



# In Concert

They're on different sides of the fairway, but architects and superintendents *can* work together harmoniously

MIKE KLEMM

# W

BY SHANE SHARP

HILE GOLF AS WE KNOW IT WAS not around during the Renaissance, it would have been something to see Michelangelo designing an upscale track while Galileo calculated the course's watering requirements, drainage slopes and mowing strategies. Today, a golf course designer gazes upon the land that is his canvas and envisions routing, slopes, bunkers, tees and greens. A superintendent, however, stares at the same land and sees drainage issues, bunker faces that will need to be walk-mowed and greens that will require more maintenance than a 1957 Chevy.

When art and science come together to produce 7,000 yards of golfing enjoyment, players assume that architects and superintendents have worked in harmonious fashion throughout a course's development. But that's not always the case.

"If the superintendent is knowledgeable about the game and knows how the game is played by skilled players, he or she can be more sensitive to what we're doing as designers," says Jan Beljan, a design associate for Tom Fazio

Golf Course Designers. "If the superintendent is not sensitive to what we do, part of the artistry of the course is lost."

But art is in the eye of the beholder, and there can be strain on the architect/superintendent relationship created by intense competition for golfing dollars. Now that the supply of new golf courses has caught up with the game's burgeoning demand, course owners are looking for a competitive edge, which often involves owners hiring high-priced architects such as Tom Fazio or Pete Dye, and demanding the most awe-inspiring courses conceivable.

The competition between owners leads to more memorable, challenging golf courses for players, but it also translates into course conditions that are nearly impossible to maintain without generous maintenance budgets. This brings to mind an important question at a time when golf has arguably never been more popular: Will the intricate relationship between architects and superintendents grow like healthy bentgrass, or will it fizzle under the strain of competitive pressure?

▲ Arizona's Gary Panks, who designed the spectacular Sedona Golf Resort pictured above, is making a name for himself as a maintenance-friendly designer.

## Maintaining your Mona Lisa

Just as it costs a museum more to preserve a painting from Pablo Picasso, it's often more expensive for owners to maintain layouts designed by today's pre-eminent architects.

"Certainly, it costs more to maintain a Pete Dye or P.B. Dye golf course," says Paul Kauffman, superintendent at Prestwick CC in Surfside Beach, S.C. "There's a lot of mounding, centipedegrass and areas you have to walk cut. [Architects] do a great job laying out challenging golf courses, but it's challenging for us, too."

But superintendents, after all, are trained and paid to maintain courses, no matter how demanding the maintenance or famous the designer. That's the attitude taken by David Downing, director of golf course operations at Barefoot Resort & GC in Myrtle Beach, S.C. Speaking of courses with big-name architects, Downing oversees tracks bearing the names of Fazio, Davis Love and Greg Norman.

"If you're looking for a great course, you have to deal with high maintenance," Downing says. "Green complexes are tough to maintain if they are dramatic. Part of what makes a course great are those things that are hard to maintain."

That's not to say there are no memorable low-maintenance courses. Some of the traditional layouts of Willard Byrd, Arthur Hills, Clyde Johnston and Russell Breeden require little maintenance outside of mowing fairways and greens, and routine maintenance such as spraying, overseeding and aerification.

Matt Sapochak believes that Winyah Bay GC in Georgetown, S.C., fits the bill as a memorable low-maintenance course. Sapochak redesigned the course in 1995 and was its superintendent for a year. "I was going to be superintendent here for a while, so I wanted to design a course that was low maintenance but had high-end conditions," says Sapochak, now general manager at Winyah Bay.

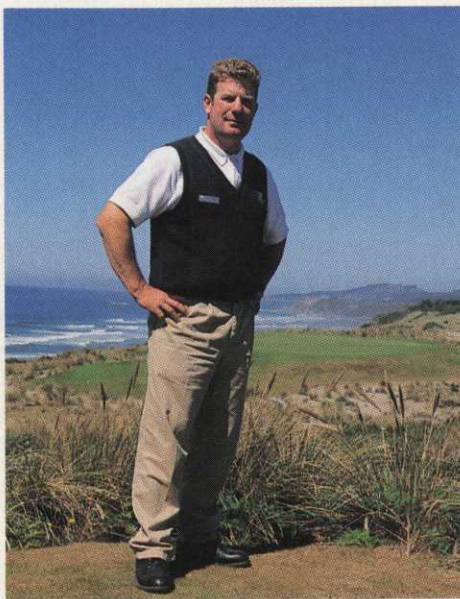
## Who's the boss?

If you're under the impression that architects make all the calls when it comes to designing their layouts, then you may also believe the New York Yankees front-office makes decisions without input from owner George Steinbrenner. When you break down golf

course development to its essence, the architect is merely the consultant to a client, who is the owner. While some owners let architects call the shots, others strong arm architects into producing the courses they want.

The architect's responsibility is to give the owner what he or she wants and is paying for, Beljan says. "If that requires a lot of detailed maintenance, and that is what the owner can afford, then that is what the architect will provide," she adds.

The owner usually determines when a



LARRY KASSELL

superintendent is brought into the design process. Many architects depend on owners to have superintendents present during construction. Other architects, however, insist that superintendents be brought into the process early to eliminate unnecessary revisions.

"In most of my projects, we just deal with the owner," says architect Clyde Johnston. "But my contract states that the owner has to have the superintendent onboard before the irrigation goes in. If a superintendent wants to be around before that, that's even better."

But not every owner has the budget to bring in a Fazio or a Pete Dye to design a course, or has the desire to micromanage every aspect of a course's development. Kemp Causey, owner of the Calabash Golf Links in Calabash, N.C., wanted a simple, traditional course that was easy to maintain. So he selected Willard Byrd, known for his straightforward layouts,

*Continued on page 28*

**A lot of time was spent reviewing everything to be sure it was as maintenance friendly as possible.**

**TROY RUSSELL  
BANDON DUNES**

*Continued from page 27*

to design his dream course.

"You won't find any bulkheads, bridges or high-maintenance items here," Causey says. "I just tried to take God's piece of land, which only had 7 feet of elevation, and have Willard build a good course."

### Of philosophy, technology

To outside observers, architects and superintendents may appear to be rivals. But the truth is, the two professions are not as far apart as they appear.

Chad Ritterbusch, director of communications for the American Society of Golf Course Architects, explains that a healthy give-and-take relationship enables architects and superintendents to coexist.

"There's a trade-off that exists between

CC in Mesa) in the early 1980s with three-to-one grass slopes that required a lot of hand labor," Rupert adds. "Panks is more conscientious about these things. There are ways of making a course penal without compromising the topography."

With more than 600 courses, Michigan has become one of the hottest golfing destinations in the country. Bill Kehoss, superintendent at Timberstone GC in Iron Mountain, Mich., says a smattering of Michigan architects embrace the concept of getting superintendents involved in building courses from the beginning.

"At our course, the architect had the original superintendent out from the start," Kehoss says. "There was a good relationship between the two, but this is probably an exception and not the norm.

"The superintendent changed some of the grass that was going to be used on the course from the original recommendation," Kehoss notes. "The course is already hard to maintain because of the rocky terrain, and the recommendation [by the superintendent] saved us a lot of additional work."

In Cherry Grove Beach, S.C., the Tidewater GC underwent a number of improvements, many of which were designed to lighten superintendent Bob Graunke's load. The greens were replanted with A-1 bentgrass, an improved strand that's more tolerant of the Southeastern climate. Bunkers were rebuilt under the supervision of course designer, Ken Tomlinson, and they are easier to maintain.

At Bandon Dunes in Bandon, Ore., superintendent Troy Russell says the course's architect, Scotsman David McLay Kidd, had ease of maintenance in mind when he designed the course, which opened last year.

"During the course of construction, a great deal of time was spent reviewing everything to be sure it was as maintenance friendly as possible," Russell says. "In most cases, shapes or traffic routes were altered if they required extraordinary maintenance. The graceful contours of the course are not only pleasing to view, they also mean you don't have to put mowers where they aren't designed to go."

### Where credit is due

Architect and architecture historian Geoffrey Cornish praises the eagerness and adaptability



LARRY KASSELL

▲ David McLay Kidd had ease of maintenance in mind when he designed Bandon Dunes in Bandon, Ore.

the two [professions], but with the advent of new technology and design methods, architects are able to create more stunning designs without impacting maintenance as much," Ritterbusch says.

In Arizona, Scottsdale-based Gary Panks is making a name for himself as a maintenance-friendly course designer with such tracks as The Raven at South Mountain and the Sedona Golf Resort. Arizona superintendent Bill Rupert says Panks layouts are challenging and penal without being extreme. It makes a big difference when an architect considers the everyday job of the superintendent and his staff when he's designing a course, Rupert says.

"I was unfortunate enough to have maintained a Pete Dye course (Red Mountain Ranch

of superintendents for maintaining the complex layouts produced by today's architects. "The game has changed, courses have changed, but the only thing that has not changed is the dedication of the superintendent," he says.

Cornish says designers and superintendents are intricately bound by the triangle of basic considerations — an equilateral triangle that espouses three essential factors when laying out a golf course: the game itself, eye appeal and maintainability. As long as the two professions adhere to the basic principles of the triangle, design and maintenance should be able to coexist in perpetuity.

"Some of the greatest courses we've seen are emerging from blackboards today," Cornish says. "Technology has helped vastly in terms of maintaining these courses."

Despite differences in their professions and their approaches, Cornish stresses that most superintendents and architects have a mutual respect for each other.

Good designers know the importance that superintendents play in their projects. "We re-



The greens were replanted with A-1 bent, an improved strand that's more tolerant of the climate.

BOB GRAUNKE  
TIDEWATER GC

spect the fact that they respect our design and our philosophy," Cornish says. ■

*Shane Sharp is a free-lance writer from Charlotte, N.C.*

# EVERGREEN™

## THE PROVEN TURF GROWTH BLANKET

- Earlier spring green-up
- Faster seed germination
- Deeper root development
- Delays dormancy in fall
- Ideal winter blanket
- Best for quick turf repairs
- Available in any size
- Longest lasting
- Choice of 3 and 7 year warranty covers



CALL TOLL FREE  
1-800-387-5808

COVERMASTER INC., REXDALE, ON, M9V 5C3  
TEL 416-745-1811 FAX 416-74-COVER (742-6837)

WEB: [www.covermaster.com](http://www.covermaster.com)  
E-MAIL: [info@covermaster.com](mailto:info@covermaster.com)

COVERMASTER™  
COVERMASTER  
COVERMASTER  
MASTERS IN THE ART OF SPORTS SURFACE COVERS

MEMBER  
Sports & Turf  
Managers Association

Turf Management Made Easy . . .



Easy to install & remove



Anchor pegs supplied



Deeper root development



Any custom size cover