

Revisionist history is thriving in golf. Did you know that Douglas Rolland's design influence can be seen in Pine Valley, Royal Melbourne and Prairie Dunes? All because he was a golfing buddy of H.S. Colt.

Then there's poor, old Joe Burbeck. After his debut design, the storied Jones Beach Pitch and Putt, Burbeck went on to mastermind Bethpage Black while A.W. Tillinghast and others wrote fictional magazine articles about Tilly's involvement at Bethpage.

And my new favorite: 2002 British Open host Muirfield made sure we all knew that the course only added a few yards to a couple of par 3s for this year's championship. Then before the scoreboard ink was dry on Colin Montgomerie's second round 64, the club announced that because the course was different, Monty had the new official course record, replacing Isao Aoki's 63. I wonder why.

There has been one particularly irritating form of revisionist golf architecture history that keeps getting in the way of much-needed restorations or renovations: the belief that small greens were the old-time architects' best ally, and thus that small greens are a sign of sound design. Big greens are no good. They're too easy.

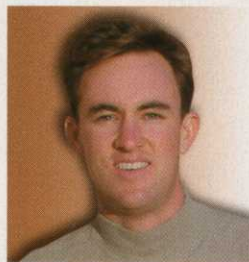
History purportedly tells us that master architects like MacKenzie and Tillinghast purposely designed on the small side. The telltale sign of genius is found in green size. Big greens are for average courses, and small is the sign of greatness.

Not only did the old architects *not* design "small" greens, they certainly never celebrated small greens as something revolutionary. Only occasionally did they build something under 3,500 square feet. Still, after years of subtle shrinkage and plenty of hard evidence to show how things used to be, we still hear golf announcers talk about how tiny greens have so much "old" style and character. Or we listen to everyday golfers, who insist that saucer-plate surfaces make their courses special.

Naturally, the opposite is true. Too many small greens undermine the character of a course. They eliminate interesting hole locations that add day-to-day variety. Increased variety and additional options make golfers

Bigger Is Better in the Case of Greens

BY GEOFF SHACKELFORD



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think, and we all know that makes the game more difficult in a fun and not-so-penal way.

Sure, it's fun to approach a small, tightly bunkered green complex on occasion. Two or maybe three greens under the 4,500-square-foot range can spice things up. But besides the obvious maintenance benefits of larger greens, there is enjoyment in playing well-designed surfaces that offer as many as 10 distinct hole locations. A quick study reveals that many classic green complexes once had fascinating corner hole locations since lost over time. Often they're not restored because the average green committee type insists his course is superior because the greens are petite.

The small green myth has taken on greater significance because modern architects struggle to build large putting surfaces with subtle character. Most modern greens feel bulky, even clumsy, popping up out of the fairway like tombstones.

The real trick is to create something in the 7,000-foot range and make it seem small. Bill Coore and Ben Crenshaw recently pulled it off at their new Hidden Creek GC near Atlantic City, N.J. Superintendent Jeff Riggs has an average of 8,000 square feet of putting surface to maintain, yet the greens don't look or play nearly that large. The contours are bold but stretch out gently, while the greens tie in beautifully to the fairways, disguising their size.

Don't listen to good golfers who insist that small putting surfaces make a design better. Bigger makes for more interesting golf when it comes to putting surfaces. Bigger is also a more accurate description of what the old architects usually built.

Perhaps this is one bit of history we can re-revise in the coming years.

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