

Accessorize — Naturally

Recycled materials and environmental products

**highlight trends that will help you
add the final touches to your course**

**BY FRANK H. ANDORKA JR.,
MANAGING EDITOR**



As always, golfers will expect cups to be bright white.

You've manicured your fairways. You've double-rolled your greens. Your flowers on the 14th tee are in full bloom. Still, you sense something's missing.

Then it hits you — your tee markers look a little shabby. Your ball washers have seen better days. Your flagsticks have

taken a beating. It's time to accessorize your course again to keep it looking sharp.

The importance of course accessories may seem small compared to overall course conditioning, but as golfers' perceptions of value become more important, little touches like elegant tee markers and tasteful trash receptacles can enhance a course's image. Here's a look at the current trends in golf course accessories.

Going natural

John Kelly, director of marketing for Cedar Falls, Iowa-based Standard Golf, says he sees accessories being manufactured with more subtle colors to blend in with the natural surroundings of a course. Instead of brightly colored trash receptacles and ball washers, Kelly says superintendents are requesting more understated products.



Markers should be made out of materials designed to withstand normal golf course use.

"Golfers are going to courses in part to enjoy the outdoors," Kelly says. "They don't want their views of beautiful surroundings interrupted by a bright orange trash receptacle on the 13th tee. Superintendents have told us they prefer the subtle looks."

Kelly says superintendents are also moving away from using plastics in accessories like tee markers and out-of-bounds stakes. More courses are choosing accessories that look as if they were made from marble or granite.

"It makes the markers appear more substantial and somehow classier," Kelly says. "It's a matter of reflecting the finer things in life."

Wood products offer another alternative to traditional plastic accessories. Randy Meek, national sales manager for Louisville, Ky.-based Bristol Bench Co., says his company, which makes course accessories out of a tropical, teak-family wood called shorea, says he sees a trend toward alternative materials as well.

"Once companies can show them that wood products can stand up to the rigors of a golf course, they're intrigued," Meek says. "We're seeing an increasing move toward wood as an acceptable material for accessories."

Meek says that in response to de-



If you want your accessories to have added class, have them custom-made, as they were at Rolling Hills CC in Wichita, Kan.

mand, Bristol Bench added a divot-mix box to place beside tees and is considering adding out-of-bounds markers to its lineup.

Environmentally friendly

Kelly says superintendents are also demanding more environmentally friendly

products, such as biodegradable turf stakes.

"That will be a big trend, particularly as environmental restrictions become more severe," Kelly says. "Superintendents can put these stakes out to mark ground under repair and they don't have to worry about picking them up afterward. They eventually melt away."

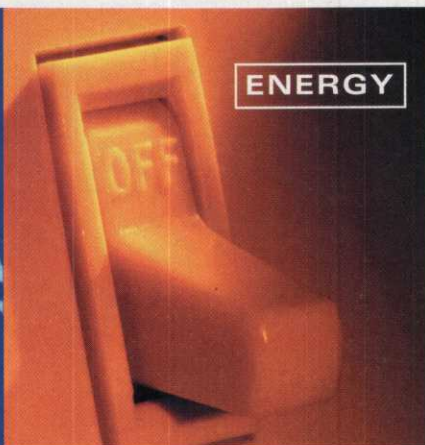
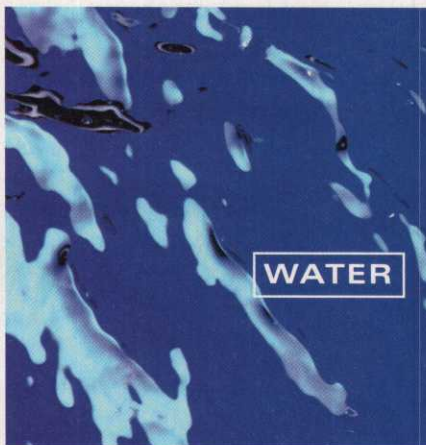
Products made from recycled materials also intrigue superintendents, who can turn such environmental awareness

into a selling point for their clubs, he says.

"Superintendents are concerned about the environment, but it's often hard for them to communicate that to golfers in a meaningful way," Kelly says.

"When you start telling people that

Continued on page 42



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Accessorize – Naturally

Continued from page 41

you're using recycled materials, however, they can see and touch your efforts. It makes an impression."

Flat market

Although new products and materials may inject some life into the market, not everyone sees optimistic trends for ac-

cessories. Steve Garske, president of Lino Lakes, Minn.-based Par Aide, says he expects the market to flatten next year as clubs tighten their budgets

"The industry's been booming for several years now, and accessory companies have benefited immensely," Garske says. "Now the industry is returning to more normal levels of busi-



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Ball washers will take on a more low-key color to blend in with the natural surroundings of the course.

ness activity, and we'll have to adjust. You can't see tremendous growth forever."

Garske says he hasn't heard of any new ideas that will revolutionize the accessories market. Companies will likely tweak existing product lines to make them more affordable or more efficient, but the pipeline of ideas that bloomed in the 1990s has dried up.

"There was a time when everyone thought they had an idea that could make them \$1 million in the golf course industry," Garske says. "They're finding out now that it's not as easy as it looks."

On the other hand, Kelly says there is plenty of room for innovation in the industry and some of that innovation will bear fruit next year.

"We are all going to keep trying to think of better tools that will make superintendents' jobs easier," Kelly says. "That's why we got into this business in the first place. I don't see that work ever stopping." ■