



Paying the Architect: Commission or Fee?

By HENRY COTTON

Golf course architecture can be a lucrative profession. It seems to work the same way the fashionable de luxe world operates: If it is expensive, it must be good. This kind of reasoning usually applies to diamonds and fur coats, but I have always worried that it might also be applied to golf course architecture: The more costly the job, the more money for the architect. By the rules of human behavior, this means extravagance pays.

It must be glorious to be let loose on a piece of beautiful ground, with an unlimited expense account, and be able to paint a picture, for that is what designing a course means to me; to be able to make fresh starts *ad lib* and alterations, more *ad lib*, to plant hundreds of big trees without waiting years for them to grow, to be able to build photogenic sand traps and be able to ignore the ex-

pense of getting the necessary amount of soil to raise them. But after all, is it no less skillful to be able to achieve the same on a shoe-string budget? Then the architect has to seek out every natural feature and somehow incorporate it.

I wonder how some American architects would react to being asked to build a course where the total cash in the kitty comes to under \$80,000. The problem then becomes one of cutting your suit according to the cloth available, and improvising all the time. It even comes to digging sand out of a sand area on the course, even if it is poor quality, of saving the ordinary top soil for green surfacing, of using every tree on the site, especially if it is open land, of using pasture land for natural fairways, even if it is full of weeds and uneven to save preparation and seeding costs, and of somehow using every natural feature, even if it is not exactly where it should be.

Building up greens, usually small, also has to be limited, and sand traps come out on the miserably small side, purely for economic reasons. Naturally, the result is a mediocre course that will take 10 years to get into decent shape. But at least golf can be played on it. After all, it is the architect's job to build a golf course.

Working for a fixed fee, I think, is a very honest way to operate, but a bonus should be given for all the money saved beneath the money target. I have built courses for a fixed fee and I have built courses for a percentage (usually 10 per cent of the gross cost of construction). When I work for a fixed fee, I must have expenses for the visits

Britain's Henry Cotton believes golf course architects should be rewarded for cost savings, not encouraged to spend more to inflate commissions

paid, otherwise if I am called on too often the project is no longer financially profitable. The maximum number of visits should be limited, with perhaps three as a minimum. I am perhaps not sufficiently interested in money to want to build up fabulous construction costs, although I do realize a well-constructed course, with extra good foundations to greens, can run away with a lot of money.

Penina in the Algarve, South Portugal, where I live in the sun on the course I built, has just about the best greens in the world. They are huge, 900 to 1,200 square yards and only cost about \$3,000 each. But they are so true and weed free, they have to be seen to be believed. They are already famous. The course was built on a rice field and is only three years old, but already holes wander through forest glades, which are not yet five years old.

The Penina course cost about \$350,000, not counting part of the 360,000 trees and shrubs we planted to form hazards, avenues and backgrounds for the holes. A vast sum went into underground drainage. The trees mainly are eucalyptus. They have grown over 35 feet in four years and will help lower the water table as they drink up the water while maturing. Already the holes on this featureless, flat and formerly soggy area are looking like part of the forest I dreamed one day of creating when I first slipped and skidded along the little earth walls dividing the paddy field, as I looked over the site.

We saved money by making water hazards instead of sand areas. To create water hazards, we just got a long arm and dug out the soil. This soil is a great help for tee and green building and several beautiful lagoons have been created. Golfers, I find, do not mind losing a ball in the main wide water hazards, but they hate losing one in a narrow, muddy ditch.

Another thing I am also proud of at Penina: Once the first green was ready for cutting, I taught the workmen (we had 150 men and women building the course at one time), how to cut, to apply dressings and how to cut the hole through a board. Now they never fail to do this, which makes holing out a treat because there are no lifted cup edges.

I never allow the greens to get soggy in the summer, although we pump one million gallons a day onto the course. We only lightly water the greens so that they

never show footmarks near the pin, even after a hundred or more players have holed out. Nor does a pitching ball tear out big holes in them. It just marks them enough so that the turf needs to be forked up. I made the greens big, so that they could be elevated (to make sure there was no danger of flooding), but the elevation cannot be noticed. Since they are big, they can be played to even when dry and there is room to pitch. The hot Algarve sun does not scorch them because by not building too many knobs on or around the green, there are no high points to dry out, which calls for extra water, which in turn floods the hollows.

Penina's greens are switched every morning. The bent-grass mixture has developed no nap because a man takes them up with a spring bok wire rake, against the cut, as the mower follows along. Good soil was brought in from far inland for tees, greens and environs and a nine to 12-inch layer of local sea sand was spread over the fairways which extend from the tee to the green.

There are no dried up areas at Penina between the tee and fairway, such as one often finds on courses where water is costly or rare or both. Our plan is perhaps extravagant, but the course is very pleasant to walk and play on. Fertilizer is used eight times a year on the course, because the course is cut year-round. That means in mid-winter the course is cut the same as in midsummer.

I have done many reconstruction jobs on older courses having only one starting point, the old out and back type, and have managed to work out somehow to get a 10th tee at the clubhouse. This sort of problem is a satisfying challenge, if it can be solved for a reasonable sum.

How can I be entirely against working for a percentage when it is the usual architects' proven practice in all sorts of different sections of life where architects progress? But it seems right to work for a fee where a person or group builds the course with their own labor and gives a substantial reward for money saved. Then the architect can be more than a link between the boss and the contractor, he can be completely on the boss' side as part of the promoting team in every way. □

Henry Cotton, MBE, is considered the best English golfer since Harry Vardon. He has won the British Open three times as well as dozens of tournaments the world over. He was captain (president) of the British PGA twice and is one of the founders of the British Golf Foundation. The author of several books on golf, he is one of golf's most respected teachers. He is now in phase three of his career, turning his interests toward golf course architecture. In addition to designing Penina, Cotton has designed three courses in Britain, one in France and one in Portugal. (Cotton is pictured top left at Penina accompanied by his "caddie.")