

**A**s classic course restoration picks up steam, more golfers are becoming pseudo experts on the master designers. Either these new authorities are getting bad information or, more likely, they're simply not doing their homework.

Architects, superintendents and historians hear the same misconceptions bandied about at committee meetings across the land. In some cases, these delusional concepts have been concocted in the grille rooms of America. The resulting lunacy has affected potentially sound restoration projects. Worse, they're turning projects into member-driven renovations. The misconceptions are fostered by architects hoping to land redesign jobs.

Here are the top 10 misconceptions about the classic architects and the courses they built.

## 1. The old architects loved building small greens.

This is the most potentially frustrating misinterpretation of all. Many golfers believe small greens are the heart and soul of their golf courses and enlarging old greens will "compromise" a design. But an examination of historic photography reveals that most of the great architects built medium- to large-sized greens.

They created fascinating corner hole locations that helped spread out wear and tear and offered more strategic possibilities. Yet some golfers don't want to hear this, even if an improved putting surface is offered as a sound reason to expand greens. Those who hang on to the small green myth need to understand that regaining old corner hole locations will make their courses more interesting and challenging.

## 2. The master designers got only the best sites.

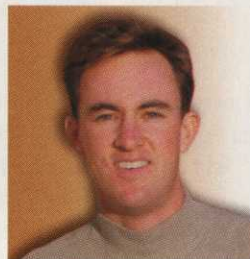
This is less of an issue relating to restoration, but it's still a silly myth that some modern architects dispense to justify why past designers were better with less technology. Guess what? They used the best land for homes, too.

## 3. They didn't move much dirt.

The real secret to some of the early architects' beautiful bunkering and contouring was the efforts they made to move earth, but in a subtle and careful manner. Alister MacKenzie's famed

# The Truth About Old Architecture

BY GEOFF SHACKELFORD



## THE TOP 10 MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT THE CLASSIC ARCHITECTS AND THE COURSES THEY CONSTRUCTED

"camouflage" look was created by massive earthwork. So when you see restorations undertaken where the bunkers don't fit, it's probably because more fill was needed to soften the slopes coming off the sides and back of the bunkers.

## 4. The old architects had clients who left them alone.

What nonsense. Golf course developers were as concerned with the final product and costs then as they are today. Committees were as irrational then as they can be today. Architects often worked with similar creative constraints that today's architects face. C.B. Macdonald, George Crump, MacKenzie and others were thought to be foolish for trying some of the things they did, but ultimately they communicated their ideas effectively.

## 5. The master designers weren't as concerned with beauty as architects are today.

Actually, they were; they just had a different definition of beautiful. Naturalness and a lack of man-made looking features defined beautiful in their world. They found things like subtle contours, natural grasses, bunker edges portraying erosion and real variety to be the ultimate in beauty.

## 6. They old guys weren't as shrewd at creating a variety of holes as today's architects.

This is a matter of taste. To the Donald Rosses and A.W. Tillinghasts of the world, variety was dictated by site.

Today, the architect dictates to the site what kind of variety a course will have. But we all know this man-induced diversity leads to characterless, uniformly balanced courses: four par 3s, four par 5s and the perfect mix of par-4 yardages, all adding up to 7,000 yards and par 72.

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## Designs on Golf

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**7. The master designers and their engineer associates didn't concern themselves with drainage.**

Look closely at your course, particularly if it was designed by Ross, Tillinghast, MacKenzie, Seth Raynor, Howard Toomey or Wendell Miller. These designers and their crews were

masters of creating surface drainage that functioned and even added to the design character.

How many times do we see the surface drainage features lost in renovation projects or handled far less deftly today with a cumbersome catch swale and drainage cap?

**8. They didn't build "complete" 18-hole courses because they couldn't rearrange certain features or their clients didn't mind if they only built a few great holes.**

This dangerous myth is the result of many classics being judged in their deteriorated state instead of by historic photos. It's also a myth being perpetuated by a famous architect who loves to rearrange landscapes, including classically designed ones that don't need any help. The myth says that the old architects only built a few good holes, while today architects are building courses with 18 dramatic finishing holes. That's patent nonsense. The master architects, who spent a lot of time on their sites, injected subtle character into every hole. They just did things more subtly than today's contractors, err architects, and they managed to make some awkward sites work extremely well.

**9. These were complex, difficult men to understand and deal with.**

This myth says that old architects were essentially "artistes" who didn't listen to their clients. Quite the contrary. They were amusing, creative individuals with numerous interests and wild imaginations. Unfortunately, the wild design features they created for comic relief are the ones golfers took out years ago. Golf just takes itself more seriously these days.

**10. The old architects did not foresee evolution or changes to their designs.**

Naturally they did, but they never could have imagined some of the atrocities that have taken place on their original layouts. They most certainly understood that bunkers would evolve and technology for turf care would improve. They did not foresee a cast of obtuse committeemen and architects to come along and introduce new, less interesting ideas. But they also could never have imagined a movement coming along to rescue their courses. This is the age of the restoration movement.

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