

# Enduring Course Design Is Hallmark of Good Architect

By DR. ALISTER MAC KENZIE

Dr. Alister MacKenzie, veteran and successful golf architect, is the author of a golf course book that will be published in the near future.

MacKenzie's international fame is considerably due to his high ratings of finality of design and insistence upon a pleasurable character of courses for dubs as well as stars.

In the advance publication of some chapters from Dr. MacKenzie's forthcoming book, *GOLFDOM* brings to light in the United States the inside of some historic, friendly arguments he had with noted English professionals.

MacKenzie doesn't stray from the ultimate idea of thrift in golf course architecture, and in attaining this economy by finality of design he has had a prominent place in defining today's first-class course architecture.

**E**CONOMY in course construction consists of obtaining the best possible results at a minimum of cost. The more one sees of golf courses, the more one realizes the importance of doing construction work really well, so that it is likely to be of a permanent character. It is impossible to lay too much stress on the importance of finality.

Every golfer knows examples of courses which have been constructed and then rearranged over and over, and the fact that in every country thousands of dollars are frittered away in doing bad work which will ultimately have to be scrapped is particularly distressful to a true economist. As an example of unnecessary labor and expense, the writer has in mind a green which has been entirely relaid on four different occasions. In the first instance, it was of the ridge and furrow type; the turf was then lifted and it was made dead flat. A new chairman was appointed, and he made it a more pronounced ridge and furrow than ever; it was then relaid and made flat again, and has now been entirely reconstructed with undulations of a more natural outline and appearance.

In discussing the question of finality, it is well to inquire if there are any really first-class courses in existence which have been unaltered for a considerable number of years and still remain, not only a good

test of golf, but a source of pleasure to all classes of players. Is there any golfing course which not even the rubber cored ball has spoiled? And, if so, what is the cause of its abiding popularity?

The only one I know is the Old Course at St. Andrews, Scotland. It was the most popular course in the world in the days of the feather ball, the guttie and the Haskell, and today Bobby Jones considers that not only is it the best course in the world, but that he gets more joy in playing it than a hundred other golf courses.

Today, with the exception of lengthening some of the tees St. Andrews remains substantially the same as it was 70 years ago.

## Joy for the Duffer

It (as well as some of the other British championship courses to a lesser extent) still retains its popularity among all classes of amateurs. In fact, it is characteristic of all the best courses that they are just as pleasurable (possibly even more so) to the long handicap man as to the player of championship rank. This fact knocks on the head the argument which is often used that the modern expert tries to spoil the pleasure of the player by making courses too difficult.

The successful negotiation of difficulties is a source of pleasure to all classes of players.

The origin of St. Andrews is shrouded in



The thrill of playing a well laid-out golf hole, such as this 13th at Cypress Point, a MacKenzie course, is never destroyed by "improvements" in clubs or ball.

mystery, but the fact of the matter is that St. Andrews differs from others in that it has always been deemed a sacrilege to interfere with its natural beauties, and it has been left almost untouched for centuries. No greenkeeper has ever dared to shave down its natural undulations. Most of the bunkers have been left where nature placed them, and others have originated from the winds and the rains enlarging divot marks left by the players, and some of them possibly by the greenkeepers converting those hollows where most players congregated, into bunkers, owing to the difficulty of keeping them free from divot marks. The bunkers at St. Andrews are thus placed in positions where players are most likely to go—in fact, in the precise positions which the ordinary green-committee would suggest should be filled up. This is a significant fact, and tends to show that many of our existing ideas in regard to hazards have been erroneous.

I frequently have mentioned what John L. Low pointed out years ago that no hazard is unfair wherever it is placed, and this particularly applies if the hazard is visible, as it should be obvious that if a player sees a hazard in front of him and promptly plunks his ball into it he has chosen the wrong spot.

I once heard a Yorkshire tale of an old farmer finding a man in his coal-house during a recent coal strike. He put his head through the window and said, "Now, I've copped you picking out all the big lumps." A voice from the darkness came, "You're a liar, I'm taking them as they come."

### Take Them as They Come

On the old type of course like St. Andrews, the players have to take the hazards as they come, and do their best to avoid them.

There is nothing new about the ideas of the golf architect: he simply wishes to reproduce the old ideas as exemplified in the old natural courses like St. Andrews, those courses which were played on before over-zealous green-committees demolished the natural undulations of the fairways and greens, and made greens like lawns for croquet, tennis or anything else except golf, and erected eyesores in the shape of straight lines of cop bunkers, instead of emphasizing the natural curves of the links.

In the old view of golf, there was no main thoroughfare to the hole: the player had to use his own judgment without the aid of guide posts, or other adventitious means of finding his way. St. Andrews still retains the old traditions of golf. For

example, I have frequently seen four individuals playing the long hole (the fourteenth), and deliberately attacking it in four different ways, and three out of the four probably right in playing it in the ways they selected.

### Play with the Head

At St. Andrews "It needs a heid to play gowf," as the caddie said to the professor. St. Andrews is a living example of the possibility of obtaining finality.

There are many golf architects whose courses have never been appreciably altered. I do not suppose Abercrombe's or Harry Colt's courses have ever required any material alterations, and I am quite certain that Max Behr's Lakeside at Los Angeles and his other excellent courses will always remain as they are at present.

It often happens that a club employs an architect and contrary to his advice carries out the work themselves so as to avoid paying for his supervision. Neither the construction of a new course or alteration to an old one can be a complete success by these methods.

Some years ago I advised the Prestwick club (owners of a magnificent piece of links land and of one of the most famous of the championship courses) regarding new 7th, 8th, 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th holes. The committee decided to carry out the work themselves.

The general opinion of the club is that the changes have a great improvement on the old holes, but I know, and doubtless other golf architects know, that they have made a mess of some marvelous natural golfing territory.

I was particularly distressed regarding the 11th hole. I visualized it as becoming the most famous of all one-shot holes, whereas the design and construction has been so badly carried out that it is a very indifferent hole.

When green-committees carry out an architect's plans it is rarely even a partial success, and in any case the committee takes credit for any improvement and the architect gets the blame for any failure. This is so much so that bitter experience has taught us to refuse work unless we are allowed a free hand in interpreting our own plans.

In the attempt to obtain finality it is of primary importance that the advice of the architect be taken in its entirety.

Cases not infrequently arise when clubs have not sufficient money to carry out his plans completely; then, the work should

be in the form of improvements made from year to year as more funds are available.

### Millions for Alteration—BUT—

Founders of golf clubs are often deterred from calling a first class architect because they think he may be expensive.

An architect's fee is often less than one-hundredth part of the total capital expenditure, and surely this is a small sum to pay for the assurance of perpetual prosperity. The writer cannot recall a single example of the failure of a golf club that has taken the advice of a first class architect.

Even men of education have a curious disinclination to pay for mental labor; they are willing to pay stupendous sums for manual labor but mental labor, No! It is strange that a committee consisting of doctors, lawyers, architects, expert engineers, etc., who no doubt recognize the importance of mental training and experience in their own professions, attach so little importance to it in golf course architecture.

What does it matter what the fee of the expert is if owing to his advice the total cost can be reduced to 50 per cent and in addition far better results obtained? It is false economy to attempt to save a few thousand dollars in mental labor when without it there will be an additional cost of tens of thousands of dollars in manual labor.

The unfortunate thing about golf courses is that every professional and almost every golfer thinks he can lay out a golf course. Only this week I had a letter from a Scotch professional hinting that the time might come when I might be retiring, and suggesting that I should adopt him with a view to his carrying out my work.

I replied to him inquiring about his education and asked him if he had made a study of psychology, if he had been educated at an agricultural college and had acquired a knowledge of chemistry, botany, geology, and engineering, and above all, had he any training and love for art?

I pointed out that though it was essential a golf course architect should have an intimate knowledge of the theory of the game of golf and make a close study of all the best courses, yet the ability to play the game was often harmful as first-class players only too frequently were subconsciously influenced by their own particular type of play and only too prone to disre-



Real architecture consists in taking full advantage of all natural features, modifying them only to the extent necessary to simplify maintenance and expedite play. Fifteenth green at Cypress Point.

gard playing requirements of some others.

I remarked before, that although I know scores of excellent golf courses designed by amateurs, outstanding ones designed by professionals are not frequently seen. Not that there are not plenty of professionals who are men of considerable education, but the fact that they are constantly playing competitive golf makes them view with resentment anything that is likely to disturb their sequence of their threes and fours.

I have a great admiration for J. H. Taylor. He is one of nature's gentlemen, is exceedingly well read, has original and common sense views on health, politics and many other subjects, and moreover is a born orator and writer. On the other hand, in my opinion, he is not a success in designing golf courses.

At one time, because he was unable to play it with a pitch, his favorite shot, he condemned the 17th hole at St. Andrews in most emphatic terms. Recently, he admits that having given up competitive golf he has changed his views and in picturesque language puts a curse on any one who would dare to alter it.

### Picks Taylor as Pro Prize

I have selected J. H. Taylor as the representative of the professionals not only because of his marked ability but because

in England he is the spokesman of the Professional Golf Association and for many years was their president and may be so still as far as I know.

We have always told each other in the frankest possible manner our respective views and one thing I admire more in J. H. than anything else is the fact that he is not afraid of changing his ideas and admitting he has changed them, when one has given him sufficiently logical reasons to convince him he is wrong.

Many years ago when Harry Colt and I were designing most of the golf courses in Britain, J. H. Taylor started an agitation to prevent us doing so and make golf course architecture a pro monopoly.

We contended that if it were not for the amateur golf course architect there would be very few professionals, and it was as a direct result of modern golf architecture that there had been such a boom in golf and golf courses. Subsequent events, I think, have proved that we were right, and that the very existence of most of the professionals is due to the fact that golf architects have made inland golf courses popular. There would be very few professionals if golf was still confined to sand dune country by the seashore.

*(To be continued in June GOLFDOM.)*