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THE IMPORTANCE OF GOLF ARCHITECTURE

A course is a thing of beauty, and it takes good architecture to achieve that.

I have written about the importance of using a golf course architect for any design related problems on your golf course. However, I focused on experience and the likelihood of saving more money, not the feel and the like. What I failed to do was instill a sense of just how important golf course architecture is to your daily golf enjoyment.

Quite simply, golf course architecture is the arrangement of landscape elements that facilitates the human activity of golf. Without architecture, there is no golf! It follows that without good architecture, there is no good golf, and without great architecture, there is no great golf. It also follows that bad architecture results in... well, you can guess.

Golf course architecture stands along with the other fine arts of architecture: landscape, fine dining, theatre, etc. in being considered important enough to warrant its own critics, lists, rankings, and even coffee table books and monthly magazines.

It inspires nearly endless debates about what style, which architects and courses are better than others.

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It makes us question whether less is more, more is more, or if more is a bore. It creates both shouts of joy and cries of despair, creating the drama that makes us all love golf.

Sure, it's not a matter of life and death to some, and to others it's more important. All of that makes it sound

pretty darned important to me.

But the real value in golf course architecture isn't obtaining rankings and stunning photographs. It lies in creating the “magic” in your golf game, and avoiding anything less. With increasing time constraints and recreational competition, it is important that your time on the golf course is time well spent, and makes you want to return as fast as possible. Good architecture is the obvious key.

If you are a golfer, then golf architecture affects you directly on a very personal level. If you love literature, you can read voraciously, but never read Danielle Steel. Movie goers can avoid any genre they don't like by not buying tickets. TV watchers can easily change channels. But, as a golfer, you won't skip a hole. Even one bad feature can ruin a hole, and every bad hole reduces your golf enjoyment by 1/18th. Even a series of average holes turns a chance to rejuvenate your soul turns into drudgery. Who needs that from golf?

This is why every feature on your golf course should be designed, not just built. If a green dies, you might

think you are simply rebuilding an “object.” Golf course architects think in terms of “creating a space” to maximize your enjoyment.

You think of your club (or church) as the people and experiences there. In both cases, the architecture is there to facilitate the religious experience

(the comparison is apt for many golfers...). Good architecture is more than providing tees and greens, it is about creating satisfying shared experiences that enhance your experience.

Golf architecture starts by organizing nature sufficiently to allow golf, but that is just the first task. The architect simultaneously weaves artistic expression with that function. Every green, tee, bunker and even cart path is an opportunity to create naturalistic beauty and inspire a wide range of human emotions, inherent in golf, including delight, serenity and joy, as well as doubt, despair and anger.

Yes, architects think this way.

While golfers do intuitively know good architecture by whether a golf course inspires or bores them, even if not versed in the principles of the art, only golf course architects know how to create these magic moments, spaces and places and make every piece of ground the best golf experience inherently possible. They understand design, as most have inherent “design personalities” supplemented through the study of landscape architecture, (including balance, rhythm, proportion, etc.) other fine arts and even human psychology.

The fact is, if you want to create something of beauty that inspires golfers and is better than merely functional, you need an architect. If you seek only minimal function that is the most you will end up with.

Yet, some golf courses go it alone, in the name of economy or ego. Others hire architects but limit them, or tell them to “just draw up my ideas.” Those results are poor, usually for a long, long time. Poor results are hard to justify when almost any golf hole is an opportunity for a talented designer to create something vastly improved

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firing is justified. How do you know your job is in jeopardy? Members (and especially those who sit on committees) stop talking to you. Meetings are held without your knowledge and attendance. Outside consultants unexpectedly show up to evaluate your efforts. Other superintendents unexpectedly show up to “look around,” or play golf with the pro or members. (The professional thing to do is to call the superintendent and let him/her know that you’ve been invited over, even if it’s possibly for his job.) And sometimes it’s just a feeling that things aren’t right.

Can you turn around a bad situation? Probably not. And given the message that the club is sending, do you really want to? Maybe it’s time to take the initiative and go, before you can be pushed out. But if you do leave, and expect to get another job, remember how you felt when in that awkward situation, and don’t put a fellow member of your industry in that same situation. **GCI**

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Above: Two images of the new channel next to the old one at Reid Golf Course.

right – across a valley – to a putting surface on the far hillside. Players used to fly that concrete channel with their approaches. Soon they will crest the hill and see a beautiful, winding, naturalized water feature. Yes, of course, that feature is part of a system that can now handle a 100-year storm, and the water exiting that system is 10 times cleaner. But the 12th hole will also be a more beautiful golf hole, and that should count for something. It’s already counting for something.

“I haven’t golfed for about 15 years,” Neuberger says, “but I’m going to play when the course reopens next spring. I’m excited.” **GCI**

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and satisfying for very little extra cost. While I promised not to focus on value, the old insurance salesman adage of, “Good architecture only cost pennies a day” applies.

Golf can range from deadly dull to inspiring. While everyone prefers the latter, they often preclude even the chance for the best golf possible by treating golf course architecture as less important than it truly is. Poor architecture usually ruins your golf, so when you have a chance, don’t shortchange your course when it comes to architecture. **GCI**

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declined. In those markets, property taxes also should have declined. Check with your local taxing jurisdiction to see if your property value declined and if your tax needs to be adjusted.

The question to ask: “Have I explored the possibility of a decrease in property taxes with my local tax authorities?”

The start of 2014 is still more than three months away. But your planning should be well underway. That process starts with the budget. **GCI**

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playing conditions to bring out the hatchet. In these cases, it’s usually not really about the grass.

Although I simplify the impact of Mother Nature to regional generalizations, I have to add a qualifier. Regional conditions can not only be variable from state to state and course to course, but also from hole to hole. We can’t forget the impact of microclimates that can result in poor growing conditions and continued decline in turf stands year after year. Correcting some of the fundamental agronomic issues – shade, air flow and drainage – is essential to growing healthy grass.

So with all of this in mind, I encourage you to assess where your problems were this year, get things healthy this fall, and fire up the chainsaws this winter. The season’s coming to an end and 2014 will be here before you know it. **GCI**