



The Year in Design

More distance off the tee, another Augusta facelift, some good books and enough work to keep most architects busy

By **Geoff Shackelford**
CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

While golf's growth can be described as stagnant (at best), one area of the sport is showing signs of steady increase: driving distance.

Driving distances by Tour players and even 18-handicappers has been on the rise for years. The USGA first denied there was any significant increase, but then admitted it and said longer driving distances were not hurting the game because new equipment made it more fun for most golfers. Yet, the number of players dropped and remained stagnant in the

late 1990s during the height of a hot economy, Tiger's rise and new equipment.

Architecturally, courses are accommodating this new area of "growth" to keep their layouts up to date (hypothetically) for their dwindling customer bases. Even though this became more obvious in 2002, no one in golf seems ready to speak up about it.

So another 365 days has gone by where technology has slowly eroded the traditions of the game and sent courses to the drawing board to address something the USGA should (but refuses) to tackle. Meanwhile the ratio of full-length courses compared to much-needed alternate facilities (short, executive and par-three courses) remains around 14 to 1, meaning the beginners who want to take up the game do not have any place to go.

Does 2003 show any signs of reversing the no-growth trend? Another "20/20" grow-the-game summit is planned, though it usually ends

MIKE KLEMM

Driving distances by Tour players and hackers is on the increase.

up becoming a forum for the PGA Tour Commissioner to preach growth in the number of golf viewers, not players, which does little for the golf industry.

Also planned is the annual gathering of golf's titans for another First Tee summit. But at the most recent gathering, instead of talking about training programs for kids and alternate facilities, the session turned into a scuttlebutt session over Augusta chairman Hootie Johnson's poor handling of the Martha Burk-women-members-at-Augusta situation.

Speaking of which ...

Another facelift

The famed course underwent more remodeling, unintentionally reinforcing to thousands of golfers that their home courses are also in need of more updating. The old Augusta National effect had an impact on turf coloring, striping and water beautification. The 21st century Augusta effect is a simple message: Change your course to adjust to the game.

It's not the club's fault it has more money than it knows what to do with.

This year the club rebuilt the fifth hole, and though most won't notice the change and many players will find it easier (swing away, it's 295 yards to reach the fairway bunkers), the club's tree planting program figures to have the worst impact. As with work in recent years, Augusta National continues to use young pines to tighten landing areas.

While most of America's superintendents, committee chairman and architects are guiding much-needed tree-removal programs to enhance agronomics and playability, this new Augusta effect may cause a setback. While many golfers continue to discuss and better understand the tree issue (thanks to a high-profile article in *Golf Digest* this summer), the inevitable glowing remarks by the CBS announcing crew about a new "premium on accuracy" figures to put trees back on many

golfers' radar screens.

This also figures to be a defining year for Hootie Johnson's and Tom Fazio's changes to Augusta National. Heavy rains made it difficult to judge the alterations during Tiger Woods' 2002 Masters win, but many felt that if the conditions had been the usual Masters fast and firm, the course would have turned into a hold-on-for-dear-life par fest.

Either way, the drama seems to have left Augusta National's back nine. Whether there's much willingness to fine-tune the changes to restore the magic remains to be seen.

Meanwhile, in Augusta National's backyard sits one of the more ironic companions in modern architecture. Unveiled this spring, Brian Silva's renovation of Augusta CC stands out as a shining example of creativity, ingenuity and respect for classic architecture.



Once a 36-hole facility with ties to Donald Ross and Seth Raynor, Silva recaptured the style of old Ross greens and strategy in creating a "modern Ross." Beautifully grown in by certified superintendent Greg Burleson, the course survived a dry summer. Silva's work serves as a shining example of what a little admiration for the old architects can do to restore prestige and fun to an old club course.

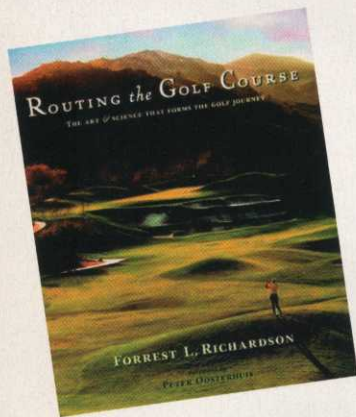
Will their neighbors take notice? Don't count on it.

August National sends a new message to golfers in the 21st century – demand changes to your courses to adjust to the game.

MIKE KLEMM

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Routing the Golf by Forrest Richardson tackles the subject of course sequencing and the many ways architects go about crafting their routings.

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Good reads

The renaissance in golf architecture literature hit full stride in 2002, with several standout books on the subject that seem to attract a devoted following. Paul Daley and David Scaletti's *The Sandbelt: Melbourne's Golfing Heaven* is a must for any fan of native golf courses. Scaletti's photographs are the most stunning golf landscapes taken in modern times. Remarkably crisp and always capturing designs in their most flattering light, we finally get to see the wondrous bunkers of Australia in their full glory.

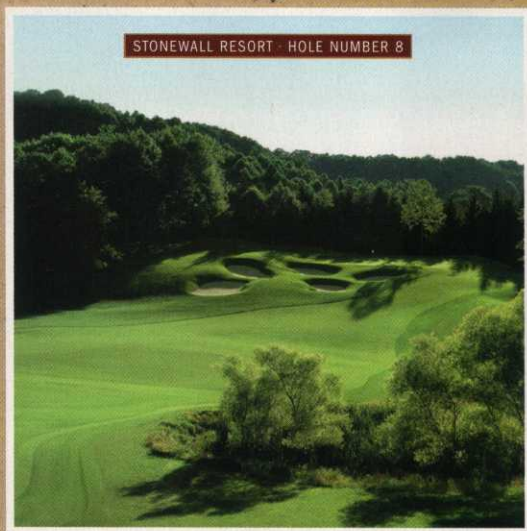
For the superintendent trying to convince his golfers that rugged beauty can give a golf course life, *The Sandbelt* sums it up with Scaletti's photos and Daley's insightful text. Daley is also producing a highly anticipated volume for spring 2003, entitled *Golf Architecture: A Worldwide Perspective*. It features contributions from dozens of architects worldwide, all with slightly different outlooks and covering many practical subjects.

On the technical side, two architecture-in-

spired textbooks are now available from publisher John Wiley and Sons, which figures to feature many golf and turf titles in the coming years after recently buying noted publisher Ann Arbor Press. *Routing the Golf* by Arizona-based architect Forrest Richardson tackles a difficult but vital subject — the sequencing of a course and the many ways architects go about crafting their routings. Plenty of practical drawings and insights from Richardson make this a must for superintendents, architects and committeemen who need help to justify a rerouting or other changes to their design infrastructures.

Less practical but more entertaining is Robert Muir Graves and Geoffrey Cornish's *Classic Golf Hole Design: Using the Greatest Holes as Inspiration For Modern Courses*. The book does just as its subtitle proclaims, providing something new and fun every time you pick it up. The vast collection of sketches and photographs not only adds interest, but gives the book more character by relying on the variety of architectural drawing styles. The

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“The course at *Stonewall Resort* promises to be one of the most challenging and scenic in the region. To say that *Mike Klemme* has captured the *essence* and natural beauty of Stonewall's fairways and greens is definitely an understatement. His images are true *works of art*. Mike and his staff at *Golfoto* have exceeded all of our expectations.”



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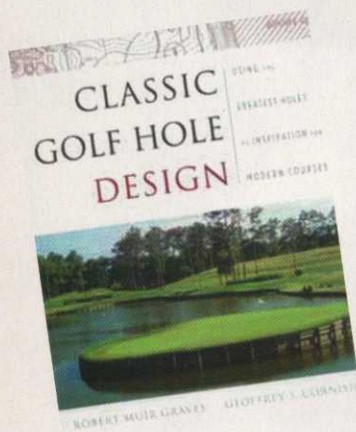
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Robert Muir Graves and Geoffrey Cornish offer *Classic Golf Hole Design: Using the Greatest Holes as Inspiration For Modern Courses*.

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book also serves an enjoyable read for those hoping to better understand what separates the best holes from the merely good.

Finally, Cornish has produced yet another vital book for architecture libraries with *Eighteen Stakes on a Sunday Afternoon*. This may be his riskiest effort but it has resulted in the most entertaining and original of his works (*The Architects of Golf* with Ron Whitten still stands as a classic). *Eighteen Stakes* (Grant Books, Limited Edition) chronicles the history of North American architecture by piecing together book and magazine excerpts from the earliest golf played in America, up to today's version of the sport. Cornish sets up the excerpts he has pulled from his vast collection (I can't imagine how many files he must have) and lets the various figures from each era do the talking. It's a graceful read through the annals of golf architecture and a must read for students of design and even for those just hoping to get a better feel for the big picture.

Unfortunately, the limited-edition print-

ing means there may not be many left, so hopefully a soft-cover edition will keep this book in circulation for generations to come.

Downturn, upturn?

While new course construction grinds to a halt and the notion of "upscale daily fee" is soon to be considered an obnoxious 1990s idiom, architects are still finding enough work at existing courses to get through the rough times. They're buoyed by the combination of clubs still having too much money to spend contrasted by struggling courses hoping to attract new members by upgrading their courses.

The best news is that many of the restoration, redesign and renovation projects reported by architects are focusing on improved playing characteristics, not vanity-driven aesthetics or new penal bunkering schemes to offset dramatic changes in driving distances.

For now, anyway. ■

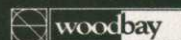
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