project. Very few have the creativity or vision to pull it off, while the best architects regularly “make it look easy.” An architect isn’t an unnecessary expense, but rather, the main driver of effective cost savings that don’t sacrifice budget, function, or good design.

Good architects accept low budgets, without accepting limited quality and results. Believing “necessity is the mother of invention,” they don’t just eliminate to control cost, they integrate, and gladly take the challenge of doing more with less to make it even better. Find “that guy” and you should have a successful renovation. **GCI**

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cent recession is that when courses do renovate, their budgets are squeezed. The price for “blow-up” renovations continues to rise, with a total redo cost in the \$4-\$8 million range.

At the same time, bankers have gotten far more conservative/realistic in the business projections. While most renovations will still garner increased revenues as before, the increases are much lower than a decade ago. Now, based on recent real experience, it is hard for any reasonably attentive banker to project large revenue increases if neighboring courses are still discounting – or closed altogether. It’s all about the payback, and most studies don’t justify a \$4-\$8 million expenditure as easily as they might have a decade ago. Something around \$2-\$3 million is more typical. So, clubs, owners and golf course architects are back to the familiar territory of trying

tion replacement and re-seeding or sodding, increasing costs.

Some recent challenges have included working around a 3-year-old cart path system that is in good shape, but in bad locations, too near fairways and containing hairpin turns. My preferred option was to start over, and install 30,000 L.F. of cart path where it made more sense. But, at \$24 per L.F., and \$720,000, replacing much of that perfectly good path seemed wasteful, so we tweaked the plans to save about  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the original path within the new design. I cringe at a few locations left over, and may eventually use the old architects trick of bribing a bulldozer operator to “accidentally” take out a few, using contingency funds to rebuild them.

On another project, we are trying to drain flat fairways without damaging the 5-year-old irrigation system. With

To read Jeff’s 2009 column “Noninvasive procedures,” enter [bit.ly/11FkTVp](http://bit.ly/11FkTVp) into your web browser.