

# Designs on Golf

■ ARCHITECTURE

**A**s C.B. Macdonald pointed out, the green complex is to golf architecture what the “face is to the portrait.” In golf, it’s the lyric to our song, the story to our film.

To create a sound green complex with strategic interest that’s also maintainable, the architect must be a genuine artist. In this day of the USGA green, it’s tougher for architects to create truly original green designs. In fact, none of the greens on my list was originally constructed as a USGA-spec green and only three are USGA greens today. The demand for increased putting surface speed has limited what architects can do with contours, which ultimately undermines the game’s character.

We love the charming character of small greens. But for the most part, the timeless green complexes are reasonably sized. Ample space provides more hole locations, lending greater strategic interest and a better chance for the green to be maintained.

Most of all, these greens are memorable. Something about their features is planted in your mind after you play them a few times, enabling you to stand in fairways and recall their nuances to negotiate.

So, with those principles in mind, here are 10 favorites that constitute great greens:

**5th Green, Pinehurst #2, Pinehurst, N.C.** – Superintendent Paul Jett notes that Donald Ross had a home close to the long par 4 and probably put a lot of time into fine-tuning this 5,978-square-foot masterpiece. The 5th epitomizes what a natural green site should look like after the architect finishes it.

Watching players in the 1999 U.S. Open refuse to hit run-up shots to this green was shocking. The putting surface sits in a Redan-like manner above the player and penalizes the slightest miscue. Pinehurst’s 5th is extraordinary thanks to its majestic character and the creativity required to play it.

**17th Green, Los Angeles CC North, Los Angeles** – It’s a simple, but classic green complex. This well-bunkered putting surface sits at fairway level with a sweeping tier in its middle that falls toward lower-left flag locations. All it takes is one round here to know you can use this tier to shape your mid- to long-iron ap-

# Golf’s Greatest Green Complexes

BY GEOFF SHACKELFORD



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proach into the left-hand hole locations.

Meanwhile, the front- and right-side pins require vastly different approach shots. The overall naturalness of this green complex is unmatched.

**6th Green, University of Michigan GC, Ann Arbor, Mich.** – It’s quirky time. This 309-yard, down-hill par-4 plays to a 6,800-square-foot green set in the face of a hill. The green is shaped like a reverse C with a bunker jutting into the middle of the C. Hazards guard the front, left and right of this epic complex.

Most players have a wedge into this steeply sloped marvel, but depending on the hole location many things can happen. There are four compartments to the green, each protected by different bunkers. Alister MacKenzie and Perry Maxwell created this along with several other extremely cool C- and horse-shoe-shaped greens.

**13th Green, Franklin Hills CC, Franklin, Mich.** – While we’re in Wolverine country, why not mention this tiny Donald Ross gem of a green? It’s the smallest on my list and maybe the smallest in golf at 1,800 square feet.

Every layout needs one rousing do-or-die shot, and 13 at Franklin Hills provides just that kind of thrill. Sitting above the fairway, it’s guarded by sand on all sides and looks like it’s perched higher than it is because of its lack of size. The pressure you feel to hit this bread plate is unrivaled in golf, and yet that tension was created by Ross through subtle feature work.

No one advocates building greens this small anymore, but it works well on a limited play course, especially one maintained by the multi-talented Tom Gray.

**3rd Green at Sand Hills GC, Sand Hills, Neb.** – It’s the most natural green on my list — and maybe in golf. This 220-yard, par-3 is sort of a reverse-Redan on steroids. The Bill Coore and

Ben Crenshaw-designed green is placed onto a sandy ridge that runs into the middle of the putting surface. You can have a blast shaping shots off this steep ridge to the right-hand hole locations. If you play too far left or long and don't catch the ridge ... look out, trouble awaits.

**17th Green at TPC Sawgrass, Ponte Vedra Beach, Fla.** – Pete Dye's actual green design gets overlooked here because the putting surface sits on an island and most people are just happy to hit it. Sure, the green started all kinds of weird trends, but the real beauty of this is often missed. The back right-hole location asks players if they want to be bold or not so bold, while the front and middle tiers offer similar dilemmas. That kind of simple temptation is the essence of any good green, island or not.

**13th Green at Somerset Hills, Somerset, N.J.** – You have to see this one to believe it. A severe dip runs through the middle and separates front hole locations from back ones. It's just one of many wild and wacky gems at this A.W. Tillinghast masterpiece.

**5th Green at Merion GC East, Ardmore, Pa.** – It's arguably the best par-4 in golf, thanks in part to its Hugh Wil-



The 6th green at the University of Michigan GC in Ann Arbor, Mich., is a quirky green shaped like a reverse C that challenges golfers to hit the right shot.

son-William Flynn green design. On paper, the hole resembles a thousand others in golf: long par-4 with a creek running the length of the left side. But the green sits on a terraced slope, with seemingly 30 little nooks and shelves that make putting this green both a joy and a nightmare. The severe slope of the green, the bunker short and the fairway height grass above the green

make this the best approach in golf.

**7th Green at Shinnecock Hills GC, East Hampton, N.Y.** – The only pure Redan takeoff on my list, created originally by Seth Raynor and kept by William Flynn when he redesigned the course in 1930. It's a simple, classic Redan that gives you multiple options and entices you to play at the flag, even though you know better than to tempt fate.

**17th Green at The Old Course, St. Andrews, Scotland** – The Road Hole green. As we saw during another classic British Open, its genius is summed up by the same concept that makes most of the other greens so special: temptation. And that's what any great green complex does to the golfer. It tempts you to try something courageous, with room to play safe and a stiff penalty awaiting for the player who gets carried away.

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*Geoff Shackelford's next book is Alister MacKenzie's Cypress Point Club, a design that has its share of green complexes. He can be reached at [geoffshackelford@aol.com](mailto:geoffshackelford@aol.com).*



The most natural green to make the list, the 3rd green at Sand Hills GC in Sand Hills, Neb., is sort of a reverse-Redan on steroids.